



The new Bisley Vaquero will ride in a Milt Sparks holster and fire 300-grain WFN bullets in its new mountain home. It represents a complete handgun system that is capable of doing virtually anything possible for a revolver to do.

The Ultimate REVOLVER?

Ruger's Bisley Vaquero in .45 Colt is Pistol-Packin' Perfection.

By Ross Seyfried

As I began the transition from the flatlands of Colorado to the mountains of Oregon, I thought a new home deserved a new gun. A gun to be worn every day, to be used for every purpose. In my first life that gun was a four-inch S&W .44 Magnum. Today, my tastes—as well as technology—have changed. Now, the .45 Colt is the all-around handgun cartridge, and my revolvers are primarily single action.

I wanted the piece to be relatively small and portable, while at the same time packing a powerful punch that would be sufficient under almost any circumstance. I seriously considered my little 4¾-inch Colt, but abandoned it for want of potential horsepower. An

Old Model Ruger Blackhawk was an interesting thought, but did not seem perfect. Also, I looked at the Ruger Vaquero and decided that, like a .30-06, *everybody* has one, and thus I probably would not. The standard grip design on the large-frame revolver just does not please me. And then it happened, the release of "out-of-the-box perfection." This came in the startling form of a Bisley Vaquero with a 5½-inch barrel and chambered for .45 Colt! Unlike many new releases, this one is real, actually being produced and shipped. The U.P.S. truck delivered it in less than two weeks.

The gun itself is wonderful in hand. The Bisley grip, trigger and hammer are all there, offering their usual exceptional shootability and recoil manage-

ment. The 5½-inch barrel is the perfect compromise of sight radius, balance and "packability." The streamlined profile caused by the fixed Colt SAA-style sights made the gun seem smaller than it actually was. With the perfect gun so easily had, I began to think about what I would require of it, what one load would do the job and what holster would carry the package.

What I would ask the piece to do would be extreme. It would need to answer the pleasant requests of breaking rocks at any range and tipping over an elk or whitetail buck on request. It might be asked to intervene in the extremely unlikely confrontation with an unruly bear. And it would certainly need to be a reliable security blanket in the more likely dealings with two-legged varmints. It would need to be able to deliver a crushing blow at close quarters and point out the error in judgment of a rifle-armed adversary at 200 or 300 yards—one who thinks a pistolero poses no threat.



Based on that premise, the gun first and foremost must be very easy to hit with. In contrast to the recent nauseating televised events where auto pistols and buzz guns have demonstrated their uncanny ability to miss in the hands of the unknowing, hundreds of rounds of "firepower" notwithstanding, my criterion would be to hit with the first decisive round. Thus, the fine hold and balance of the "Biquero" would need to be supplemented by all-important sight and trigger quality.

Ruger did an excellent job in the sight department. The rear notch is "square" and the front sight is generous, with parallel sides (in contrast to some front sights that taper from bottom to top). The only weakness in the sight system was the complete and highly polished radius on the front sight. This kind of sight forms a brilliant ball of fire, right on top of the blade, if the sun is above or in front of the shooter. This bright glint makes it difficult—or impossible—to determine the exact location of the critical top surface of the sight. This causes vertical stringing. (The gun will usually shoot "away from the light.") The cure was simple. I filed the upper front face

of the sight to a flat, at about 45 degrees to the bore.

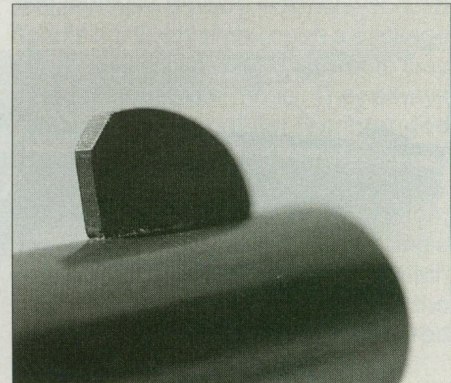
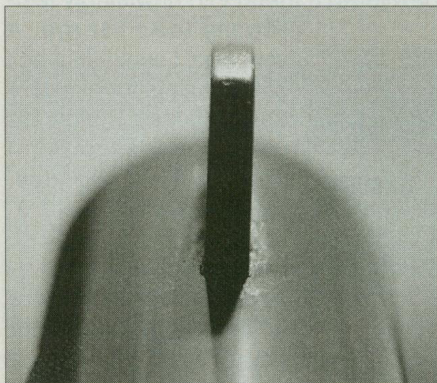
Then I cross-cut this surface with a very fine checkering file and finished it with a dull, cold blue. This sight is only slightly more apt to pull a bit of leather out of the holster than the original, and it provides a sight picture akin to a fine target ramp.

With the sights in order, the trigger needed attention. The factory trigger pull is necessarily (for liability reasons) both long and heavy. I installed a Wolff reduced-power spring kit that went a long way toward reducing the pull weight. At the same time, I polished the mainspring strut, simply removing

the burrs. This increased the smoothness and helped to maximize hammer speed. In the end I sent the gun to the professionals at Bowen Arms to reduce the sear engagement, eliminating the creep. The final result is a light, crisp trigger that contributes the finishing touches to the little Ruger's shootability.

I did not want to spend a great deal of money on customizing this piece, but as always, I wanted the gun to be as precise as possible. Therefore, like the spring kit, I used a do-it-yourself approach to tightening the cylinder. Belt Mountain Enterprises makes replacement base pins for the Rugers. These are precise, centerless-ground parts that are .002 inch larger in diameter than the factory pin. This simple \$22 addition does a great job of removing side-play between the cylinder and frame—a modification that may well add accuracy and will almost certainly increase the life span of the revolver. After I installed this pin according to instructions, the gun began to have that custom "feel." The smooth hammer draw ends in that solid thunk usually found on those highly tuned custom action jobs. Also, the factory, aluminum ejector-rod housing was (as always) an annoyance. I decided to replace it with a Bowen Arms steel one.

With the sights and action in perfect order, I began to look at the cylinder and barrel dimensions. Using LBT push-through slugs, I measured the groove diameter and the diameter of the cylinder throats. The barrel measured .4515 inch, a perfect mate with .452-inch bullets, but the cylinder throats would not cooperate with this size. They generally measured only .451 inch. The new, very-tight throats are a rebound from the old days of extremely oversize cylinder throats. In the past, dimensions as large as .458



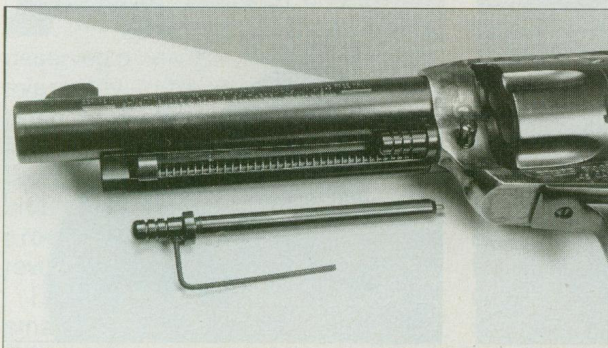
The original, radiused and polished front sight glints in the sun. This bright spot makes precise sight alignment almost impossible. Modifying the front sight by filing a flat at 45 degrees to the bore and cross-cutting with a fine checkering file eliminates the glint and provides a perfect sight picture even on the brightest of days.

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inch were not uncommon. They created an impossible situation. These huge holes allowed gas and powder particles to blow past the bullet before it was sealed in the bore. This, combined with the obvious potential for misalignment, resulted in some very inaccurate revolvers. While the oversize holes are incurable, the undersize ones are easy to fix. The skilled at-home gunsmith can polish them out with emery paper revolving on a stick. I have done it successfully, but having the throats honed on a Sunnen hone is the route to perfection.

The .451-inch throats ensured that no bullet could reach the bore at a greater diameter and, in this case, meant the bullets would be at least a half-thousandth too small. Also, the tight chamber would make the bullet I planned to use very difficult to load into the gun. While the gun was at Bowen's shop for the trigger job, I had the company hone the throats to .4530 inch. The gun was now dimensioned to perfectly fit .452-inch bullets.

Finding a load to suit the gun and its tasks would not be difficult. Actually, I had one in mind all along. While I wanted the Ruger to be reasonably powerful, I also wanted it to be user-friendly. I did not need or want the kind of power available from the five-shot conversions. The 325- to 350-grain bullets with 1,500 fps velocity have their charm, but that much power is rarely useful and never pleasant to fire. Even the standard six-shot loads with the same bullet weights seemed like more than this everyday gun wanted. Normally I feel that the 325-grain LBT, with the long, flatnose shape is the ideal everyday .45 bullet for heavy work. But there is another LBT that has



The addition of a .002-inch-oversize replacement base pin from Belt Mountain tightens the cylinder fit in the frame. This reduces cylinder wobble, increases the gun's longevity and should enhance accuracy.

DIRECTORY

Milt Sparks Holsters Inc.

Dept. GA
605 E. 44th, #2
Boise, ID 83714

LBT

(Bullet molds, push-through slugs, lapping kits)
Dept. GA
HCR 62, Box 145
Moyie Springs, ID 83845

Bowen Arms Corp.

Dept. GA
P.O. Box 67
Louisville, TN 37777
(catalog \$3)

Belt Mountain Enterprises

(Oversize Ruger base pins)
Dept. GA
P.O. Box 3202
Bozeman, MT 59772

Bill's Custom Cast Bullets

(LBT bullets: heat treated, sized and lubed)
Dept. GA
133 E. Hampton Way
Jupiter, FL 33458

always fascinated me. This is the 300-grain wide flatnose. If you keep things in perspective, 300 grains of bullet is a lot. The .44 Magnum has established its extreme reputation on a 240. The load for my .44 that I carried for years, one that took many head of big game and scraped a ton of bull off of me, was a 240 at 1,200 fps. Now, in my "mild" .45 Colt version I would drive the 300-grain bullet at 1,300 fps. The WFN bullet would present almost twice the frontal area of the old .44 Keith bullet, while penetrating at least as much. Actually, I cheated a little and Tom Sawyered a friend into unwittingly testing my load for me. A year ago, I sent him a box of the bullets for his standard .45 Colt Bisley. He used one less grain of powder than I intended, 22 grains of H-110, instead of my 23. With this combination I coyotes, deer and elk were all flattened, run over or crushed. The ranges were from a few yards to nearly 200. The huge frontal area of the WFN proved to have enough "slap" to hit the smaller



The author's load for his new revolver uses a 300-grain LBT wide flatnose bullet and 23 grains of H-110 powder. It is exceptionally accurate and hits very hard.

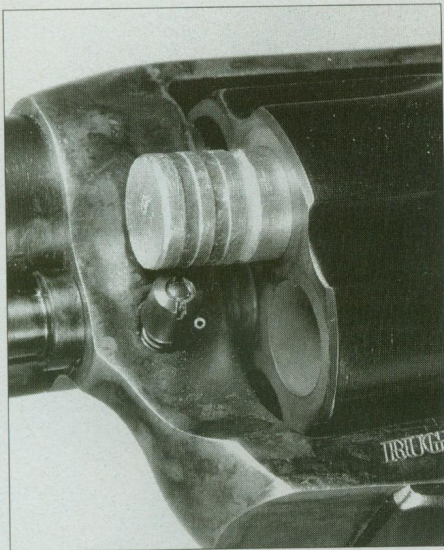
game very hard, even though the bullets were heat treated and would almost refuse to expand on an anvil. The same ones broke big elk bones with ease.

You might ask why I seem more than normally obsessed with a single load. As you know, I have a passion for simplicity, feeling that dozens of loads with different bullets and powders only serve to fill pages for gunwriters. In this case, the fixed sights on the Biquero demand consistency. I wanted a perfect load, then I would tune and tweak the sights to a perfect zero. Kentucky windage was not an option; the gun had to shoot where I looked.

The new Ruger again proved to almost be made for my purpose. I had assumed the load with its heavy bullet and much higher than normal .45 Colt velocity would shoot high. Not true! Ruger has wisely fitted a very generous front sight. Again—as with the tight cylinder—it is very easy to remove sight metal and very difficult to make it grow. My gun, with my load, printed about three inches left and that much low at 50 yards. This kind of zero with an out-of-the-box gun is very, very commendable. Ruger had done a spectacular job of lining things up.

As I was worrying about the refinement of the zero, I had to chuckle a bit. Way back when I won the world championship, my old Pachmayr .45 auto was on its last legs. Just before the match I feared that the sights were going to self-destruct and poured them full of Loctite. It was off the perfect zero at 50 meters by twice that amount!

But now I wanted perfection and regulated the sights to the load. The elevation was easy. I simply had to gently file the top of the front sight to raise the point

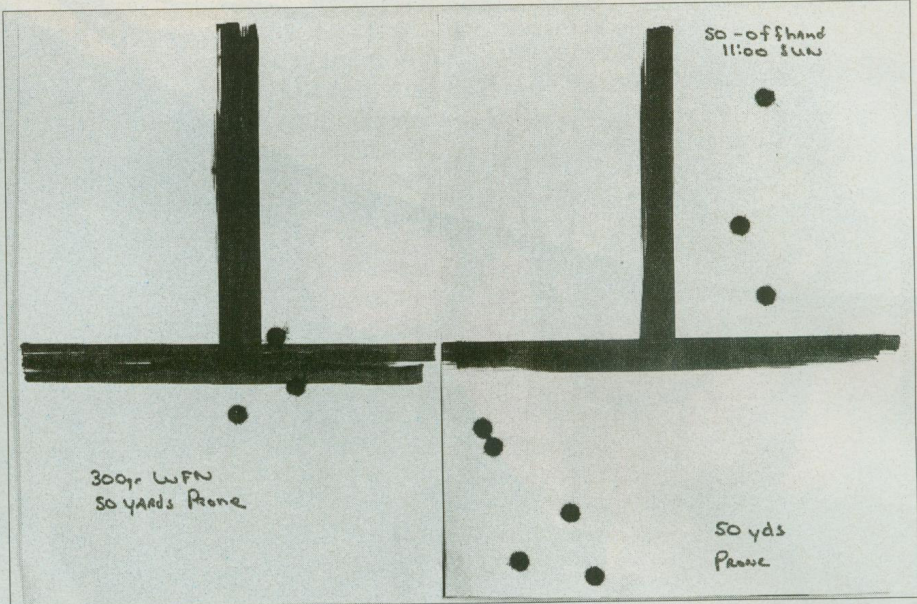


The factory cylinder throats were too small to allow .452-inch bullets to pass freely. The throats were honed to .453 inch, making them a perfect match to the barrel's .4515-inch groove dimension.

of impact. After three sessions, the bullets hit the horizontal line of my aiming point. Speaking of the aiming point, I should share one of my secrets ... the target. As you see in the photos, it is an inverted T. I learned about this kind of target from books written in the 1800s. Then they were used as an aiming point for express sights on double- and single-shot rifles. The horizontal bar gives you a perfect reference for elevation, while the vertical line leaves no doubt about your hold for windage. I found the system a perfect match with the fixed revolver sights, and it may well be the very best for any kind of iron sight on handguns or rifles. All you have to do is vary the width and size of the T to suit any given range, making the target larger and more visible as the distance increases.

Moving the point of impact to the right was slightly more difficult. To accomplish this, the front sight needed to move to the left. The movement, either left or right, can be achieved by screwing the barrel into, or out of, the frame. To zero to the right, my barrel had to be tightened slightly.

This is not the radical adventure that you might assume. The actual movement is miniscule. I began by scribing a witness mark on the barrel and frame, under the ejector-rod housing, with a carbide scribe. The mark was only a very thin line, one of less width than a fine pencil mark. I used my Brownells barrel vise to turn the barrel the width of my marks and found that I had moved it twice too much. I had to back off, actually turning the barrel half the width of a scratch, viewing the process under 2½-



The right-hand target shows two groups fired before sight modification and barrel adjustment. On the left are the results of the adjustment and final zero. The changes make it possible to shoot smaller groups that hit almost exactly at the point of aim.

power magnification. The end result was a tiny 1½-inch cluster cutting the junction of the T. Okay, it is ¼-inch to the right, but I will live with it.

The gun and load average under three inches at 50 yards, shot from prone or kneeling. Considering the wobble of the guy behind it, the Ruger is doing a spectacular job and will never be the cause of a miss. Someday I may fire-lap the bore for a few shots, just to say I have asked for the maximum. But wanting more accuracy is luxury, bordering on folly.

The package was almost complete. Every part of the machinery and load

was right, but now I needed a way to carry the piece. When you consider a holster that is to be worn, carried and used on a daily basis, under every conceivable circumstance, the choice must be a careful one. The gun and holster need to be unobtrusive, stay out of the way in a vehicle, on a horse or four-wheeler, or while crawling through brush and down timber. It must hold the gun with absolute security and at the same time make it instantly ready. To pack the Biquero, I returned to my old, known standard, a Milt Sparks. The Sparks holsters are old-fashioned and made of fine leather sewn by extraordinary craftsmen. The welt is adjustable, providing a solid hold on the gun, while it also allows an instant, crisp release. The system served me when I rode horses that bucked with my Model 29 and when I needed the lightning draws in competition with my .45 auto. It will serve with the Ruger also. Along with the speed and security, there is also a neatness about a Sparks rig. Every time I open a package with a new Sparks holster, I am sure they have sent the wrong model. They always look much too small for the intended gun. But the tiny, unobtrusive piece of leather always swallows the piece. They are pure efficiency ... pure perfection. The Model 200 AW for the newest single action was no exception. Every stitch was in place, it looked smaller than the revolver, ate the gun and disappeared on my belt and in my hip pocket.

Ultimately the project pleases me. I am armed perhaps better than I have ever been in my life, and I am ready for whatever challenge might walk, crawl or fly in front of the .45.

Manufactured by
w l s f company
GUNSPRINGMAKERS
 P. O. Box 232, Ardmore, Pa. 19003-0232
 215-647-1880

By installing a Wolff reduced-power spring set, the trigger-pull weight was reduced and the action was smoothed up considerably.