

The .475 revolver cartridge was designed to be the ultimate big-game round for use in handguns. It represents a monumental step up from the .44s and a considerable increase in horsepower over any of the .45-caliber cartridges. This combination of long, heavy bullets and moderately high velocity makes even the highly-touted .454 Casull seem small and ineffective. The .475 does about the same thing with a 440-grain bullet that the .454 does with 300 grains of lead. In the May 1988 edition of *G&A*, I reported on the .475's performance on paper. Now I've buckled together what I think is the ideal big-game handgun and taken it *down under*, to wage war with the mighty Indian water buffalo and other game of Australia.

My personal .475 is a hunting handgun. To fill that description it has to be portable, to ride in a tidy belt holster; have iron sights; and be capable of taking on dangerous game without a backup. This last requirement rules out all of the single shots. "Wait a minute Mr. Charging Buffalo, I'm reloading" just won't cut it in the real world. This .475 was made with my standard revolver

recipe. It's a five-shot Ruger Bisley with a 5½-inch barrel. The initial conversion was done by John Linebaugh, using a Krieger barrel. We left an integral barrel band near the muzzle that would add mass to the front of the gun. The rear of this band would also form a square shoulder to support the front of the ejector rod, helping to keep it in place under the .475's crashing recoil. John fitted a steel Colt ejector rod housing and an oversize base pin. The base pin lock was supplemented by a set screw that locked the pin to the barrel. This pin lock, on the Hamilton Bowen design, is threaded through the base pin itself and anchored in a counterbore in the bottom of the barrel. This eliminates any danger of the pin jumping out under recoil.

The entire package is designed for absolute reliability. Another interesting and useful feature of the Linebaugh conversion is that the cylinder will rotate in either direction when the loading gate is open. There are two vital applications for this unusual detail. First, by opening the loading gate the shooter can instantly and silently rotate the cylinder to select a cartridge other than the one in line to



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*A true test
of the ultimate
wheelgun cartridge.*

By Ross Seyfried



be fired. This is useful when you want to carry more than one kind of bullet in the cylinder, that is, soft nose or solid. The soft nose is useful for lighter game animals or when a shot behind the shoulder on big game is a certainty. I often carry a soft nose under the hammer, where the old timers kept an empty chamber. If I want the soft instead of a solid, I open the gate and rotate the cylinder one chamber to the left, bringing the soft into firing position when I cock the hammer.

The other reason for the "double rotation" is reliability. In the event that recoil pulls a bullet out of a case so that it prevents the cylinder from rotating by hitting

Author Seyfried traveled to Australia to try his wildcat .475 wheelgun. In the top photo, the customized Ruger Bisley is in full recoil, as Ross drives one of the big slugs at a huge Asian buffalo. Right: A big animal!

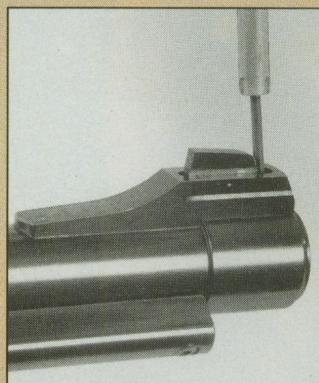


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the barrel shank, the cylinder can be turned in the opposite direction. In an emergency, if there is more than one loaded round in the cylinder, you can usually get a cartridge into firing position. The reverse rotation also lets you turn the offending cartridge around under the base pin, getting it to the loading gate and out of the gun. This works because



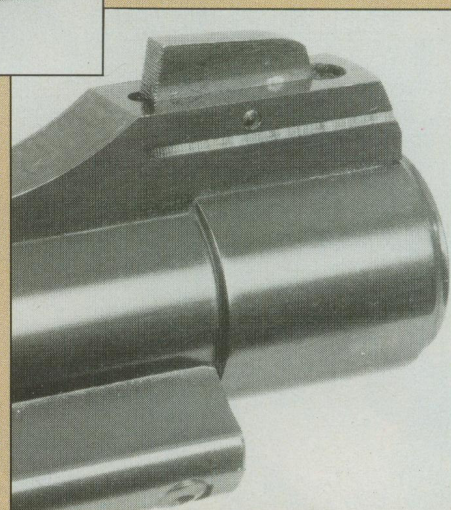
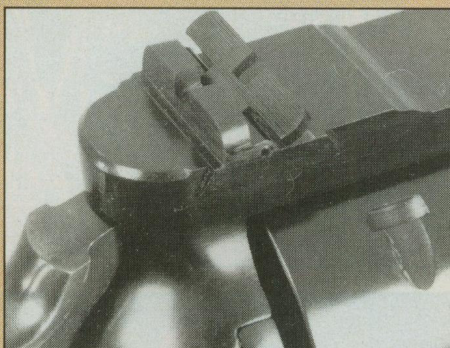
The above bullets were recovered from game on the hunt: 385-gr. Sledge Hammer from bull, 430-grain solid from buffalo, and bases of two soft noses after expanding.



The lineup above shows .475 loads and bullets; from left: 500-gr. Sledge Hammer, 385-gr. Sledge Hammer, a loaded round, unsectioned Sledge Hammer bullet, 430-gr. LBT soft nose, .475 load with LBT solid bullet, and the 430-grain solid as used for buffalo.



The completed .475 is a handsome revolver, with practical as well as cosmetic touches. Work by Linebaugh and Belk.



Three photos show the versatile custom sights on Seyfried's .475. Top: Front sight adjusts for elevation. Above: A barrel band is also a shoulder for the extractor rod. Left: Two rear blades.

you can avoid the narrow gap between barrel and cylinder, using the larger opening on the bottom of the frame, which will usually allow the bullet nose to pass unimpeded.

After the basic fitting of barrel, cylinder, and lockwork by Linebaugh, I turned the gun over to Jack Belk for some finesse gunsmithing. First, Jack threw away the Ruger rear sight and welded up the "hole" it left in the frame. At this point Jack sent me the gun so that I could make a set of experimental sights out of sheet brass. The material was .030-inch thick. The rear was a 5/8-inch-wide flat piece folded with a 90-degree bend and soft-soldered to the top strap. The front was of the same material, with a .125-inch-wide blade cut and bent 90 degrees and held in place with electrician's tape.

These "try" sights were used to determine the heights and positions of both front and rear sights by shooting the gun and filing the sights until the load was zeroed at 50 yards. After zeroing the gun with 430-grain, 1,400 fps bullets at 50 yards, I made a second taller rear sight. This sight, by lucky coincidence, zeroed the 430s at 200 yards and 385-grain bullets at 50 yards.

With the dimensions determined, Belk fitted, modified, and cut down rifle sights. The sight blanks were European ones supplied by Meier Work. The rear was a "one standing, one folding leaf" pattern used on express rifles. The folding leaf would represent the taller of my try sights and be used for long range or light bullets. The front sight was again a rifle sight; this one was adjustable for elevation. The final result is an extremely rug-

ged and tidy set of sights. The rear could be drifted in its dovetail for windage adjustment, while the front used a screw for fine elevation adjustments. The system is similar to that used by Elmer Keith on his Number 5 Colt.

With the sights in place, the gun needed only final fitting and finishing. Belk tuned the trigger to a perfect 2½-pound pull, polished the steel, and blued the entire piece. In the meantime I made a set of grips that fit my hands perfectly out of the finest piece of Circassian walnut that I have ever seen. The final extravagance was to make the right-hand escutcheon out of a silver tie tac. This is a wonderful bull elephant with 100-pound tusks, executed in lifelike perfection by Sid Bell. The finished "express" revolver was beautiful perfection, at least in the eyes of this beholder. When

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I shot it from the standing position I could hold it in 4 inches at 50 yards consistently. It looked good, shot better, and delivered awesome horsepower.

I took three different loads to Australia, all stoked to flat-out maximum. The first two were soft point and solid variations of the LBT 430-grain LFN bullet. The solids and the bases of the softs were wheel-weight metal, heat-treated to 25 BHN. The front half of the softs were pure lead. Both were loaded in new Winchester .45-70 re-formed cases, driven by Federal 155 primers and 28 grains of WW 296. The velocity was 1,380 fps. The solid version would penetrate 36 inches of wet paper that included three inches of solid bone. The softs were violently explosive, making 6-inch wound

channels in paper and penetrating 24 inches or more.

The last load was a highly specialized solid bullet loading. For this I used the Trophy Bonded Sledge Hammer solids made for the .470 Nitro express. The original 500-grain bullets were turned in a lathe, shortening both nose and base to make a finished bullet that was .975 inch long. This is the maximum bullet length that can be worked into the .475 cartridge/cylinder combination. The bullet was almost identical in external shape to the LBT bullet, but due to its high proportion of naval bronze it weighed only 385 grains. The lighter bullets would take a larger powder charge and give more velocity (1,500 fps). It remained to be seen if the bronze bullet would be better than the heavier lead bullet.

In the penetration box, the bronze bul-

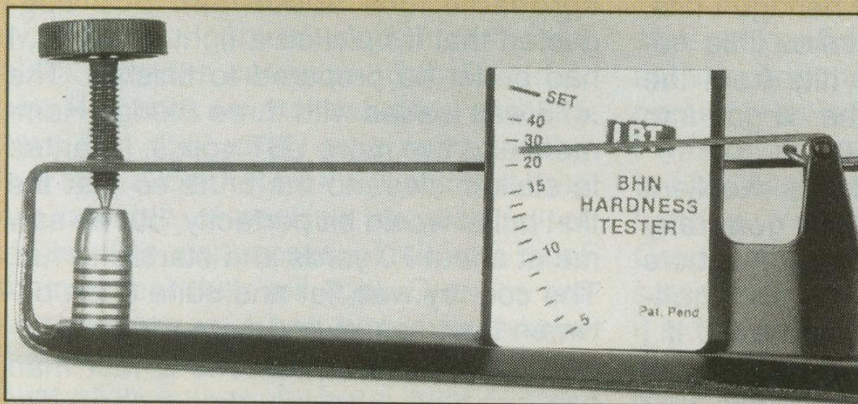
lets beat the lead ones by 20 percent. Where the lead bullets would slightly deform on heavy bones, the Sledge Hammers stayed bright and shiny, with only rifling marks disturbing their surface. Unfortunately, the bronze bullets had a technical loading problem. The bullets would jump their crimps after exposure to two rounds of recoil. The combination of the bullet's slick surface and compressed powder charge is the reason for the trouble.

Right now, I'm not sure what it will take to make them work perfectly. Roll-

"The finished 'express' revolver was beautiful perfection...in the eyes of this beholder."

ing the bullets under a file will increase their friction in the necks, but I'm afraid the compressed load is the real culprit. Possibly turning the case bodies to increase the case capacity, or simply cutting the load, will be the answer. Until I can reach total reliability with the bronze bullets, I'm going to stay with lead ones for dangerous game. There is no doubt in my mind that the modified Sledge

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The LBT hardness tester shows the 25 BHN hardness of the heat-treated 430-gr. solid bullet, used for buffalo.

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Hammer bullets are superior to lead-alloy bullets for buffalo and elephant. We just need a bit more time and experimentation to overcome the limitations of bullet volume vs. bullet weight and their relationship to case/cylinder capacity, where the less-dense bullets are concerned.

With the gun in a state of perfection and load development as far as it could go, I climbed onto a United Airlines 747, armed with an ancient Gibbs eight-bore rifle and the .475. Twenty-five hours later I landed in Darwin, Australia. For information on Australian hunting, write to: Bob and Kay Penfold, Hunt Australia Pty.



This Australian feral goat fell to 430-grain softnose bullet from the .475. Too powerful, but effective!

Ltd., Dept. GA, 72 Blanch Street, Shortland, NSW, 2307 Australia. They are organized with not only fine hunting, but the ability to secure the necessary and difficult-to-obtain permits for handguns. My 10-day hunt would start gently with the numerous feral animals: goats, pigs, donkeys, and wild cattle, gradually proving the pistol's capability before I confronted the giant Indian water buffalo...without a backup!

For those who wonder, Australia is overrun with various kinds of feral beasts. The Northern Territory is vast beyond comprehension, lacking both major predators and any significant human population. Over the last century ranching and farming have been tried and generally abandoned, leaving the livestock to thrive and overpopulate in the subtropical climate. The end result is herds of cattle and donkeys on the mainland and goats on islands that are

totally destroying the environment. They make both conservation of native species and modern cattle ranching very difficult.

The Australians spend millions of dollars annually using helicopters to control the non-native animals. Shooting sportsmen like myself are invited to cull the hoofed "varmints," acting as the predator. It is very similar to coyote and prairie dog shooting here. The difference is that the animals are big, representing bullet and ammunition performance on big game animals. Three-fourths of a ton of wild bull is tough and dangerous, to boot.

"...is similar to that used by Elmer Keith on his Number 5 Colt."

Hunting these is far more interesting to me than plinking the gentle prairie dog.

I took on the goats with soft-nose bullets. The animals carry huge horns for their size. An old billy weighs about 80 pounds and may have horns 3 feet long with a 40-inch spread. They are found on beautiful, remote islands off the north coast. Because they are without natural predators they are not too wary, making them excellent game for the handgunner. I found a flock with an old white billy carrying massive long horns. They were feeding along a gentle ridge covered with low scrub. I simply waited in ambush, downwind from the herd. The billy fed to within 15 yards when I sent a 430-grain soft nose through his lungs. A 7mm magnum wouldn't have done more damage. The .475 is ten times more gun than the goats need, but the violent expansion on the light animal confirmed what I thought I knew about the cast, soft-nose .475 bullets. They would really expand!

Back on the mainland I went to work on feral donkeys and dingos. The latter, equivalent to our coyotes, are in a state of extreme overpopulation. They are generally in horrid diseased condition and are doing great damage to young livestock. The soft-nose bullets continued their exceptional work on the little wild dogs. I was surprised to see the bullets expand, even on the 30-pound animals. Two-inch exits were the rule on lung shots. Unlike normal handgun hits, where the critter usually takes little notice of the bullet impact, hits from the 430-grain softs slapped the dingos into the dust just like a .22-250.

Feral donkeys proved to be excellent handgun game. They were generally quite wild. Some 10,000 of their numbers had recently been culled with helicopters, making the survivors wary. If I stalked carefully, I could get to within 40 to 70 yards for a shot. If I could take their leader out with the first round, the rest

would mill, giving me several more chances. These donkeys, averaging 300 to 400 pounds, are as tough as old tires. I can only equate them with zebras and wildebeests for sheer "bulletproofness." Bob Penfold told me that it normally takes a minimum 250-grain .338 to flatten them with body hits.

Here, the .475 was able to show its prowess on deer and elk-sized animals. The softs would crush both shoulders and exit into the trees. Over 50% of the lop-ears went down instantly. The rest stumbled a step or two before they collapsed. I began to try the solids on the donkeys. On broadside shots, the bullets whistled through the critters as if they were made of air. If I could get two side-by-side I could smash four shoulders with a single bullet. When I hit them in the chest while they were facing me, the bullets exited their rumps. Here the performance was like that I have experienced with rifle solids. An animal *lengthwise* with a big solid is almost always flattened instantly.

At this point it was easy to conclude that the .475 was more than a match for normal game. Soft-nose bullets were far more spectacular than solids. But as always, a well-placed, big solid bullet is fatal. Bob Penfold was beginning to believe in the handgun. He had seen the .44 Mags and the "short rifles" fail mis-

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erably on buffalo. In the beginning he was a bit apprehensive about trying even my .475 on the big beasts. Bob was starting to realize that this wasn't an ordinary handgun. The next stop and final proving ground, before the buffalo, was a big wild bull. Being a cattleman and having suffered every kind of abuse from bulls for the last 25 years, I was looking forward to getting even.

We found a big, rangy red brindle bull standing in the gum forest. He carried his head high and had an altogether disagreeable look about him. Bob suggested that if I picked a fight with him, I had better be prepared to finish it. The .475 was loaded with three Sledge Hammers and two more LBT solids. I wanted to stalk in close to the brute so that the first bullet would hit perfectly, but he saw me at about 70 yards and started to run. The country was flat and quite open between the trees, giving me perfect visibility. Under these conditions a fast man can overhaul a bovine over a short distance. Cattle and buffalo usually won't

run flat out; instead they lope and occasionally look back to see what's behind them. The bull did just that—after 100 yards' hard run he pulled up to get a look at me and took a Sledge Hammer low through both shoulders. By the time he had made full speed going away, I had the hammer back and hit him in the hind quarters with the second 385-grain Sledge Hammer solid. The bull made three more jumps and rolled over, finished.

My first, hasty shot was too low and far forward, missing the vitals. Round two centered his right hip, breaking the big bones, and ranged forward smashing his shoulder, finally coming to rest under the skin on his brisket. The wonderful bullet had penetrated almost five feet, breaking both hip and shoulder bones, and hadn't even lost the factory shine on its nose! Unfortunately the third round had pulled the bullet out of the case, tying up the gun. As great as the Sledge Hammer loads were, I was going to abandon them. The risk was too great. I knew the heat-treated lead bullets weren't far behind in performance and those loads were totally reliable.

The water buffalo has rarely been given the credit for sagacity that is showered on his cousin the African Cape buffalo. True, there are domestic versions that are only "cattle," but the wild Asiatic buffalo has always been a tough customer. Samuel Baker talked continually about their toughness, their ability to soak up numerous hits from the old black-powder cannons. Bob Penfold, who has shot several thousand of them, says that they rarely take notice of the first few .375s that hit them and that they are capable of soaking up guns full of .458s. The consensus of all who hunt them is that they will fight. Charges are not uncommon. I had begun to believe that, Peter Capstick notwithstanding, the Australian buff might be a tougher customer than the famous Cape buffalo. I

have found the Capes to be warriors and very tough, but only rarely. Two days previously, I had a minor war with an Aussie buff. After three rounds of 1,000-grain, eight-bore bullets through both shoulders, he was still standing, looking for trouble! The reality was, these buffalo weren't white mice. Taking one with a handgun, even with the mighty .475, was going to be serious work.

My guide, Bob Penfold, had reached a

easy. If I did my job, there shouldn't be a problem.

The old water buffalo bulls are normally solitary. We hunted them by cruising in a Toyota, looking for them in the endless gum forest. Visibility was normally 100 to 300 yards. Even though the forest was open, there were enough trees and ant-hills to make stalking very effective, especially against single bulls. Late in the afternoon, Peter, our Aborigine

tracker, spied a huge bull. Even at 200 yards his body looked immense. His horns weren't long, but they were thick. The consensus was that this was an ancient bull who had broomed the thin tips from his headgear. He was the equivalent of a Cape buffalo "Kakulie," an old bachelor. He probably came fully equipped with an evil temper.

The bull spotted the Toyota almost immediately but showed no sign of panic. Instead he would occasionally toss his head in a threatening gesture toward us and continue on his course from our left to our right. The wind was perfectly favorable. We decided to let Peter lead the stalk, while John, a fourth member of our party, drove the Toyota away. Our hope was that the bull would think that we left with the car and unlock his eyes from our position. Even though he was surly, there was little hope of getting within good pistol range if the bull knew where we were.

The plan worked. The bull watched the

car disappear in the distance. Peter, using his ancient hunting instincts, made as effective a stalker as I have ever seen. He seemed more leopard than man. He glided forward silently, using shadows and tree boles for cover. Peter moved only when the bull moved. Gradually the distance between us shortened. At 100 yards the bull appeared to be an awesome animal. He was a mass of black, rippling muscles; bright, chal-

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state of confidence in the revolver and my shooting that both flattered and concerned me. He had left his .458 in camp. I was on my own. This is the way I like to hunt dangerous game—alone, without backup. Years before, I had taken a Cape buffalo with a .45 Colt under the same circumstances. To my knowledge it is the only one taken with a handgun, without the aid of a security blanket. Now, armed with the .475, I was more confident and the terrain was open and

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lenging eyes; and nasty-looking horns. The bull appeared to be stalking something. Suddenly we realized that John had left the Toyota and worked along a ridge to get a view of the show. The bull had taken a killing bead on this lone human form in the forest.

I grinned, inwardly. If he kept taking John for bait, getting into good range was going to be easy. When the bull stalked, we stalked. At 70 yards I was in the shade of a small tree and the bull was in a clearing lit by the searing tropical sun. The shot was longer than I wanted, but with shade on my sights and the target in the bright sun I couldn't ask for better shooting conditions. Besides, he

"Mixed with the crashing recoil was the immediate sensation that I had dealt the bull the final blow."

was getting close enough to John to become a real threat or, as I feared more, to spook at his human scent. I drew the .475 and went into kneeling as Peter melted behind me. The bull was perfectly broadside; my target was a 2-inch square just over the knuckle bone on his right shoulder. I forced my eyes onto the front sight, holding the big gun as gently as a .22 while I loaded the trigger.

Mixed with the crashing recoil was the immediate sensation that I had dealt the bull the final blow. There are times when big bullets land on heavy animals that you know it is over; this was one of them. The bull almost fell down as both front legs buckled. He swiveled 180 degrees, hobbling back the way he had come on 2½ legs. I trotted behind him, taking advantage of the open cover and keeping him in sight. He ran 50 yards to the dark shade under a tree and turned to face me. His head went down between his front legs, and I waited for him to fall over.

Suddenly from behind me were Bob's urgent words to shoot! "He's going to charge!" Apparently, head down, horns forward is the water buffalo's form of attack. Unfortunately for them, it makes them very vulnerable. My second bullet smashed into the bull's spine between his shoulders before he took his first step. He was dead when he hit the ground. I told John that I was sorry that the bull hadn't gotten him down, so I could have saved his life. It would have been nice to have a permanent manservant. John said it looked serious from his point of view...he had begun to cling to a climbable tree. I told him that I didn't

realize that Aussies made such great bait and wondered if he had any lion-hunting experience.

My first shot had hit exactly where I wanted it. The gentle hold and the resultant bone bruise in my right hand had apparently been worth it. It punched through the near shoulder, destroyed the heart, and smashed the off shoulder to pulp before it exited into the gum trees. Bob said he had never seen a .375 H&H hit a bull that hard. At last, with the .475, I have a handgun that isn't underpowered when used on big game.

After my first field experience with the big gun, I have some definite opinions about the usefulness of the .475 cartridge. First, it is a specialized tool. When loaded to full power it is right at home against the big or dangerous game. Buffalo, hippos, bears, lions, and moose may be the only animals worthy of its potential. At full power, the recoil is intimidating, making the gun difficult to shoot precisely. Great effort is required for me to master it, applying the bullets precisely enough to be effective. The .45 Colt and .454 are far more practical for general big game hunting. In a tight spot, I would always rather have my .416. But the .475 is effective enough that I would feel as comfortable with it as it is possible to feel when facing unhappy claws and horns.

If you are interested in .475 revolvers, there are two sources. John Linebaugh makes his plain working conversions on the Ruger single actions. The work costs about \$900, plus the cost of the revolver. For details, write: John Linebaugh, Dept. GA, Box 1263, Cody, WY 82414.

Hamilton Bowen is equipped to make any kind of .475 that you might want.

"Hordes of cattle and donkeys on the mainland and goats on islands... are totally destroying the environment."

They can be had on Ruger single actions or on the double-action Redhawks. They are available in plain working models with precisely-fitted barrels, cylinders, and actions at about \$1,000. From there the sky is the limit. Bowen can make a "best-quality" revolver with any style barrel, sights, custom grips, hand-stoned surfaces, and highly-refined lockwork. If you pull out all of the stops, short of engraving, the guns are about \$3,000. At the same time I can't be complimentary enough about the Bowen revolvers. They are simply masterpieces of design and execution. For a complete catalog of details, send \$3 to: Bowen Classic Arms Corp., Dept. GA, Box 67, Louisville, TN 37777. 