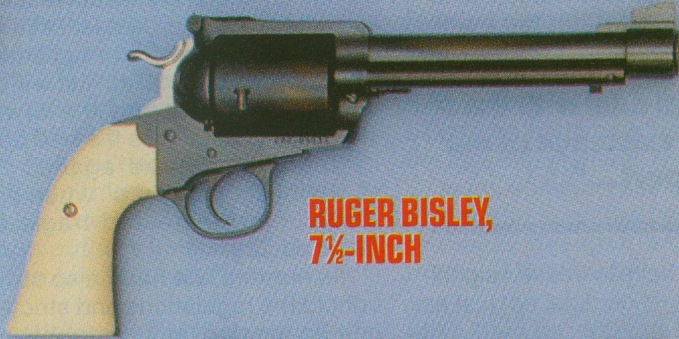




**S&W M29, 10-INCH  
CUSTOM BULL BARREL**



**RUGER BISLEY,  
7½-INCH**



**S&W M29,  
6½-INCH**



**S&W 629,  
5-INCH**

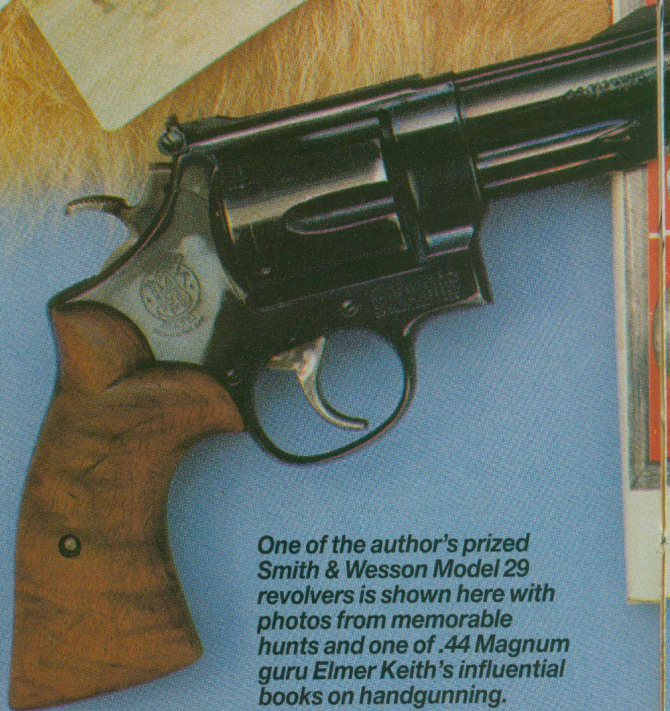
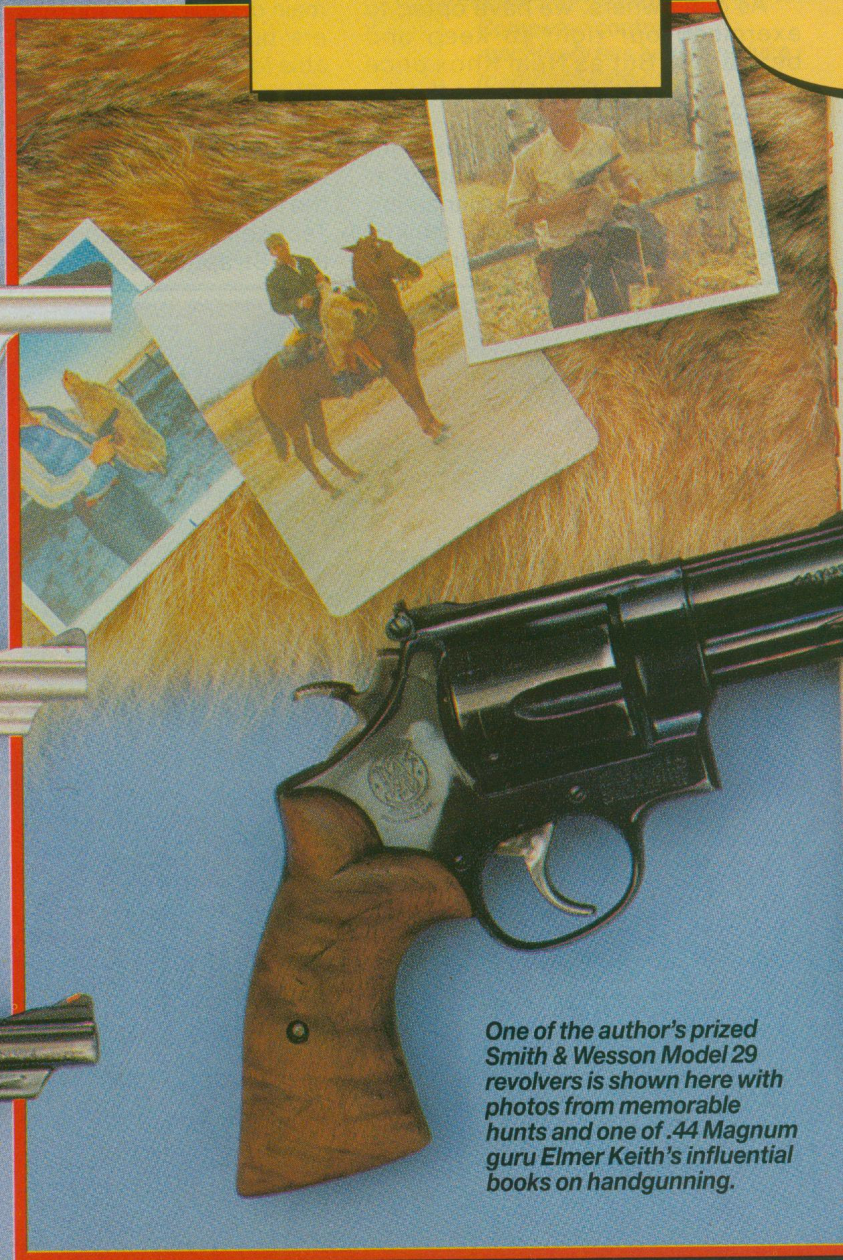


**S&W M629  
MOUNTAIN  
REVOLVER**



**S&W M29,  
4-INCH**

# 20 .44

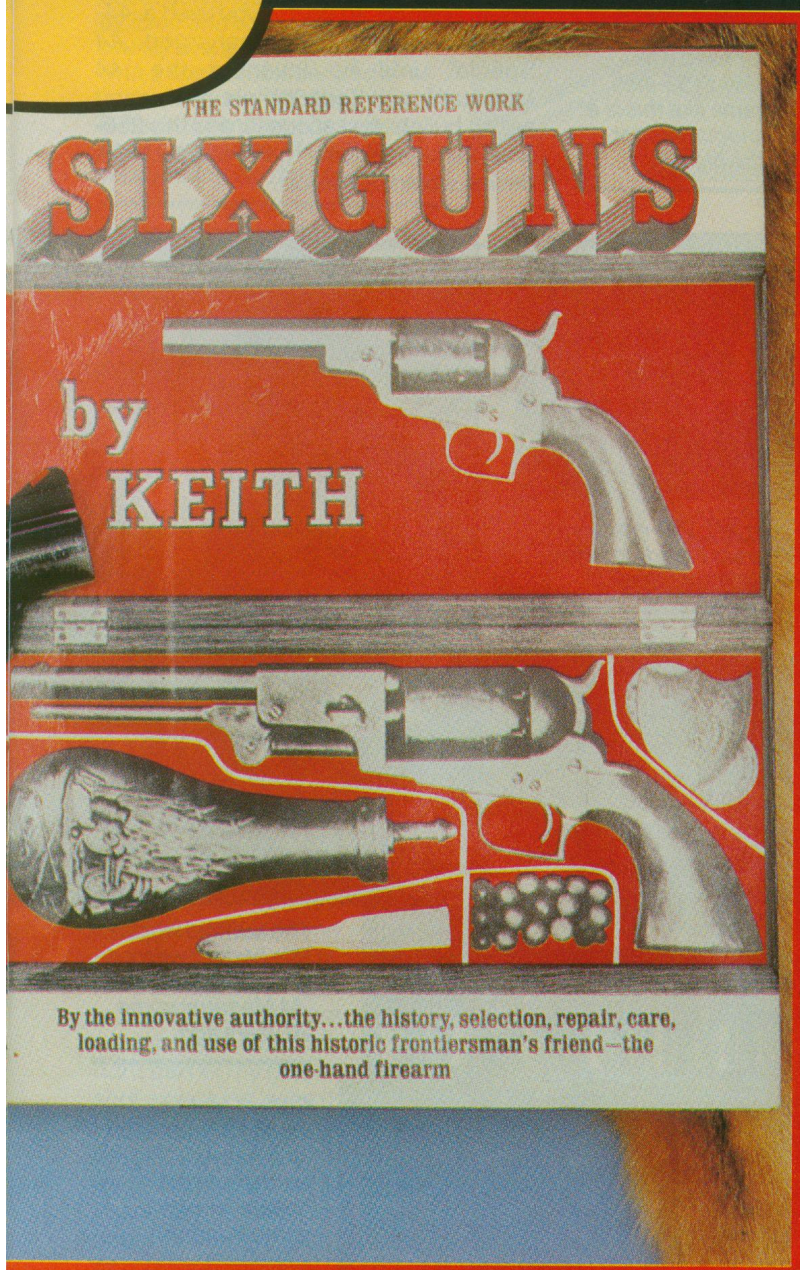


*One of the author's prized Smith & Wesson Model 29 revolvers is shown here with photos from memorable hunts and one of .44 Magnum guru Elmer Keith's influential books on handgunning.*

# 10 YEARS WITH THE MAGNUM

Reflections on this legendary "most powerful" handgun cartridge.

By Ross Seyfried



One of the drawbacks to growing up in the country is the lack of "concrete" toys. Roller skates, skateboards and even bicycles lack charm in the sand. Of course the positive side is the lack of concrete itself, which makes room for far more entertaining pastimes. I had to make do with fishing poles, .22 rifles and as soon as I was up to it, really big handguns.

I'm sure that I was the first kid within a reasonable radius to be fool enough to take on one of the roaring, fire-breathing monsters called .357 Magnums. It came in the shape of a 6-inch Smith & Wesson Model 19. To someone who was definitely geared for results, it was underwhelming to say the least. I made do with it until one of my shooting buddies had the audacity to show up with a .44 Magnum. Now there was a real gun! It would do something when it went off. One's hand stung a bit, dirt flew considerably when the bullets hit and with the then-current crop of Remington 240-grain jacketed softpoint ammo you had to pound on the ejector rod to dump the empties. Power, real power—enough to make a 15-year-old's eyes twinkle and his ears ring for a week.

Of course, I knew next to nothing about the gun and what it could or should do. I was dumber than a box of rocks—without hearing protection or shooting glasses, worrying when the bullets didn't expand and not worrying when the cases wouldn't come out of the cylinder. Senselessly happy, however, I was making incredible amounts of noise and

# 20 YEARS WITH THE .44 MAGNUM

occasionally putting a bullet in the vicinity of its objective.

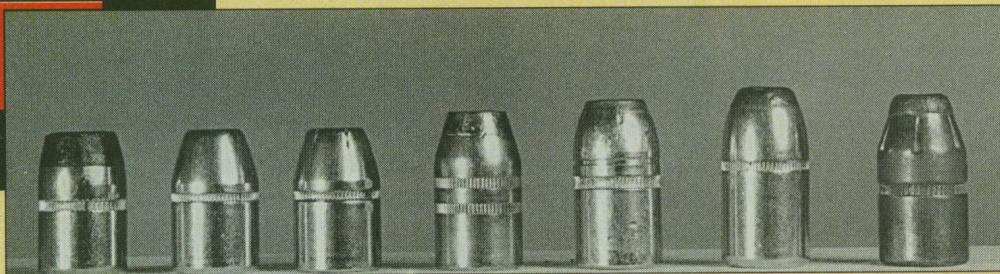
Then I started to reload. Factory ammunition simply put too large a dent in my limited purse and then as today, reloading, especially with one's own cast bullets, gave you .44 ammo for almost nothing. I was equipped with a Lyman single-cavity hollowpoint bullet mold (still trying to make them expand) along with a variety of factory bullets of the day—Speer half-jacketed hollowpoints, Norma Tri-clad 240-grain truncated-cone bullets and whatever else I could get hold of. Looking at the Lyman reloading manual, Hercules 2400 was the fastest and baddest powder, making it the logical choice. I carried the 6½-inch Model 29 in a buscadero holster of my own making. I was groping around in the dark with a big gun, probably risking life and limb,



*In 1965, Petersen Publishing Chairman of the Board Robert E. Petersen bagged the first recorded polar bear to fall to a .44 Magnum. The revolver used was a nicked S&W Model 29 with 6½-inch barrel. Big, dangerous game like this is a real challenge for the handgun hunter even when armed with the big .44.*

print or person. He could do things that bordered on superhuman and assumed that others could function on the same level. Because of this he failed to tell one how to reach the goal; he only defined it. But anything he lacked in detailed instruction he made up for with inspiration. With a thorough study of his book *Sixguns* a person could understand what he had to do: lie on his back, put the front sight just so and whack a 5-gallon bucket 400 yards away. Or take up the right lead on a flying target and test it. If you only got tail feathers with the first round, just increase the lead a foot and watch it tumble on the second round...never mind that it was 200 yards away and traveling 40 miles per hour. You just do it.

Within his lesson plan, which lacked specific details, there were ways and means to this end. The most basic principle was to pull the trigger. You shot and shot at anything and everything. Lesson two was to use a real gun, with loads that would perform. To do this you used a .44-caliber revolver (a turbocharged .44 Special until he invented the .44 Magnum) with Keith bullets. He wasn't selling bullets, just success, and this 250-grain semi-wadcutter made exactly to his design would do the job.

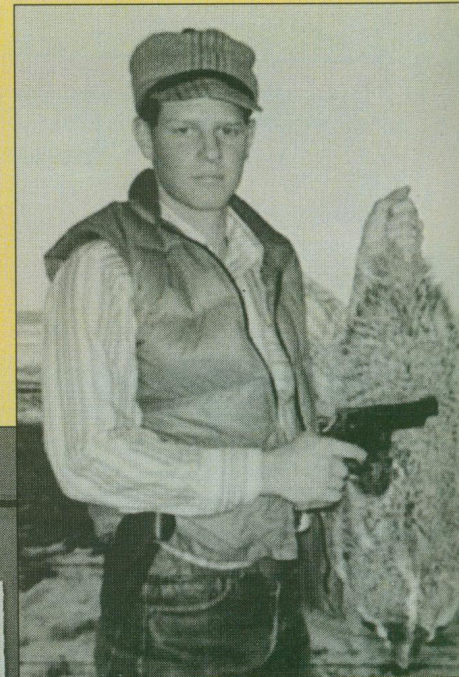


*A variety of fine jacketed bullets exist for the .44 Magnum today. From left: 250-grain Ballard, 240-grain Hornady Silhouette, 240-grain Hornady XTP, 300-grain Freedom Arms, 300-grain Speer Plated Jacket, 300-grain Barnes, 300-grain Cor-Bon.*

and hitting absolutely nothing.

The point in looking at my gross ignorance is not to make me feel worse about myself, but instead to make you feel better about yourself. I know that at least some of you are right there, right now. No question is too simple, no problem is too basic, and while I only know a little more than I did then, I am living proof that a .44 Magnum can be a great friend and teacher. Enter Elmer Keith.

I confess that men who could hit baseballs over a fence didn't do a lot for me, but someone who could hit anything, at any distance, anytime they wanted with a .44 became an instant hero. The big revolver that had been a source of confused entertainment now had a focused purpose. I had to learn about it, how it worked, what it could do and most of all I had to master it. Elmer was not an exceptional teacher, either in



*The author bagged this badger with a 4-inch S&W Model 29 .44 Magnum some 20 years ago.*



GARRETT'S .44 MAGNUM CARTRIDGES  
 SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE ON HEAVY GAME  
 280 GR MODIFIED-KEITH SMC AT 1400 FPS  
 1200 FOOT POUNDS OF ENERGY  
 SUPER-HARD BULLETS (23+ BRINNELL)  
 COOL STORAGE RECOMMENDED  
 GARRETT CARTRIDGES (206) 736-0702

*Garrett makes loaded ammunition with heavy, hardened cast bullets for big-game hunting.*



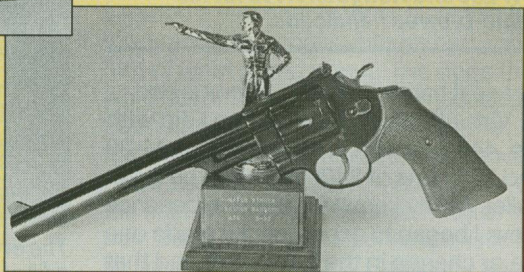
*The original Keith 240-grain cast bullet design (shown here both by itself and as part of a loaded round) was a semi-wadcutter with a sharp shoulder and a wide, flat nose. Although this bullet's technology has since been surpassed, it's still an outstanding hunting bullet.*

buck's ribs. At the shot I was certain I had missed. The buck bounced away in classic mule deer fashion. About the time I was accepting the embarrassment of such an easy miss the buck turned and was running straight away. Then on each bounce I could see the "ropes of blood" that Elmer had described, streaming out both sides. Twenty yards later the buck tipped over.

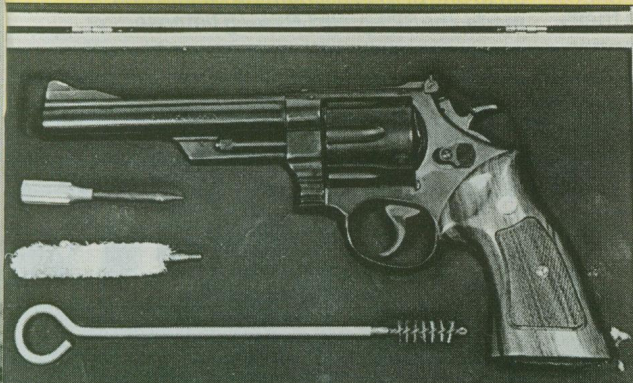
That was a long time ago and I've shot a few critters since, including one elephant. If I count the hunts that really stick in my mind on one hand, that little two-point buck surely is on the list. Handgun

scale. When the photos of our own Robert E. Petersen and his giant polar bear taken with an S&W .44 Mag were published, I knew the sky was the limit for a handgun hunter. This gave a young aspiring handgun hunter plenty of fuel for his fire.

Not long after this milestone in my life there was another. I had the privilege to meet and get to know Elmer Keith in person. I worked in an elk camp run by Elmer's old friend R.W. Thompson and the great master turned up, somewhat shorter than expected, but true to form larger than life. He carried a Champlin



*The Ruger Bisley .44 Magnum is one of the author's favorites. It's essentially a Ruger Blackhawk with a grip frame similar to the old Colt Bisley's.*



*This S&W Model 29 with a custom 10-inch bull barrel won the first long-range target match in which it was shot. It was promptly banned from competition.*

*Early Model 29s like this one with 6-inch barrel came fitted in a wooden case with cleaning tools.*

.338/378 KT and his 4-inch-barreled Model 29. The KT is another story, but the short-barreled .44 with diminutive grips was a real revelation. Unlike my big 6½-inch gun with the oversized factory grips, his little gun could be a constant, unnoticed companion. Worn in a tidy little belt holster made by Ed Bohlin or Milt Sparks the guns just weren't there unless you wanted them.

On my return home I invested in a 4-

About here in the saga I believe my evolution as a handgunner began. I ordered a Hensley and Gibbs four-cavity mold that made the exact Keith bullet. I made and shot a lot of them, now not measuring my shooting in hundreds of rounds, but in hundreds of pounds of lead expended. Within the school of misses there were some hits. With the hits, the sights and trigger began to take on meaning. I couldn't cheat them, no matter how hard I tried. Along the way I learned that if my ears didn't hurt it was easier to hit. Earmuffs became a standard part of my gear. Now, almost every shot was close, even the 400-yard ones.

It was time to try big game, and one fall of my early teens I took that 6½-inch gun into the brush to look for mule deer. I found a little buck and crept to within about 80 yards, eased into the old reclining position and leveled the sights on the



*The author's .44 Magnum collection includes this special presentation S&W Model 629 with 5-inch barrel (top) and the lightweight Mountain Revolver, a limited-edition .44 based on the stainless 629 frame with a slimmed barrel contour and round butt.*

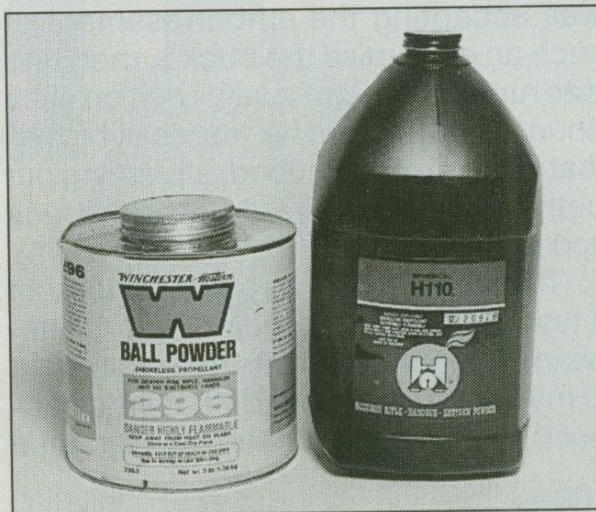
hunting took on real meaning, something that hasn't gone away with 25 years of exposure. It's harder, with a lot less success...if you measure success in terms of killing. But, if you measure success with the yardstick of human endeavor, bushcraft and sheer enjoyment, *not* getting something with a handgun often outweighs a kill with any other tool. Mixed with my tiny success were the big-game hunting feats of others on a much larger

inch gun and made up a set of grips that were as small as they could be and still give me control and comfort under recoil. Today you can get a set of similar grips from Herrett's. These are nearly a copy of the old Roper grip, fully inletted but left oversize and unfinished. You can file and sand them to get an exact (and small enough) size for your hands. During the next 20 years more or less, the day when I wasn't wearing this gun, or one like it,

## **.44 MAGNUM**

was very rare. Because it was always there, the opportunities to use it grew. My cow horse, Sport, liked to hunt almost as well as he liked to chase cows. I confess that hunting, even when I was chasing cows, was always my priority. When we jumped a coyote, given even the slightest chance the chase was on. If we had a decent start Sport would put me on the varmint's tail and I would try to shoot it. Hitting a running coyote from horseback at full speed is at very least an imprecise science. I didn't hit too many, but that didn't matter. It was jolly good sport and by abandoning aim in the conventional sense and poking the gun at the target, snapping the trigger when the muzzle was in the vicinity of the coyote, we got a few.

Most of the time this revolver that had become so much a part of my everyday life was just good clean fun. It was a tool, but mostly it was a diversion and a challenge. One day Sport fell, my leg was smashed, the rope was tangled and the bull was going to win. I expect this story about the .44s is being written for two reasons. One because I have spent most of my life with them, and more dramatically two, because I had one on that moment on that day. It's bet-



*The author originally used 2400 powder for his .44 Magnum loads. However, after years of shooting he now prefers WW 296 and Hodgdon H110 for his home-brewed handloads.*

ter to eat hamburger than become one.

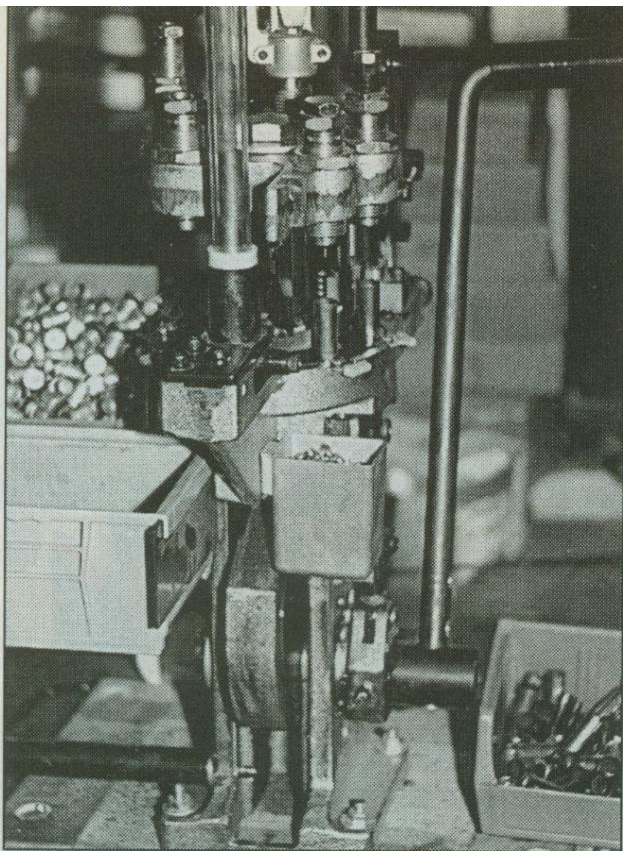
Virtually all of the shooting I did with the .44s was with the basic 4-inch M-29 and 21 grains of 2400 pushing the Keith bullet. As my knowledge and experience grew, I began to experiment. I made one major change in the basic load and that was to exchange 2400 for H-110 or 296 powder. They just seemed more agreeable and I believe time has proven them so. I was also involved in some of the ear-



*The big Ruger Super Redhawk .44 is extremely accurate and can be loaded to high power levels with very heavy bullets. Cutouts in the frame accept Ruger rings for scope mounting.*



*The evolution of the cast .44 Magnum bullet has progressed from (l-r) the 250-grain Keith bullet through the 270-grainer and on to one of the best hunting bullets ever made, the 325-grain LBT long flatnose.*



**The author's Dillon 1050 progressive reloader is set up to turn out .44 Magnum loads by the thousands.**

lier experiments with long-barreled magnums. With the aid of a local gunsmith we put a 10-inch barrel in his Ruger Blackhawk. I'm sure I didn't understand just what that long sight radius meant then, but I do now. The gun, compared to the short 4-incher, shot like a rifle. The long sight radius made hits child's play. Enthused by this first experiment I unscrewed the 6½-inch barrel from my original .44 and put in a 10-inch bull barrel. It

was equipped with an S&W-type underlug and a gold-bar Keith front sight.

Now here, as compared to regular handguns, was a shooting machine. The Douglas barrel was extremely accurate and the shootability provided by the long, heavy barrel let me apply the accuracy. I remember one morning while I was working for an oil company and waiting for someone as usual, I went to work on a prairie dog town. I was sitting on the hood of my pickup, leaning back on the windshield, holding the gun between my knees. I had just found the range and clipped a couple of the varmints when whoever it was that had delayed me turned up. He asked what I was doing and looked a little incredulous when I said I was shooting prairie dogs. "Which ones?" "Those, up there on the hill," seemed a reasonable reply. Now this fellow wasn't a pistolero, but he had some hint of what it was about. The dogs that were out of their burrows were just about 200 yards away. He laughed at me. At that state of my youthful pride and poverty, he made a mistake. "Twenty bucks on the next shot?" My pigeon slashed at the bait. Bang, thump and a characteristic little flip-flop up on the hill. Before the fellow recovered his footing I challenged him to make it a hundred if it was a head shot...that part was luck.

That rather ludicrous gun got caught

up in another challenge. A story in the *American Rifleman* about a magnum handgun match shot at 100 yards ended with, "We challenge anyone to the contest of long-range handgunning." The site of the match was only 50 miles away! I pitched up with the big gun, my first time to ever see a formal pistol range. The match was shot at steel gongs. I think they were 8, 12 and 14 inches in size. We shot them standing from 100 yards and the gun had to be a "magnum." Believe it or not there was a time, not long ago,

---

**"...a 250-grain bullet was not the limit, but only the beginning."**

---

when the guns were all revolvers and no one had a scope. I still have the trophy from that match. The gun was so frighteningly exotic that it was outlawed before the next contest. There was a lesson there somewhere, but I confess it went over my head.

Even then, in 1977, the .44 Magnum guns and ammunition had changed little from Elmer's original blueprint. There were the Smiths, Ruger Blackhawks and 240-grain loads. The .44 Mag had al-

*continued on page 84*

## .44 MAGNUM

continued from page 51

ready proven itself to be capable of taking most of the world's big game, even with what was comparably inadequate ammunition. The .44 technology remained static for a long time; then not much more than a decade ago, it began to grow.

Shooters realized that a 250-grain bullet was not the limit, but only the beginning. I am not sure which came first, like the chicken or the egg—heavy .44 bullets, or guns that could handle them. The lovely Smith & Wessons are *relatively* light and fragile when placed on the scale of really powerful loads. The big, brutally strong Ruger Super Blackhawks, Redhawks and Super Redhawks gave the revolver shooter a vehicle for the total evolution of the .44 Magnum as a big-game round.

I carried a 4-inch 629 a long way, including a couple of trips in Africa. The load was the standard Keith, 250 grains at just over 1,200 fps in the short barrel. It worked on impala and kudu, but that is all it did. On three different occasions I cocked the hammer and pointed the gun at a Cape buffalo but with a brilliant showing of strategic cowardice let it back down in silence. The penetration and punch just weren't there and I knew it.

With the advent of John Linebaugh's .45 Colts and 345-grain Keith bullets I abandoned the .44 as a big-game gun. It was quite against tradition at that time to put a big bullet down the .44-caliber bore.

My first heavy .44 bullets were 270-grain Keith models. They were decidedly better but still couldn't get on the field with the .45. Then the .44 Magnum community discovered heavy bullets. Most of the credit for this must go to J.D. Jones, who had the audacity to fling 300 grains-plus out of the .44s. While I don't agree with his bullet design, I do applaud the principle. These long, heavy non-expanding bullets finally gave the .44 enough penetration to cope with 1,000-pound-plus animals on a reasonable basis.

The shooters began to learn that, as with all other heavy handguns, big results come with big bullets. The real turning point was the introduction of Veral Smith's Lead Bullet Technology and the LFN bullet. These are bullets with a truncated-radius nose, using a full .300-inch flat up front. They put a maximum amount of weight in a minimum of bullet length. Recently I have been watching a shooter with a 5-inch Redhawk use this 325-grain bullet. It is astoundingly accurate and best of all will penetrate. This isn't the dud penetration using a pointed nose. Instead it is pushing that big, flat killing nose in a straight line. I just watched this little 5-inch

gun repeatedly drive that bullet through nearly 40 inches of wet paper—a realm previously reserved for turbo .45s and the .475 Linebaugh. I'm not sure just how to categorize this performance. No, the .44 is not quite equal to the larger bores. I think the best way to look at it is that, loaded with this kind of bullet and used against big game, the .44 can now be considered adequate. It is at least twice the gun it used to be.

Commercial bullet makers have not ignored the heavy .44. Several 300-grain jacketed bullets are on the market. My favorite is the Speer 300-grain with the plated jacket. This is a bonded-core bullet that will expand some. For medium game this is hard to beat. Cor-Bon also makes some bonded-core softs and good jacketed solids in .44 caliber/300 grain. For the non-caster the Freedom Arms jacketed flatnose with an extremely hard core will give you good performance. Barnes also makes some great softnose solids, as well as a flatnose solid. Garrett ammunition offers loaded .44 Magnum ammunition with very heavy bullets. They have two loads with the Keith shape. These are 280 and 310-grain bullets at 1,400 and 1,300 fps respectively from a 7½-inch barrel. I've found these to be excellent loads. A third loading using a 330-grain truncated-cone bullet with a too-pointed nose has not performed well for me. This bullet wants to turn sideways after impact, greatly reducing its penetration. Hopefully Garrett will discover the LBT shape and give us ammunition using these excellent bullets.

With this heavy bullet technology the

### UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT DISTRICT OF CONNECTICUT

IN RE: U.S. REPEATING ARMS COMPANY, Debtor

CHAPTER 11 Case No. 5-86-00036

#### NOTICE OF ENTRY OF ORDER FIXING LAST DAY TO FILE CLAIM BASED ON PERSONAL INJURY ACTIONS AGAINST THE DEBTOR

TO ALL PERSONS AND ENTITIES WITH CLAIMS AGAINST THE ABOVE DEBTOR ARISING OUT OF PERSONAL INJURY ACTIONS:

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE THAT on January 16, 1986, the above debtor filed a voluntary petition for relief under Chapter 11 of Title 11 of the United States Code in the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Connecticut ("Bankruptcy Court"). The Bankruptcy Court has entered an order dated June 16, 1992 requiring all persons and entities including individuals, partnerships, estates, and trusts that assert a claim (as defined below) against the above Debtor which arose on account of a personal injury action, and who have not yet filed a claim against the estate, to file a written claim with the Bankruptcy Court by mailing the claim to the Clerk, United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Connecticut, 915 Lafayette Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut 06604, and to serve a copy of such claim on Jon P. Newton, Esq., Reid and Riege, P.C., One State Street, Hartford, CT 06103-3185. The claim must be actually received on or before August 31, 1992 (the "Bar Date"). Such claims will be deemed filed only when they are actually received.

As used herein, the term "claim" means a right to payment, whether or not such right is reduced to judgment, liquidated, unliquidated, fixed, contingent, matured, unmatured, disputed, undisputed, legal, equitable, secured, or unsecured.

If you claim an injury due to a gun manufactured by the above debtor prior to December 29, 1987, you are advised to file a claim.

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE THAT if you fail to file a claim on or before the Bar Date, you will be forever barred from receiving any distribution under the confirmed plan of reorganization in this case and will be forever barred from asserting any such claim against the Debtor.

ROBERT U. SATTIN, TRUSTEE

By Jon P. Newton, Esq.  
REID and RIEGE, P.C. His Attorneys  
One State Street Hartford, CT 06103 (203) 278-1150 Federal Bar No. ct03376

## DIRECTORY

### COR-BON

(jacketed hunting bullets/loaded ammo)  
Dept. GA  
4828 Michigan Ave.  
Detroit, MI 48210

### L.B.T.

(bullet molds)  
Dept. GA  
HCR 62, Box 145  
Moyie Springs, ID 83845

### GARRETT CARTRIDGES

(.44 ammo with heavy, hardened bullets)  
Dept. GA  
P.O. Box 178  
Ft. Worth, TX 76110

### HERRETT'S STOCKS INC.

(semi-finished grips to my design)  
Dept. GA  
P.O. Box 741  
Twin Falls, ID 83303

### PERFECAST INC.

(bullet molds)  
Dept. GA  
P.O. Box 535025  
Grand Prairie, TX 75050

## BOWHUNTING MAGAZINE

Advertise your guide & outfitting service today!

**WE HAVE:** •Affordable rates •Hunters who are looking for hunts

Bowhunting Magazine will reach an audience of bowhunters who understand what the excitement, challenge and sport of bowhunting is all about!



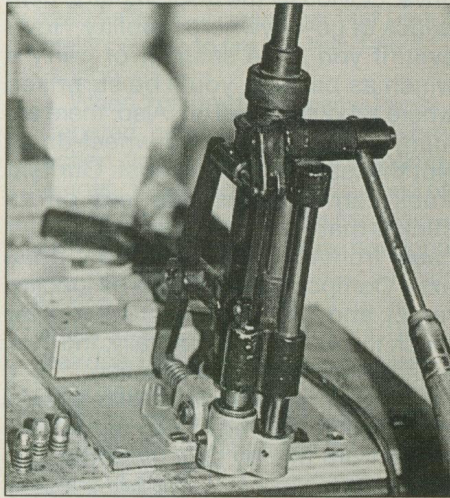
1(800) 231-4053 (U.S.) • 1(800) 521-3151 (Canada)



Direct Marketing Division, P.O. Box 69910, Los Angeles, CA 90069

.44 Magnum has certainly reached new levels on the top end. When Smith & Wesson made a limited run of the little Mountain Revolver, it also reached new levels of portability. This gun wasn't received well by the shooting public, or at least didn't sell like hotcakes. As Tom Campbell says, "it is a gun with a purpose." Unfortunately, most did not understand that. The light weight makes it a bit brutal in recoil, but the plan is a gun to carry a lot and shoot a little. I load mine with 280-grain LBT Wide-Flat-Nose bullets. When filled with this load my little mountain gun becomes a tiny *thumper* with possibly the most punch per size in the handgun kingdom.

I have a lot of .44s ranging from this



***Seyfried uses a Star Lubri-sizer to prepare large amounts of cast bullets for reloading in a short amount of time.***

little Mountain through the standard Smiths to the giant Super Redhawk. I also have one in my now all-time favorite revolver guise, a Ruger Bisley. My Dillon 1050 reloader is set up to make ammunition by the thousands and believe it or not I am still drawing bullet blueprints trying to achieve perfection. Along with LBT, a new bullet mold company called Perfecast will be supplying bullet molds in several calibers made to my specifications. The new Perfecast molds will be made entirely on highly sophisticated computer-controlled machinery. This will give them both extreme precision and the flexibility to make almost any bullet size or shape.

The .44 Magnum has had an awesome influence on my life. We have been a long, long way together. There are a lot of lesser guns and a very few that are greater. But, when taken for what it is—a very powerful, versatile handgun cartridge—it is very hard to beat. When you combine the range of ballistic performance with the wide spectrum of out-of-the-box guns, it will probably remain deservedly the king of the handguns. 