

# Playing

A Hopelessly Addicted  
Handgunner Culls  
Through His Collection for  
a Few Star Performers.

# FAVORITES

By Ross Seyfried





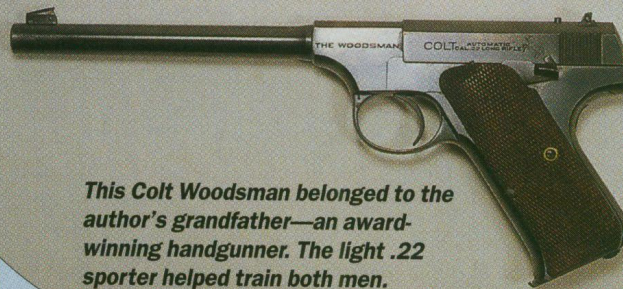


*This tuned, 2½-inch Model 19 S&W .357 was tough to master well, but helped teach the author the fundamentals of double-action shooting.*

**S**ome time ago, I happened to glance along the peg-rack of handguns in my safe. My collection is eclectic, almost weird, but looking at it got me to thinking about my favorites—why I like them and what I've done with them. Here's what ran through my mind:

### **THE COLT WOODSMAN**

When I consider the old Colt Woodsman, I'm surprised at just how little I've actually used a .22 rimfire. This is about the only one I own that has many miles on it, and it's certainly the only .22 I have any devotion or affection for. In its own way it is very important. The Woodsman's greatest virtue is that it was my grandfather's. He, too, was a pistolero—a winner of many medals in military competition. This gun was one of his trainers. The light-barreled sporter has little mass and is very unforgiving. This—combined with its fine trigger and outstanding accuracy—makes it an almost-perfect teacher of the basics of handgunning. I used it to practice, generally with any kind of ammunition I could get that was cheap. Even with bargain ammo it could outshoot me. With high-speed hollow points, it is a great gopher gun. I remember well—after a long wait following the recoil—hearing the little bullet thump into the center of a prairie dog. The unlucky fellow was 128 steps away.



*This Colt Woodsman belonged to the author's grandfather—an award-winning handgunner. The light .22 sporter helped train both men.*



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## THE MODEL 19

The 2½-inch Model 19 round-butt .357 is a gun I should not like. It seems impractical, but this gun and this gun alone taught me to shoot a handgun. It is high degree of difficulty personified. The tiny grips and short sight radius, combined with a generally violent attitude make this little Smith an enforcer of discipline. The action and lockwork were tuned by the late Fred Sadowski, and his work, like that of so many masters, seems impossible to duplicate. It was the buttery-smooth DA pull of the M19 that cajoled me into trying to master the art of double-action revolver shooting.

I burned thousands and thousands of rounds at a standard 50-foot bullseye from 25 yards. At first I missed the paper regularly. Then I began to make reliable patterns, and finally, I could chew out the 10-ring. The gun taught me that I could not cheat. Every move had to be smooth and consistent ... the tiniest flinch caused a "miss by a mile." At the same time, my eyes began to learn just how critical precise sight alignment is. Of course, I shot it single action also. First at 50, then at 100 yards. Elmer Keith told me that a short barrel was just as accurate as a long one, but it was a long time before I could believe it, let



Two Ruger Bisleys, a .32 and a five-shot .45 Colt, are outstanding hunting handguns. The author (below) feels that the Ruger Bisley design makes a magnificent launching pad for powerhouse cartridges.



First class with a .45: A Pachmayr Combat Special (top) and a Swenson steel Commander helped send the author around the world on the competitive combat circuit.

alone prove it. But finally the extreme discipline pressed upon me by the little gun paid off. I learned that if I was perfect, even small targets at long range were in serious trouble.

I carried the snubby a lot in an equally diminutive Milt Sparks holster. It was unnoticeable on my belt, but when I hauled it out, it often got results. It was just about perfect for shooting coyotes from horseback. At times it made some ridiculously long hits when the coyote stopped and stood to look at me, perhaps thinking they were safe

at what was "mild" rifle range.

For most of its career, I loaded the M19 with 173-grain Keith bullets atop very maximum charges of H-110 that pushed the big bullet at nearly 1,200 fps out of the short barrel. Its bark was about equal to its bite. Today it is more or less retired but stays filled with 180-grain LBT WFN bullets and goes places where a gun needs to not be seen, but heard if necessary.

## THE .45 AUTOS

A pair of Colt .45 autos had a profound impact on my life in general. They are certainly responsible for my sitting here right now typing these words. The first is an all-steel Commander that I bought because it was too pretty to pass up. The gun was "made" by the great master Armand Swenson and came complete with some of his signature modifications. The front and back straps have fine, precise checkering. While this kind of work





**.45 Colt Linebaugh/Seville**

**Sixgun or Cape gun? A six-shot Linebaugh/Seville in .45 Colt changed the author's concept of handgun hunting and took a Cape buffalo—unaided.**



**Four-inch S&W Model 29**

**The author's four-inch .44 Magnum Model 29 was a direct link to Elmer Keith and proved the master's theories on the long-range effectiveness of short-barreled handguns.**

is almost standard today, in the late '60s it was an extreme rarity. The true beauty of the piece comes from the elegant and complex stippling on the top of the slide and the neatly fitted S&W rear sight. Of course, like all of Swenson's jewels it would shoot. It was a toy at first, and I almost couldn't admit owning it to Elmer, who felt that autos were contraptions.

I began competition shooting with a revolver—more or less trying to prove that Elmer was right—and probably would have continued the bull-headed approach to the bitter end. But a friend intervened, suggesting that if I would take up an auto, I might be able to go to Africa. With the Swenson I began to win instead of place. I shot it with a Saco 230-grain bullet and Unique powder. The recoil was heavy, and the loads nearly pounded the gun to death, but I was on my way.

The next stop was Pachmayr Gun Works, following the example of the great

Ray Chapman and Raul Walters. They were my idols, and they won with Pachmayr Combat Specials. The Pachmayr pistols were engineered by Bill Ives and were the product of a great deal of research and effort. While highly sophisticated combat guns are almost commonplace today, they were impossibly rare then. But even with today's technology and advancements, I have yet to behold a pistol that was as smooth, as elegantly simple and efficient as the old Pachrat. On a diet of Federal Match ball and Hornady 230-grain flatpoint factory loads it won the world shoot in 1981. Needless to say, it has a soft place in my heart. After some 80,000 rounds, the gun is essentially worn out. But that's not bad when you consider the design life of the Colt is only 5,000 rounds. Now, I shoot it only occasionally ... just to remember.

### THE MODEL 29

Any discussion of my handguns

would be incomplete without the Model 29 .44 Magnum. But this is actually my second. The first was a 6½-inch version, but to be a student of Keith, a four-inch is mandatory. This one was also tuned by Sadowski, but the fine double action was wasted on me. I did shoot it a few times DA, but the recoil, combined with the long reach to the trigger made the package unsuitable for me. But I did shoot (and shoot and shoot) it single action. It took deer, elk and antelope, not to mention lots of coyotes, some unmentionable vermin and some feathery things on the wing. With it I learned the art of long-range shooting, eventually reaching the state where a five-gallon bucket was in real trouble at 300 yards and beyond. It was my link to my mentor, and while I never reached Keith's level of proficiency, I did get good enough to appreciate just how good Elmer really was.

While I did experiment with loads some, the M29 pretty much lived on 250-grain Keith bullets. As soon as I discovered the superiority of H-110 and 296 in the magnums, I abandoned 2400. Even with the milder loads, the gun has made two trips back to Smith & Wesson



**Number 13 is, in the author's opinion, the finest handgun in the world. This .475-caliber Ruger Bisley is as powerful and accurate as it is beautiful. The author used it to take this nice pronghorn (inset).**





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for rehab. On its first scheduled overhaul, my friend Tom Campbell told me that he thought he could salvage the frame and barrel, while the rest was beyond hope. As I move on to single actions, the old gun gets a lot of rest, but it is still there, ready.

## ASSORTED SA POWERHOUSES

The revolver that replaced my pet .44 changed my outlook on handguns, perhaps even the face of handgunning itself. This was the six-shot .45 Colt "magnum" made on the Seville frame by John Linebaugh. With this revolver I moved from a power level that was marginal on midsized game to one that was almost adequate for anything that walked. The 250-grain .44 Keith bullet was replaced with a similar shape of one that weighed 325 grains, while the velocity moved from 1,200 fps to 1,500 fps.

I carried the gun as a constant companion while I guided in Africa and actually used it much more than any of my rifles. It was my cripple stopper. With it I dispatched everything from little reed-buck to eland. I even used it on several buffalo; it flattened one wounded bull that was about to take the radiator out of my Toyota when all of the rifles at hand had gone empty. I centered the bull's shoulders at 10 feet and grounded him as if I'd been using my pet .416. The shootability and accuracy of the single action were outstanding, and it had enough power to plow through four feet of meat and bone. I believe this gun was the first widely publicized "heavy" hunting handgun—one that used big bullets at moderately high velocity. It became the "buffalo gun" after I used it to take a big Cape bull out of the thorn thickets without the help of a backup rifle.

The gun's active life was only about two years, but the lessons it taught and the precedents it set led the way. I can honestly say that even though I have better guns now, I have

never hit better in the field than I did with this old six-shooter.

I'm in the Ruger single-action era now and there are three guns that have special places in my battery. The first is my first Bowen five-shot .45 Colt. It is actually quite ordinary, still wearing the factory 7½-inch barrel and stock grips.

But with it came the LBT bullets, an uncommon degree of accuracy and the feel and shootability of the Bisley frame. The gun has been to Australia and other parts of the world far and near. With it I realized that the .45 Colt—when loaded with 325- and 360-grain bullets—is the perfect hunting handgun. It is more than adequate for any North American game, having reserve power for the big ones and the ability to be loaded down for deer and varmints.

The five-shot .45 Colts can accept an extreme variety of loads, but my recipes remain simple. My all-around load uses the LBT 325-grain Long Flat Nose over a 100 percent density load of either H-110 or 296 powder. This kind of load—where the bullet base just touches the powder—is the most efficient and offers maximum velocity without excess pressure. Velocity from the 7½-inch barrel is close to 1,500 fps. With a hard bullet it is capable of going right through elk, bear—even moose. My "heavy" load is a 360-grain Wide Flat Nose with similar touch-the-powder loads producing 1,400 fps or more. This 360-grain load is a slugger, delivering similar penetration to the 325, but with a mightier blow.

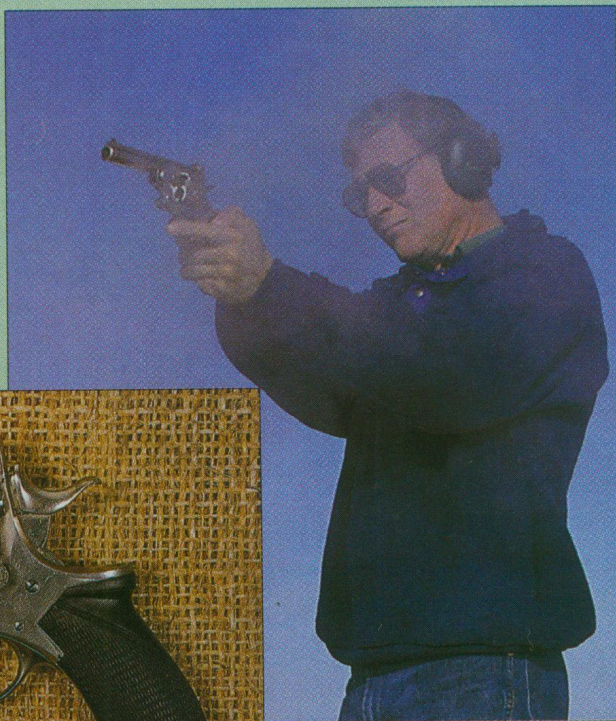
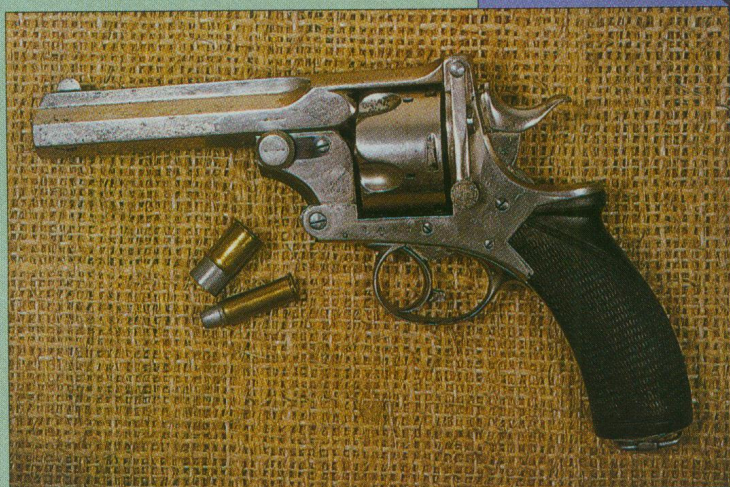
## FULL-DRESS RUGERS

Now when I want substantially less power than the .45, I change to a

diminutive Single-Six .32 Magnum. I used this gun in out-of-the-box form for quite a while, long enough to realize that it was one of the most accurate and easy-to-shoot handguns I had ever held. This fixed-sight model is sleek and, to my eye, absolutely beautiful. I liked it so much I couldn't resist turning it into something of a movie star. First I sleeved the outside of the factory barrel with a piece of fine Damascus from a best-quality English shotgun. The addition of a sleek, caterpillar-ramp front sight complimented its already racy lines. The aluminum ejector-rod housing was replaced with one of steel, which was then browned to match the Damascus barrel. As a crowning touch, I color case-hardened the frame.

I load the .32 with 120-grain LBT hard bullets (or 110-grain Speer HPs if I want expansion). The Speer uses ½ grain less powder (again H-110 or 296) to achieve a true magnum 1,400 fps velocity. Both loads hit the top of the front sight at 100 yards. Both will stay in less than four inches at that range. The .32 Magnum's bark is small, but a few hogs and deer will attest to its bite.

Similar in theme, but far more extravagant is Number 13. It is the product of my desire for the finest revolver in the world. Its basis is again a Ruger Bisley, transformed by the finest metalsmith, engraver and schrimshander I could find. Number 13 is chambered for the .475, the ultimate extreme in revolver



**A Bland .577 revolver from Edwardian England uses 450-grain bullets and 28 grains of black powder. It is the ultimate "manstopper."**





**Old favorites (clockwise from top): a Colt Woodsman, a Swenson Commander, a Linebaugh/Seville in .45 Colt, a Pachmayr Combat Special, an S&W M29, a Bland .577, S&W M19, a five-shot Bowen/Ruger .45 Colt, a .32 Magnum Ruger Bisley and a Ruger Bisley "Number 13" .475.**

power. Hamilton Bowen was responsible for the fitting, honing, chambering, stoning and tuning to create the best-quality revolver, itself. The barrel is match-quality 4140 steel, but a cosmetic sleeve of handmade Damascus steel covers the outside in beautiful octagon shape. The fully adjustable sights appear to be fixed and resemble those found on my Woodsman.

After the base gun was complete, it became a canvas for artists. Jim Nixon added just enough elegant English scroll engraving to the frame and barrel to make a statement, then transformed the hammer into a dragon. I wanted the grips to be equally special. To that end, Bowen made a set from a huge chunk of fossilized walrus ivory. They became a background for the art of Mary Mueller who brought them to life with the saber-toothed cat and the huntress from *Clan of the Cave Bear*. Finally, I browned the barrel and Doug Turnbull added fire blue and color case-hardening.

Number 13 is extremely accurate, averaging two inches or less at 50 yards, and it is powerful. Its big load drives LBT 430-grain LFN bullets at 1,300 fps. Reduced small-game loads use Blue Dot to push 380-grain bullets 1,200 fps. I only hunted the gun once, taking a mule-deer buck and a big, old pronghorn. Beyond that it is, unfortunately, like a fine painting. I can only admire it, knowing it will shoot if I

should be greedy enough to ask.

The final piece in my selected few is almost as extreme, but instead of new, it is very old. The Bland .577 revolver is by its nature very special. Unlike some modern aberrations, this true big bore is not a cumbersome giant. Instead, it is little larger than my Model 29 ... except for its holes. The groove diameter is .615-inch! The gun is like Swiss cheese in that there's a lot more hole than gun. The case heads are the same as the .577 Nitro, but they are only .8 inch long, perhaps as close as a cartridge can come to being as wide as it is long. It uses 450-grain bullets driven by 28 grains of fine black powder. While it palls in real power when compared to modern magnums, this true manstopper from the past is very impressive and, I expect, would cause any form of two-legged varmint to surrender after looking down the business end.

As I look upon this collection of tools that have served the first half of my life, I realize my favorites represent untold hours of pleasure, refinement of my self-discipline and the honing of my physical skills. They have provided comfort in uneasy places and fed my family. Some demonstrate human skill at its highest degree and, like fine art, are heirlooms for future generations. And yet, in spite of what we are told about handguns, not one has demonstrated even the slightest hint of evil.