THE L.A.R. GRIZZLY



At last, a production auto pistol to handle the long-touted .45 Winchester Magnum cartridge.

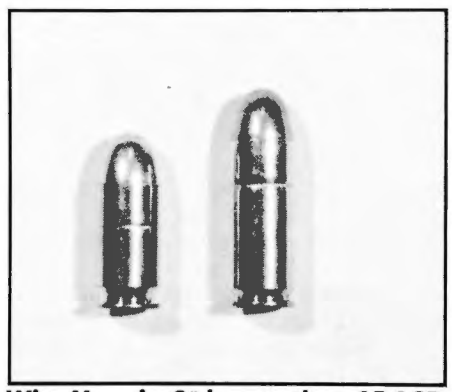


By Jim Weller

Since 1979, there has been a handgun round sort of floating around like a lost child looking for a parent—the .45 Winchester Magnum. The Grizzly Win Mag has now arrived, and coupled with the .45 Magnum cartridge is a most impressive piece of ordinance.

For years, if one wanted a powerful handgun, the .44 Magnum was the way to go, yet for the recoil conscious there appeared to be a gap somewhere along the line. People wanted something powerful, but didn't want the recoil associated with it. Indeed, I wish I had every .44 in my closet that was bought, shot, and traded in within about two weeks of purchase because of the inability of the shooter to cope with the sharp jab of a heavy recoiling .44. How does a 230 grain bullet at over 1300 fps with the recoil of a standard .45 auto using hot loads grab you? Because, as you will see, that sums up the Grizzly Win Mag to a "T".

If you look at one, your first thought will probably be that it looks like an overgrown Colt MKIV, and you're more than a little right. Out of 49 parts in the Grizzly, 39 of them interchange with the Colt product. The 10 that don't are those that were enlarged or beefed up to take the pounding of the larger cartridge, yet the appearance is basically the same. The most recognizable difference is the massive frame and slide, yet the entire tear-down and re-assembly is almost a carbon copy of the MKIV we all know and love. Should you desire to have the gun accurized, any pistolsmith that does good work on the MKIV should be able to work with the Grizzly just as easily.



Win. Mag. is .3″ longer than 45 ACP.

The cartridge is a twin of the .45 ACP round with the exception of the .3″ longer case, and, of course, the powder charge. The only load presently offered is from Winchester, and the only choice of bullet is the 230RNFMJ as used in GI Ball. On the performance end, the ACP round just isn't in the same league with the magnum version, but I'm getting a little ahead of myself.

As the gun comes out of the box, it is most impressive. The extra mass of the slide and larger frame combine to give an empty weight of 51 oz., hardly in the lightweight category. The slide was a nice flawless blue, but the frame exhibited a slight purplish tint. Metal fit was fine. I had expected to see the vents ported into the standard 6½″ barrel, but a note enclosed in the box said that after testing, it was found that the ports were not only detrimental to accuracy and velocity, but that they did not significantly reduce muzzle jump enough to warrant the extra cost, therefore they were eliminated. The early Grizzlys had sights from Wichita, but that has since been changed to the excellent sights by Millett with a white outline/bar rear and blaze orange front. An ambidextrous safety and Pachmayr stocks and mainspring housing as well as an extended slide release complete the package.

As one would expect, the grip frame is longer to make room for the larger magnum cartridge which resulted in a real handful for me. The trigger is the standard "short" version and is the right length for the size of the frame. Had a long trigger been installed, I would have had trouble reaching the trigger. The trigger broke at 6½ lb., and was gritty with a noticeable amount of creep, however it isn't any worse than any other .45 you're likely to pick up these days. I would never have the extended slide stop on any of my standard .45's, but it is a needed piece of equipment here and worked well. Magazine capacity is seven rounds.

Winchester was kind enough to furnish me with 200 rounds of factory ammo. After sighting in offhand at ten yards, I fired ten rounds over my Custom 900 Chronograph using the light screens. Air temperature was 55°. The high round was 1394 fps and the low was 1294 fps for a 100 fps spread between high and low velocities. Truthfully, I had expected a little better. All rounds but two were over 1300 fps with the average for the ten coming out at 1330 fps, that calculates to 900 fpe. Take the same velocity for the 240 grain bullet in the .44 Magnum and you would have 940 fpe or a 5% gain which is hardly worth noting. The factory manual lists



The author says the Grizzly is easy to shoot with surprisingly little recoil.

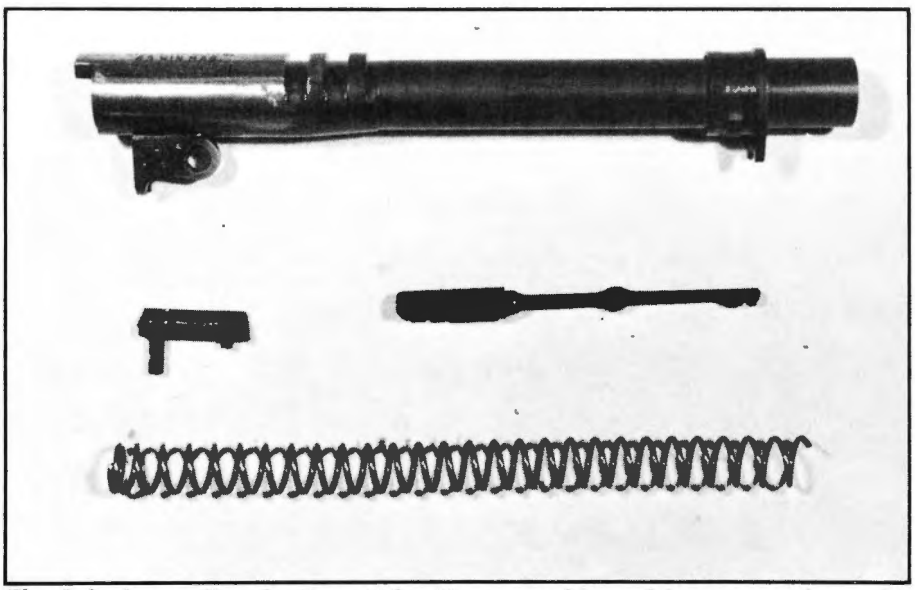
velocity at 1400 fps from a 5″ barrel, but I never hit that figure from a barrel 1½″ longer. At any rate, this cartridge is no slouch and the fact that it fires from an autoloading pistol makes it that much better. It exhibits absolutely none of the jabbing recoil associated with the revolver. In fact, during the whole test period I found this to be a very pleasant gun to shoot, hardly worse than a standard MKIV using hot handloads. The only thing that let you know you had something else up the pipe was the muzzle blast, which is considerable, and right up there with any of the .44's.

The Grizzly averaged groups of 2½″ at 25 yards, and I suspect that a really good trigger job giving a good 3 lb. pull would shrink that somewhat. The trigger work should be on the first priority list for purchasers of the Grizzly who may want to compete in metallic silhouette matches, and it wouldn't surprise me at all to see a few of these in accurized form turn up at a match here and there. In fact, L.A.R. even has oversized barrels available to be handfitted by the gunsmith. I did not get into handloads with the Grizzly, but I suspect that Blue Dot powder would be a good starting place, and coupled with a good hollow point bullet would make this a most desirable hunting load which I myself prefer to shoot over any .44 Magnum that I've ever run across.

In the 200 rounds of testing there was one failure to fully go into battery on a live round. This was traced to a dirty gun, which the Grizzly seems to become rather quickly. The lugs in the slide are massive and rather sharp, and these apparently tend to shave brass from the magnum casings upon extraction. When the malfunction occurred, an inspection of the chamber area and inside of the slide showed a lot of small brass shavings, which, coupled with the powder residue, tends to get things a little sticky. Whether or not the shaving may cease at some other point down the line, I can't say.

In addition to the .45 Magnum, the Grizzly is able to be converted to several other calibers through the use of the Multi-Caliber Conversion Units (MCCU) available from the maker, including one for the rare 9mm Winchester Magnum round. Whether or not the 9 Mag will become a reality remains to be seen, as L.A.R. is also planning on offering a conversion kit in .357 Magnum as well. I suspect that the .357 will do about the same as the 9 Mag, and is certainly more readily available as the 9 Mag ammo is non-existent as of this writing. Plans include kits to convert the gun to a .38 Super, .30 Mauser, and others. Each kit includes an extractor, ejector, barrel, recoil spring, and magazine, and any of the kits may be changed with the standard equipment in about 3 minutes time. L.A.R. included a kit to convert it to standard .45 ACP which I happily gave a run on the range. In over 300 rounds of mixed ammunition types, it gave not one failure in any department, with accuracy on a par with any stock Colt product. As one would expect, the recoil of the .45 ACP, not much to talk about in the first place, becomes totally laughable when fired in the heavy 51 oz. Grizzly.

I believe that there is a place for the Grizzly in the shooting world. I don't think that there's any doubt that the power of the factory round could be elevated through some judicious handloading. Hornady lists loads for the .45 Magnum in their reloading manual, although they are for the T/C Contender single shot, and may be on the hairy side for the Grizzly. If you plan on hunting somewhere where the autoloader is allowed, I certainly wouldn't be afraid to tackle anything with the Grizzly that could be tackled with the vaunted .44 Magnum, and I, for one, would prefer it. With an accuracy job, it should do fairly well at the silhouette game as well. I believe that the current retail price is somewhere in the $600-$700 bracket, but compare that to the Wildey at $1250 (if you can find one), and it doesn't look so bad at that.



The Grizzly can fire the 9mm Win. Mag. cartridge with a conversion unit.

RELOADING THE .45 WIN MAG

By Joe Zambone

One of the most powerful handgun cartridges around has been, until recently, also one of the best-kept secrets because only one self-loading gun is chambered for it. The .45 Winchester Magnum, originally developed for the Wildey gas-operated pistol, went into production at Olin's East Alton, Illinois plant some years back, but the Wildey failed to materialize on schedule. Shooter interest dropped off like a fizzled Roman candle and hard-bucking handgun enthusiasts turned back to the all-time favorite .44 Magnum. Only Thompson/Center produced a handgun chambered for the .45 Win Mag, and not a whole lot of folks dabbled with reloading the cartridge.

With the introduction of L.A.R.'s Grizzly self-shucker pistol there's a lot of renewed interest in this caliber; unfortunately, the only

reloading data is for Contender pistols with stronger actions and longer barrels than found in a semi-auto pistol. Since Winchester's factory load is a zippy 230-grain full metal jacket (FMJ) round-nose slug totally unsuitable for self-defense and marginally applicable for hunting, handloading becomes a necessity for good performance. This article will address loads which can turn



Factory powder looks like Unique.

Here's a cartridge that just begs to be reloaded, and here are six-dozen loads for the Grizzly that make it a winner.

the Grizzly into the first cousin of a full-house .44 Magnum with eight-shot repeatability.

The factory load is inadequate for self-defense because it shoots through many things before slowing appreciably. There would be very little energy transfer and great potential for casualties to innocent bystanders even many blocks away. In my Grizzly, the Winchester 230-grain "hardball" ammo chronographed at 1,340 feet per second (fps) when the gun was new, and an average of 1,360 fps after the Grizzly was broken in. That's a muzzle energy figure of 943 foot-pounds (written as fpe, foot-pounds of energy), or about what a .44 Magnum delivers. That's also nearly three times as much energy as a .45 Auto offers with the same 230-grain bullet.

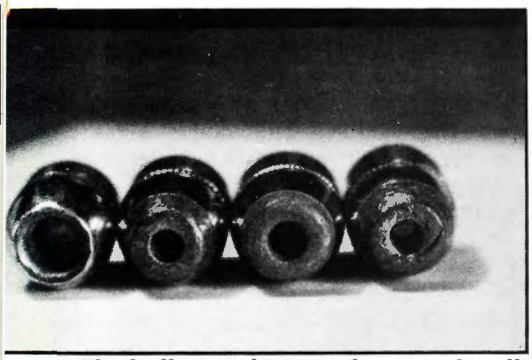
Penetration with factory ammunition is absolutely awesome. I shot a six-inch-thick



Most slugs mushroomed beautifully.

LOADING DATA . . .45 WINCHESTER MAGNUM IN L.A.R. GRIZZLY WIN MAG PISTOL

HERCULES UNIQUE	10.0	10.5	11.0	11.5	12.0	12.2	12.5	12.6	12.8	13.0	13.2		
200 gn Speer JHP	1149 12	1196 17	1244 26	1300 13	1342 19		1378 11		1396 17	1387 22	1393 16		
225 gn Speer JHP								1316 14	1314 13	1333 11	1356 10		
240 gn Sierra JHP						1266 7	1293 8						
260 gn Speer JHP	No loads listed—Unique rather fast for this bullet weight												
230 gn Alberts Swaged Lead		1205 17	1239 18	1279 12	1320 12	1339 14	Heavier loads possible at expense of accuracy						
POWDER - BLUE DOT	15.0	15.5	16.0	16.5	17.0	17.5	18.0	18.5	19.0				
200 gn Speer JHP					1246 24	1257 13	1317 5	1323 18	1442 10	Note: Mild recoil, huge flash			
225 gn Speer JHP			1278 13	1307 12	1341 14	1355 10							
240 gn Sierra JHP	1169 24	1215 24	1263 14	1283 2	1327 9								
260 gn Speer JHP		1214 11	1254 8	1284 18	Best powder for 260 gn bullet								
POWDER - HODGDON HS 6	12.0	12.5	13.0	13.5	14.0	14.5	15.0	15.5	16.0	16.5			
200 gn Speer JHP	896 21	992 30	1052 18	1090 27	1132 12	1190 27	1242 7	1324 40	1351 22	1388 28	Not an ideal powder for .45 Win. Mag.		
POWDER - HODGDON HS 7	14.0	14.5	15.0	15.5	16.0	16.5	17.0	17.5	18.0	18.5	19.0	19.5	20.0
200 gn Speer JHP						Lighter loads very mild!			1315 24	1382 15	1400 23	1446 16	1504 16
225 gn Speer JHP					1141 14	1176 19	1226 22	1279 20	1338 6	Max. load very accurate—huge flash!			
240 gn Sierra JHP			1090 25	1117 30	1172 23	1216 28	1248 21	Max. load very controllable and mild					
260 gn Speer JHP	1001 24	1053 17	1089 9	1115 11	1169 11	Not best powder for heavy slugs							
POWDER - OLIN "?"	12.5	13.0	13.5	14.0	14.5	15.0							
200 gn Speer JHP				1424 22	1467 29								
225 gn Speer JHP				1393 8									
240 gn Sierra JHP			1344 16										
260 gn Speer JHP	1239 12												
230 gn Alberts Swaged Lead				1465 59									
185 gn Silvertip						1500 22							



The hollow points mushroomed well.

live pine tree (in an area about to be cleared) to determine if the slug would penetrate fully. It did, and then penetrated completely through another tree the same size which was four feet behind the first one. Such penetration is impressive to a novice, but seasoned shooters (both self-defense and hunters) know that bullets which travel through a target do not get their job done efficiently. Expansion is needed so the bullet stops *in* the target, delivering its full energy for a quick kill rather than slaying a Douglas fir 200 yards behind the target.

You can't buy unprimed (or primed) factory brass for the .45 Win Mag; only a factory-loaded round is offered, in the single 230-grain flavor. Handloaders must therefore purchase loaded rounds first; instead of simply shooting 'em up in a hurry to get brass for reloading, however, use these rounds to break in the Grizzly. Velocities and accuracy will improve after about 500 rounds through the gun, and all parts are settled into place by a thousand rounds. Winchester helped in this reloading project by supplying me with a case of factory ammo; they're obviously interested in ensuring that sales of the cartridge pick up, but a vote of thanks is owed them for such cooperation.

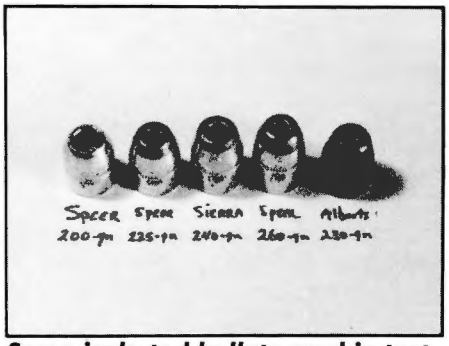
Factory ammo clocks rather accurately, with an extreme spread between slow and fast rounds in a string of about 60 fps and a standard deviation measurement of 14 to 20. Winchester factory fodder is loaded with 14 grains of a powder which looks a lot like Hercules *Unique*, and the bullet is asphalted into the case to develop high case pull for better powder ignition. It's basically a longer version of the .45 ACP with a lot more powder and nearly three times the recoil (about 12.3 foot-pounds of recoil versus some 4.5 foot-pounds in a .45 ACP). The recoil is *not* really hard to handle, I might add, and some two dozen .45 ACP pistol experts I allowed to shoot the Grizzly were all surprised at the mild recoil.

Since there was no valid reloading data for this cartridge in a semi-auto pistol with six-inch barrel, I started with Blue Dot powder first. It's a good powder for magnum cartridges but is also applicable to lesser loadings. A variety of bullets were loaded up and many problems arose right away.

This cartridge requires a cannelured bullet because the recoil will sometimes pull taper-crimped slugs out of the cases enough that they won't chamber. Sierra's 185-grain JHP slug, a whiz-bang bullet for the .45 ACP, is thus not a good choice for the Win Mag Grizzly. And, as the slide whips back to spit out a spent case, it's compressing a spring about the size a car's suspension uses. Slide forward travel is quite fast and a bullet that isn't held tight may be driven back into the case upon contact with the feed ramp. About half the 185-grain Sierra bullets did this.

Only those bullets with a rounded nose profile would feed reliably in my Grizzly, and not for love nor money could I get Hornady's 185- and 200-grain truncated cone target bullets to chamber. Removing metal in the throat area to facilitate chambering of odd-shaped slugs is not a good idea because that also weakens that area and allows more of the cartridge case to be unsupported.

I found through trial and error that only six factory bullets will chamber well and have the needed crimping cannelure, too. Speer's 200-grain JHP bullet is the best choice for self-defense because it can be driven at supersonic velocities without heavy recoil. Speer's 225-grain exposed lead nose JHP slug is suitable for self-defense or hunting deer-sized animals, and can be driven at mind-boggling velocities without too much recoil. Sierra's



Some jacketed bullets used in test.

240-grain JHP slug, designed for the .45 Long Colt, is an excellent all-around choice for hunting when driven at 1,300 feet per second or so. Speer's 260-grain JHP "monster slug" would be good for hunting large animals or plugging away at silhouette targets; it can be driven safely to nearly 1,300 fps although recoil becomes rather fierce at that speed. And Winchester's 185-grain Silvertip slug, available only by breaking down .45 ACP ammo, can be slung for self-defense at velocities of 1,500 fps or better.

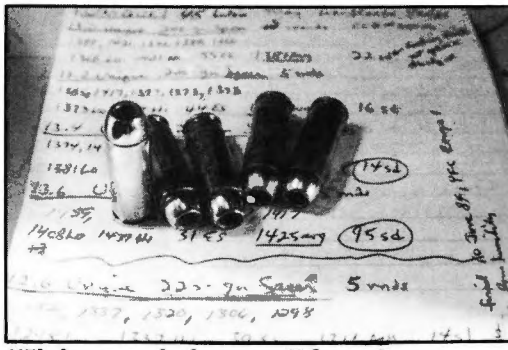
The Alberts Corporation swaged 230-grain lead flat point bullet will also feed well in the Grizzly and would make a devastating hunting slug at ranges up to 75 yards or so. Since the bullet material is soft it doesn't take rifling as well as a jacketed slug, and accuracy isn't as good as with the other bullets just mentioned. But for close-in work at over 1,400 fps, this bullet will mushroom reliably, not splatter into pieces (as will some of the JHP slugs), and it will retain 100 percent of its weight. It's not a good choice for self-defense because it shoots through small trees even after mushrooming, but for bear or deer this one is excellent. And yes, it will lead the barrel in a hurry; a seven-round magazine will severely foul the barrel, but firing one or two jacketed rounds after that will clear the lands and grooves quickly. Besides, if a hunter needs more than seven rounds maybe he shouldn't be after moving targets.

There's a whole world of development possible with such slugs as Lyman's cast 225-grain hard lead bullet. There shouldn't be any problem driving this at velocities over 1,500 fps, but penetration will then be about like that offered by factory hardball ammunition. These would probably be good moose rounds if pistol hunting for such large animals ever became legal or necessary for survival.

Hercules Blue Dot is the best powder to use with heavier bullets in the .45 Win Mag cartridge. It will drive the 200-grain "flying manhole cover" Speer JHP slug to 1,442 fps while still not exceeding handloading manual max load data, yet it will also propel the 260-grain Speer safely (by manual data) to a chronographed velocity of 1,254 fps. I went half a grain heavier with the 260-grain slug, with a charge of 16.5 grains of Blue Dot, and clocked the velocity at 1,284 fps with no signs of excessive pressure. Keep in mind, however, that this is an over-max load and I don't recommend you start out with it or even use it at all. What worked for me, in *my* Grizzly #043, may not be safe for *your* Grizzly.

The nicest feature of Blue Dot in this hefty cartridge is that felt recoil is reduced somewhat from that experienced with full-blown factory or Unique powder loadings. There's some unburned powder going out the barrel in the heavier charge loads, which gives muzzle flash visible a block away at night, but it's a pleasant powder to use. Factory loads offer a sharp recoil, as do my Unique loads, since faster powder lights instantly and all the kick is generated in a short time. Slower powders along the Blue Dot burning curve kick the same but it's spread out over a slightly longer period of time and will make the Grizzly easier to shoot for some folks.

Loading manuals list Winchester 296, Hodgdon H110 and Hercules 2400 as powders applicable to the .45 Win Mag cartridge used in Contender pistols. Since this



"Flying manhole cover" from Speer.

caliber nearly duplicates .44 Magnum ballistics and physical size, I tried some slow-burning powder loads. They aren't worth a damn.

A max charge (by the Lyman manual for 250-grain bullets) of 23.0 grains of 296 behind Speer's 260-grain JHP slug produced a blinding muzzle flash and velocities of 1,183 fps in one string and 1,124 in another. Felt recoil was very sharp and spread between

Continued on page 61

RELOADING 45 WM

Continued from page 38

rounds wasn't very tight (57 fps); standard deviation (a measure of how close to average velocity a bullet can be expected to travel) was from 16 to 23, compared with 14 to 21 in factory-loaded ammo and 8 (very good) standard deviation in the 260-grainer over 16.0 grains of Blue Dot. H110 and 2400 offered much the same performance and it isn't hard to conclude that slow-burning magnum powders aren't applicable in a six-inch barrel with semi-auto action.

All cartridges loaded for this test program had magnum pistol primers, incidentally (Winchester's #WLP primer, for standard or magnum loads). All loads were chronographed over Oehler Model 33 Chronotach skyscreens at five feet from the muzzle in 75 degree temperatures.

Because the factory loads appeared to have a look-alike Unique powder, I tried this next with excellent results. This is probably the best all-around powder to use if you're limited to one choice, although as mentioned felt recoil may be a bit heavier with faster powders.

Behind Speer's 200-grain JHP slug, which is a truly excellent expander, Hercules Unique is as diverse as you could wish for. A tiny 10.0-grain charge will offer 1,149 fps but have virtually no recoil (and it just barely functions the slide), while a 14.0-grain charge will sling the manhole cover at 1,448 fps with standard deviation of a mere 10 (and good accuracy!). The ideal load . . . one which doesn't recoil much but which would be devastating for self-defense work . . . is 12.5 grains of Unique. Recoil is light enough to get off rapid-fire shots and hit what you're aiming at every time.

Unique also functions well with the heavier bullets, driving the 225-grain Speer to 1,356 fps accurately and taking Sierra's 240-grain JHP to 1,293 fps with excellent accuracy also. Even the 260-grain Speer JHP slug responds well with Unique, but I list no loads for it because other powders will do a better job.



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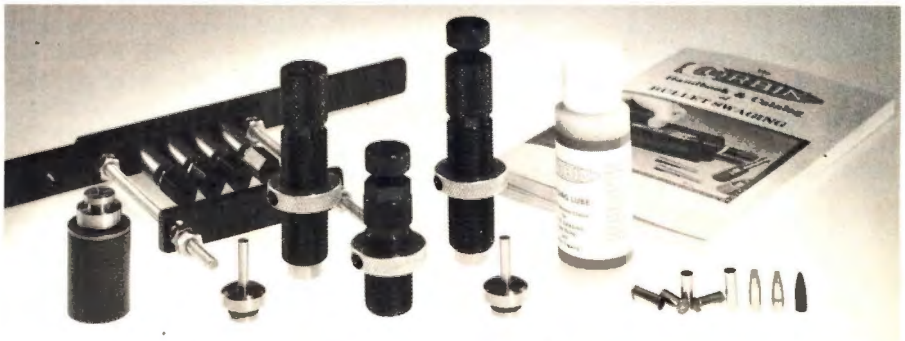
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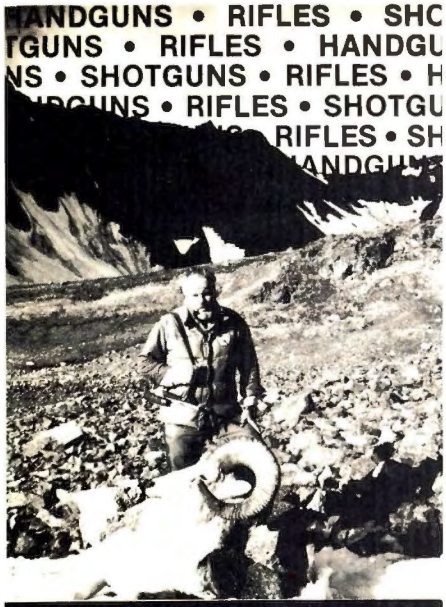
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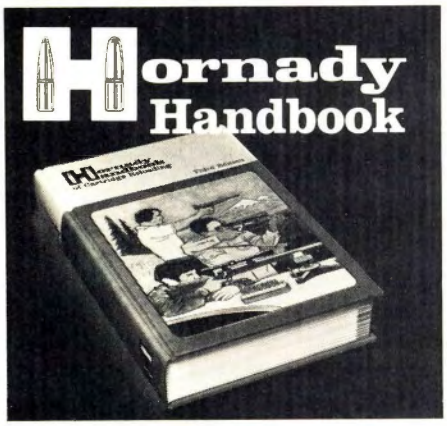
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Hodgdon's HS6 powder is a fast-burning spherical shotgun powder which often delivers good velocities in moderate to heavy handgun loads, so that was tried next with Speer's 200-grain JHP slug. There is no listed data for this powder in .45 Win Mag, so I winged it here by starting very low (as you should also do when working up to any of my max loads). Up to 15.0 grains of HS6 accuracy and recoil is pleasant, but above that to a maximum of 16.5 grains I tried, recoil is sharp and muzzle blast gets awesome. All in all, this powder doesn't work very well in .45 Win Mag, but in a pinch 15.0 grains at 1,242 fps is the best accuracy load with most pleasing recoil.

Hodgdon's HS7, a bit slower than HS6, worked well in lighter bullet loads. An overmax (by one grain) charge of 20.0 grains of HS7 behind the 200-grain Speer offered 1,504 fps with recoil still milder than that of factory ammo. At Hodgdon's recommended 19.0-grain load the Speer slug will hit an even 1,400 fps with good accuracy and fairly mild recoil, and would make a nice all-around self-defense loading.

With heavier bullets HS7 offered velocities slightly lower than Blue Dot-equivalent charges (recommended levels by loading manual data).

The last powder tried was that packed in each factory round. High-power rifle competition shooters call this "Mexican Match" shooting; the factory bullet is pulled and another substituted of about the same weight. I tried over a hundred Mexican Match reloads and determined that this would be an easy way for the reloader to go if he didn't wish to fiddle around working up loads over a chronograph.

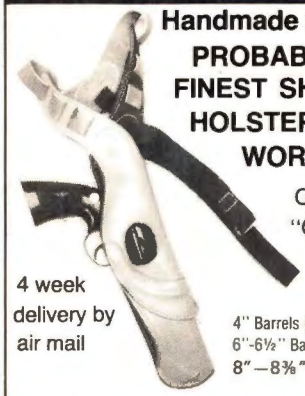
After pulling bullets I weighed each powder charge to get exactly the 14.0-grain weight of a factory round. Some broken-down rounds had as little as 13.6 grains while others had as much as 14.3 grains, an inherent problem with automated filling equipment as used in modern factories.

Substituting 200-grain Speer JHP slugs for the factory 230-grainers, I arrived at very consistent velocities of 1,424 fps using Olin powder. By weighing out an extra half-grain the velocity jumped to 1,467. In each case recoil was about like that with factory loads. The 225-grain Speer bullet, a wonderful all-around choice, clocked 1,393 fps with the factory charge of 14.0 grains of powder. Standard deviation was a mere 8, and a shooter could do much worse than simply replacing the hardball bullets with this slug and forgetting all about an involved reloading program.

With Sierra's 240-grainer I dropped back half a grain for safety (because the bullet is slightly heavier and slightly larger in diameter) and came up with 1,344 fps. This would be a nice hunting load suitable also for self-defense or silhouette shooting. At 12.5 grains of Olin powder (again to reflect heavier bullet weight) the 260-grain Speer clocked 1,239. Winchester's Silvertip hit 1,500 fps over a weighed charge of 15.0 grains of Olin powder, but muzzle flash was severe.

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gram received a medium roll crimp, both to promote bullet retention and to ensure proper powder burning. Factory bullets are asphalted into their cases, and thus will not suffer being driven back down into the case under stressful chambering forces; nor will asphalted bullets work out of their cases as uncrimped slugs of the handloaded variety might.

It's important to recognize that, within limitations, this auto pistol case does *not* headspace on the case mouth. Manuals will tell you otherwise, of course. The Lyman reloading manual, for example, states that overall case length must be maintained because the .45 Win. Mag. headspaces on the case mouth; in the next breath, the same page tells you that trim-to-length specs are 1.188", or a total of 10-thousandths of an inch shorter than factory length specs call for. I measured many factory cases before they were fired, and some of them were as short as 1.183", or a grand total of 15-thousandths of an inch shorter! It is difficult to believe that such a short case would headspace properly, if indeed this cartridge spaces on the case mouth.

No attempt was made to control overall loaded length, since the crimping cannelure on the recommeded bullets determines this measurement. I experienced only one failure to chamber in over 600 handloaded rounds, and that was traced to a burr on the case mouth (a result of improper case preparation on my part). It is clear that crimping the .45 Win. Mag. case mouth is the *only* way to handload this cartridge so the bullets stay where they are supposed to, without being driven back down into the case with attendant sky-high pressure specs.

The Alberts swaged bullet also received a crimp, right into the bullet metal because there's no crimping cannelure. The Alberts slug was seated to arrive at an overall length of 1.530" to 1.540".

The loads detailed in accompanying tables show what worked for *me*.

When working up loads based on my findings start one or even two grains lower than maximum charges. Unique loads for 200-grain bullets over 13.2 grains are not shown, but I experienced no signs of excessive pressure up to 14.0 grains. That does not make this a safe load in all guns, however.

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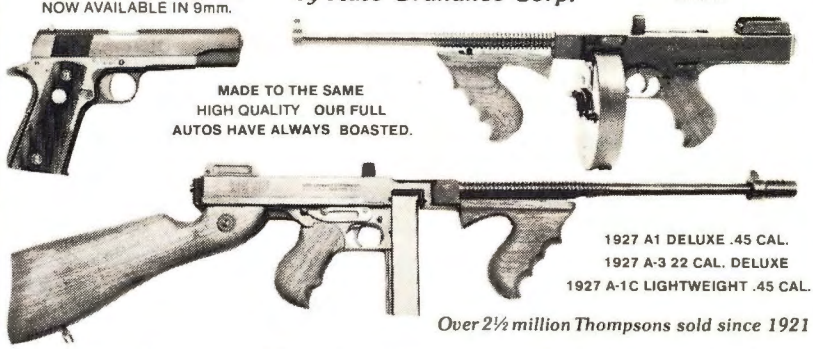
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