BY JOHN TAFFIN

TAFFIN TESTS

the .45 WinMag

It was an idea that had to come to fruition. The 1899 .38 Special was lengthened to the .357 Magnum in 1935, the 1908 .44 Special was lengthened to the .44 magnum in 1955, and they became two of the most popular sixgun combinations available.

What about the semi-autos? The .45 ACP had been around since well before World War I, but no one lengthened the .45 ACP until Olin was convinced to stretch the legendary .45 Auto cartridge to the .45 Winchester Magnum in 1979 for use in the Wildey pistol.

And while the .357 and .44 Magnums have been tremendous successes, the .45 Win. Mag. is still offered only in one ammunition style, namely the 230 grain hardball .45 ACP bullet. The reason is quite simple. The promised semi-automatics chambered for the .45 Winchester Magnum never really materialized.

The first gun was to be the Wildey which has been an on-again, off-again proposition for years.

But the .45 Win. Mag. did find a home in the Thompson/Center Contender and my shooting buddy swears by his Super 14 Contender .45 WM as a superbly accurate handgun. Now the Win. Mag. has found two permanent homes, semi-auto style, in the Grizzly from L.A.R. and the AutoMag IV from iAi.

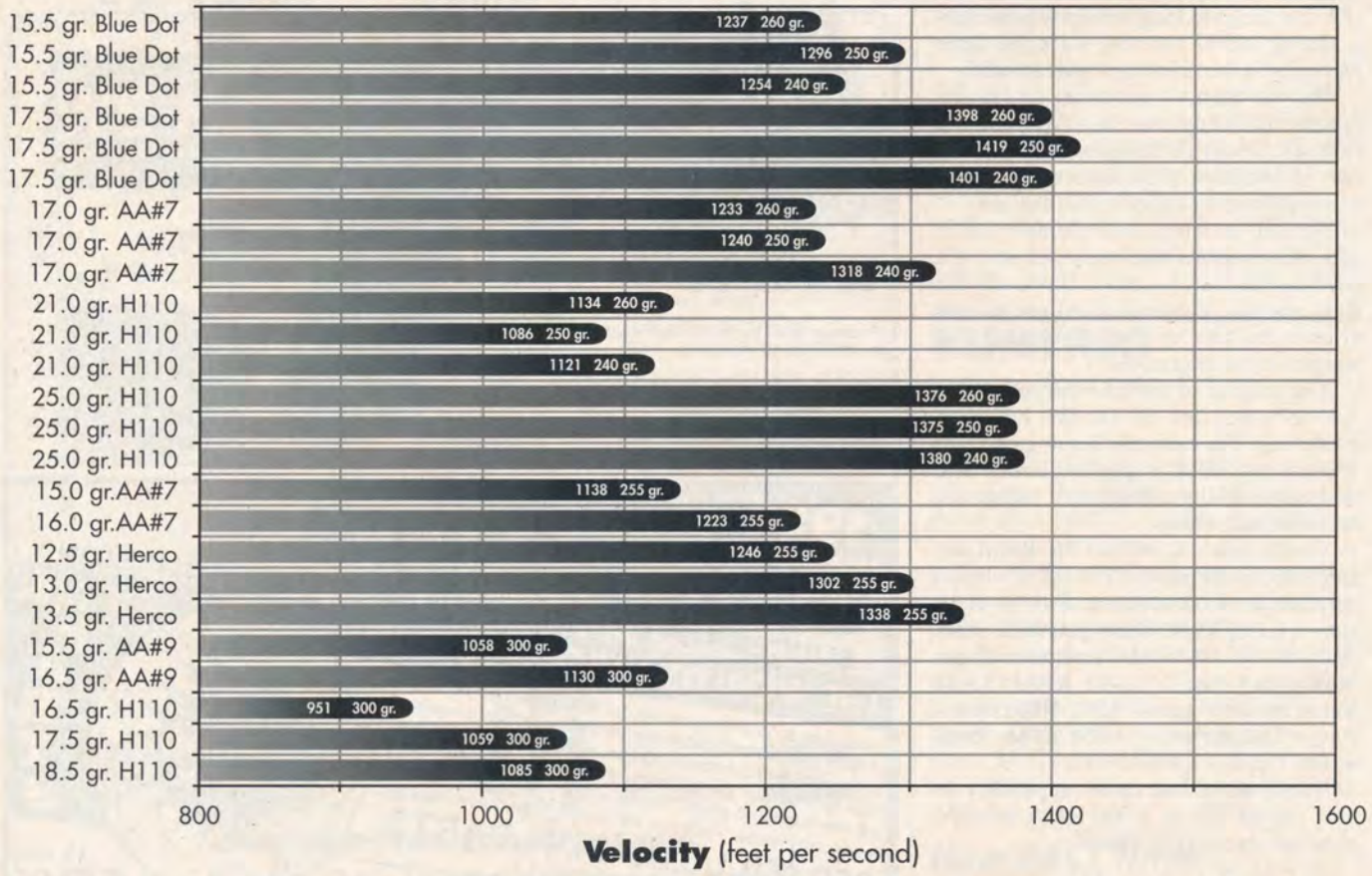
The .45 ACP has been magnumized with style!

It is impossible to look at the cartridge without first looking at its most prevalent chambering, the Grizzly. The L.A.R. Grizzly looks much like a Government Model on steroids and to this shooter was an intimidating handgun, at least at first.

I've shot 'em all. All the big ones from every make and style of .44 Magnum through the .454 Casull and the .475 and .500 Linebaughs. All of these guns generate considerable recoil but none put me on the defensive as did the Grizzly .45 Win.Mag.

The problem is not recoil. The problem is grip shape. To allow the Government Model grip frame shape to accommodate magnum-style cartridges it must be made much wider from front to back

High Performance Favorite Loads For The .45 Win Mag



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and this does not mate well with short stubby fingers.

I felt that I did not really have a secure hold on the Grizzly as I began to test-fire the .45 Magnum. I actually felt that I would not be able to hold onto the big .45. Familiarity did not breed contempt in this case as the more I fired the Grizzly the better it felt, and I now don't even notice the grip girth.

The .45 Win. Mag. operates and strips like a Government Model and conversion kits are available in 10mm and the bottle-necked .357/.45 WM. L.A.R also offers a compensator that replaces the standard bushing and definitely reduces felt recoil. (For further information on The Grizzly contact L.A.R, 4133 West Farm Rd., Dept AH, West Jordan, UT 84084.)



The .45 Winchester Magnum cartridge is .3" longer than the standard .45 ACP cartridge and theoretically at least can be reloaded with .45 ACP dies. I use an RCBS .45 WM four die set that includes a taper crimp die which I consider mandatory for reloading the .45 WM or any heavy recoiling semi-automatic cartridge.

I say I use the RCBS four die set, but it is not quite so simple. Actually these four dies plus two others are needed to successfully load for the .45 WM.

The .45 WM brass takes a considerable beating when fired in the Grizzly. Ejected empties come flying out, leaving brass skid marks across the top of the slide, and unless caught with some type of brass catcher, wind up 55 to 60 feet behind the shooter. When retrieved, the brass is almost hopelessly out of round. So much so, at least, that it will not enter the .45 WM sizing die.

To reclaim the brass, I first use a NexPander tool (available from NEI) that is an extremely valuable addition to any reloading bench. The NexPander is a cylinder approximately three inches long by .900" in diameter with a tapered pin on each end. One tapers from approximately .500" to .350" and the other about .350" to .200".

It is used, as its name claims, to expand necks of brass cartridges by simply tapping the bottom of the brass on the bench as the tapered pin is entered in the mouth of the brass. It is also invaluable for "rounding out" bent and misshapen cartridge mouths.

The mouths of .45 WM brass are first "nexpanded" and then the cases are ready for standard handling. Almost. The mouths are still too crooked to enter the .45 WM sizing die, so all brass is then run through a .45 Colt carbide sizing die.

After these first two steps, then the .45 WM brass is ready to be run through the four RCBS dies to result in a loaded .45 Win. Mag. round.

The .45 Win. Mag. is definitely a reloader's cartridge as the factory round, the 230 grain roundnose FMJ, or hardball, is good only for... for... Hmmm? I really can't think of anything.

Muzzle velocity of the factory Winchester round clocked 1,392 fps from the six-inch barrelled Grizzly and compares with the Federal 240 gr. JHP .44 Magnum round that goes 1,465 fps from a 7.5" Ruger Bisley and 1,380 fps from the 5.5" inch Ruger Redhawk.

I consider the factory round as maximum. Any attempt on my part to exceed this velocity with Sierra 240, Hornady 250, or Speer 260 grain jacketed bullets resulted in much higher pressures as read on the flattened primers. I would definitely consider 1,400 fps as absolute maximum with this weight range bullet in the .45 Winchester Magnum.

Powders used in reloading the .45 Win. Mag. are Hercules' Blue Dot and Herco, Accurate Arm's AA#7 and AA#9, and Hodgdon's H110. The above mentioned Sierra 240, Hornady 250, and the Speer 260 JHP's all work well in the .45 WM. All loads are assembled in Winchester brass with CCI #350 Magnum Primers.

Favorite loads with Sierra 240 gr. JHP are 15.5, 16.5, and 17.5 grains of Blue Dot for muzzle velocities of 1,254, 1,326, and 1,401 fps; 17.0 grains of AA#7 (1,318 fps); 13.0 and 13.5 grains of Herco (1,258 and 1,285 fps respectively); and 25.0 grains of H110 for a maximum load at 1,380 fps.

Going up the weight scale to the 250 gr. Hornady JHP, most accurate and most favored loads are 16.5 and 17.5 grains of Blue Dot for 1,331 and 1,414 fps, and 25.0 grains of H110 for 1,375 fps.

Milder loadings that show excellent accuracy with the 250 gr. Hornady in are 17.5 grains of AA#9 for 1,041 fps and 21.0 and 22.0 grains of H110 for 1,086 and 1,169 fps.

Speer's 260 gr. is the heaviest jacketed bullet available for use in the .45 Win. Mag. and proved to be the most accurate jacketed bullet in my test L.A.R. Grizzly. Best loads turn out to be 15.5 and 16.5 grains of Blue Dot for 1,237 and 1,304 fps, 16.0 and 17.0 grains of AA#7 (1,156 and 1,233 fps respectively), 12.5 grains of Herco for 1,185 fps and again 25.0 grains of H110 for 1,376 fps.

Actually 25.0 grains of H110 proved to be an excellent load for all three jacketed bullets, Sierra's 240, Hornady's 250, and Speer's 260. Again consider this a maximum load.

Blue Dot is an excellent powder for use in the .45 Win. Mag.

Any of these three bullets turn the .45 WM into an excellent hunting handgun or silhouette pistol. Of course the retrieving of brass becomes a real problem when using the .45 Magnum in silhouettes. And where the hot, fired and extracted brass winds up could make one very unpopular with fellow shooters.

Switching to cast bullets for the .45 Win. Mag., I went with Bull-X's (102 S.Main St., Dept AH, Farmer City, IL 61842) 255 gr. SWC .45 Colt bullet. These bullets proved to be highly satisfactory in the .45 WM and favorite loads turned out to be 18.5 grains of AA#9 at 1,215 fps, 12.5 grains of Herco for 1,246 fps, and 22.0 and 23.0 grains of H110 for 1,275 and 1,342 fps respectively.

These loads would work fine for hunting medium-sized game at reasonable ranges and puts the .45 WinMag right alongside a heavy loaded Ruger .45 Colt. BRP bullets are assembled with 16.5 grains of AA#9 at 1130 fps, and 17.5 and 18.5 grains of H110 for 1085 and 1130 fps muzzle velocities. All of these are the equivalent of the loads that I use with the same bullet in the .45 Colt for use in the Ruger Bisley and Blackhawk and the Freedom Arms .454 Casull and they are perfect close-range hunting loads and excellent long-range fun-shooting loads out to 800 yards. When shot over dusty ground, it takes a few seconds but they do raise a lot of dust when they hit.

The .45 WinMag is actually quite a good cartridge and definitely in the true Magnum class. With a longer barrel and better sights, the Grizzly would do fine as a long range silhouette pistol. While definitely too large to be carried as a defensive or law enforcement weapon, it would make a fine hunting pistol when properly handloaded. I am anxious to see how the .45 WinMag AutoMag IV feels and handles.