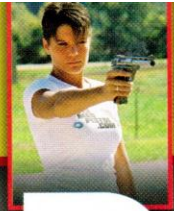


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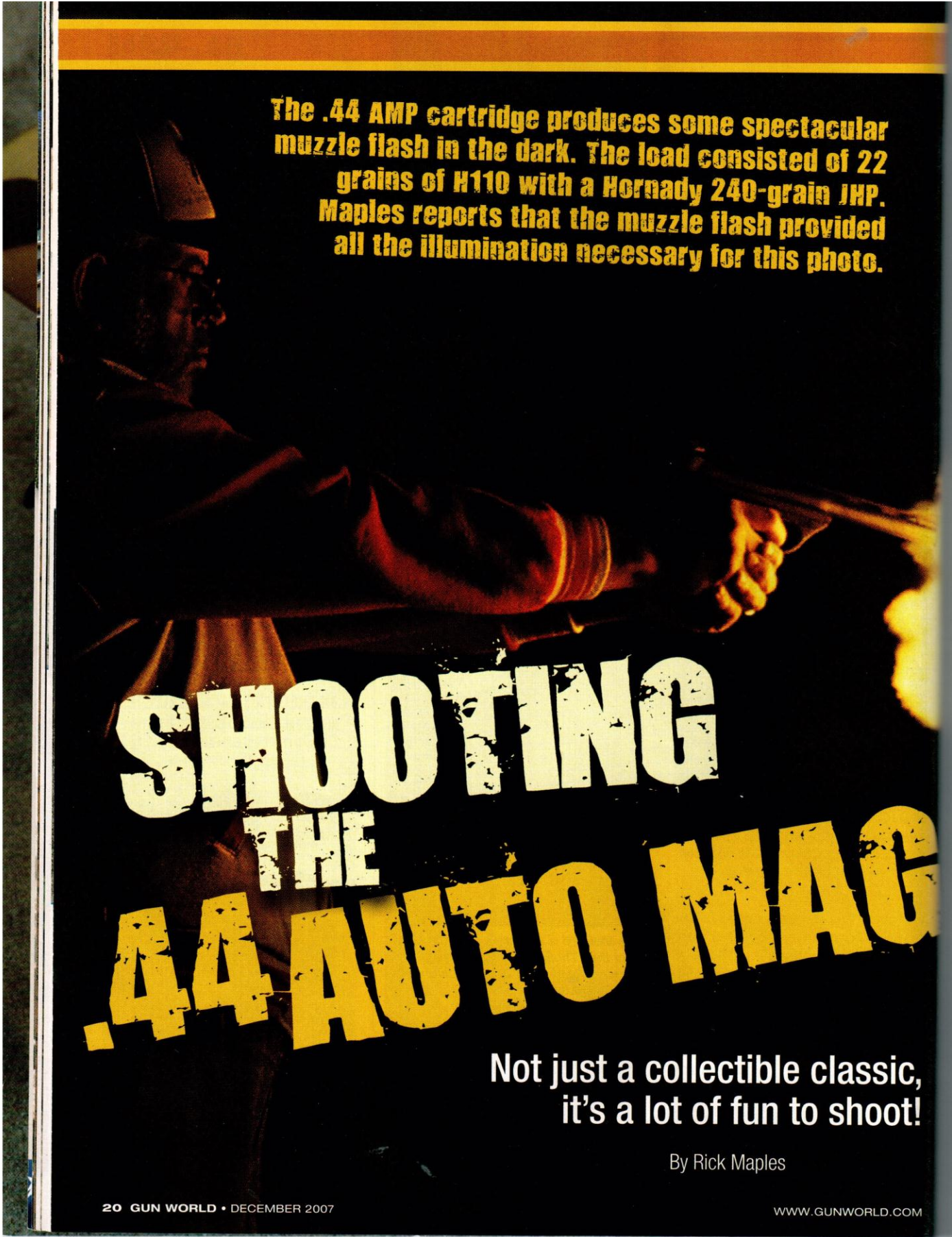
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The .44 AMP cartridge produces some spectacular muzzle flash in the dark. The load consisted of 22 grains of H110 with a Hornady 240-grain JHP. Maples reports that the muzzle flash provided all the illumination necessary for this photo.

SHOOTING THE .44 AUTO MAG

Not just a collectible classic,
it's a lot of fun to shoot!

By Rick Maples



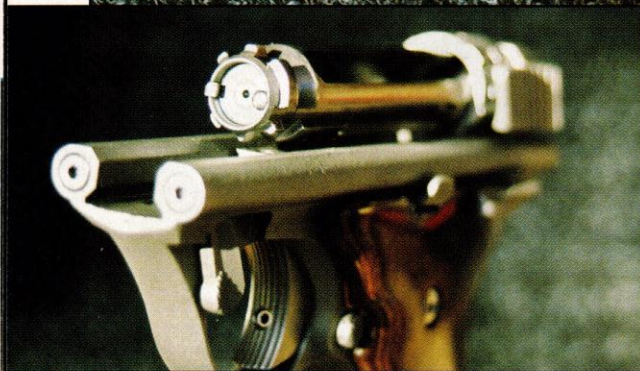
Auto Mags come in an astounding number of variants. The 6.5-inch-barreled pistol (top) is the most common, while the 4.5-incher below it is very rare. Both have non-standard stocks, the top gun wearing a laminated walnut stock, the bottom one a walnut-maple laminate.



The .44 Auto Mag is indeed a classic. It was ahead of its time, being the first all-stainless, semi-auto magnum production handgun. One could also have an extra barrel in a different caliber and just switch barrels and ammo and use the same bolt, magazine, etc. for both calibers. This was because the .41 and .357 calibers used the .44 AMP case as their basis, simply necked-down to the smaller caliber. Plus, it was just plain sexy-looking and powerful. It has associations with two well-known movie stars: Clint Eastwood ("Sudden Impact", 1982) and Burt Reynolds ("Malone", 1987). It also held the title for a period of "world's most

The dramatic looks of the Auto Mag caused it to appear in a number of films, including "Malone", starring Burt Reynolds in 1987.

AUTO MAG



Removing the barrel is effected by retracting the bolt and rotating the barrel latch lever. This permits one to inspect the bolt and the critical locking lugs.

powerful handgun," replacing Dirty Harry's Smith & Wesson Model 29 .44 Magnum in the movie "Sudden Impact" and laying claim to the title in the real world by virtue of its potent ballistics.

In 1971, Harry Sanford (inventor of the AutoMag, along with designer Max Gera) got his pistol into production. Over the next 11 years of production, the .44 Auto Mag would have its manufacturer's name changed seven times (see sidebar) and a total production of less than 9,500 pistols.

As noted, the Auto Mag was offered in three calibers. The original .44 AMP (Auto Mag Pistol) was the most common and popular. It was also offered chambered for the .357 AMP and .41 JMP (Jurras Magnum Pistol). The pistols were offered in an assortment of barrel



According to Maples, an authority on these pistols, one can field-strip an Auto Mag in about the same time it takes to strip a 1911.



Auto Mags are fun to shoot, as the grin on the author's model, Samele, shows. Maples recommends wearing your holster during practice. According to Maples, Samele shoots the Auto Mag as well as most men.

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AUTO MAG AT A GLANCE

SPECIFICATIONS

Calibers: .44 AMP, .41 JMP, .357 AMP

Weight: 3.6 pounds (6.5-inch barrel)

Construction: Stainless Steel

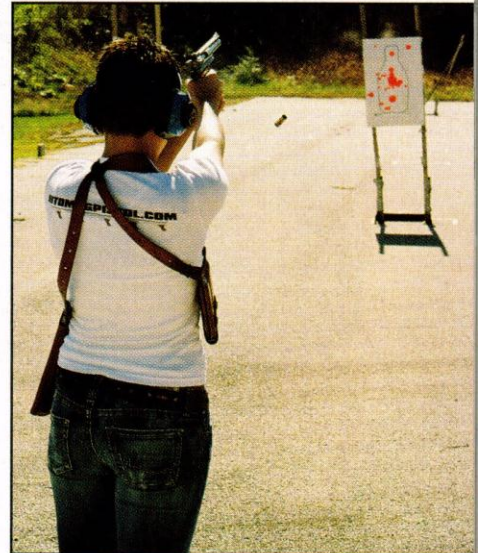
Grips: Black Plastic or Custom Wood

Barrel length: 6.5 inches
vent rib (standard)

Magazine Capacity: Seven rounds

Years of production: 1971-1982

Quantity Produced: Less than 9,500



The weight and semi-automatic operation help tame recoil. Muzzle rise is obvious, but not uncontrollable, as Samele engages a stylized silhouette.

lengths, with 6.5 inches being the most common, but it was also offered with 4.5-inch barrels (very rare), as well as lengths of 8.5, 10.5, 12.5, 14.5 and 16.5, all of which were also comparatively rare. Stocks were commonly black plastic, but one could order the Jurras laminated wooden grips in various exotic woods or fabricated from Micarta.

The fact that Auto Mags were made by a succession of different manufacturers in three different calibers, seven different barrel lengths and with a variety of stocks makes Auto Mag pistols a fascinating field for the collector, especially for so short-lived a handgun. Given that the total produced was less than 9,500 pistols, many of these variants are very rare.

AUTO MAG



Maples states that he has always had difficulty aiming with both eyes open, but obviously that is not a problem for Samele. One-handed shooting is more likely to cause malfunctions in these big pistols.

So, you have one of these classic, sexy collectables, now what do you do with it? Well, you take it out and shoot it! The Auto Mag was made for hunting game, but that doesn't mean you can't take it out and have fun plinking, engaging paper targets, cans or whatever—all are fun with the .44 Auto Mag! Despite its power, it is a lot of fun to shoot. A

weight of 3.6 pounds (for the 6.5-inch version in .44 AMP) means that it's a little on the heavy side, but this weight, coupled with the Auto Mag's semi-auto operation, makes recoil surprisingly mild. Also, the fact that it is a semi-auto means that, when a round is fired, all the gases will go out the barrel, unlike a revolver, which has leakage

between the barrel and cylinder. This eliminates side-spitting, which can be especially annoying with magnum revolvers. That all the burning powder gases emerge from the muzzle makes for a crowd-pleasing flame show. My favorite load is a 240-grain bullet with 22.0 grains of H110. This will throw the bullet about 1,250 fps.

However, before you start having fun with your .44 Auto Mag, here are some things you should look for: First you need to inspect your pistol. Step one—and most important—is to be sure the gun is not



In a side view of the muzzle rise as Samele shoots the Auto Mag, the ejected case can be seen just above her shoulder. In actual shooting, Samele is wearing eye and ear protection. In the posed shots she is not.

loaded. With the bolt locked in the rear position, move the barrel latch downward. The barrel will then slide forward and off the frame. Now you are able to inspect the locking lugs in the barrel and on the bolt. Be sure there are no lugs chipped, cracked or missing. This is the same type of rotary-bolt setup the AR-15 has. Next, let the bolt forward. Now you can remove the two recoil rods and springs. Be sure the rods go back in the same side they came out of, and be sure there is no lubrication on the threads. Oil on the recoil rod threads will allow the

AUTO MAG

MANUFACTURERS AND VARIATIONS

Auto Mag Corp.: (AMC)

Known as Pasadena Model

Trust Deed Estates: (TDE)

North Hollywood Model (First Location)

El Monte (Second Location)

Variations: High Standard Model

Lee Jurras Model

Trust Deed Estates/Ordnance Mfg. Corp. (TDE/OMC)

Known as "B" Series

Arcadia Machine Tool (AMT)

Known as "C" series

Last production of the AutoMag.

In addition Galena Industries of Sturgis SD assembled somewhat fewer than 300 "Harry Sanford Commemorative" Auto Mags from previously manufactured parts in 1999-2000.

Model Numbers:

Model 180 (44 AutoMag) and

160 (357 AutoMag)

TDC/OMC and AMT changed

Model 180 to 280

And Model 160 to 260

Lee Jurras Custom Model were:

100, 200, 300, 400, 500 and 600.

Serial Numbers:

Due to some lost records, all serial number ranges are to be used as a guideline only:

Pasadena A0001-A3399

North Hollywood A3400-A5015

El Monte A5016-A8300

High Standard: 132 AutoMags marked

High Standard with "H" in serial

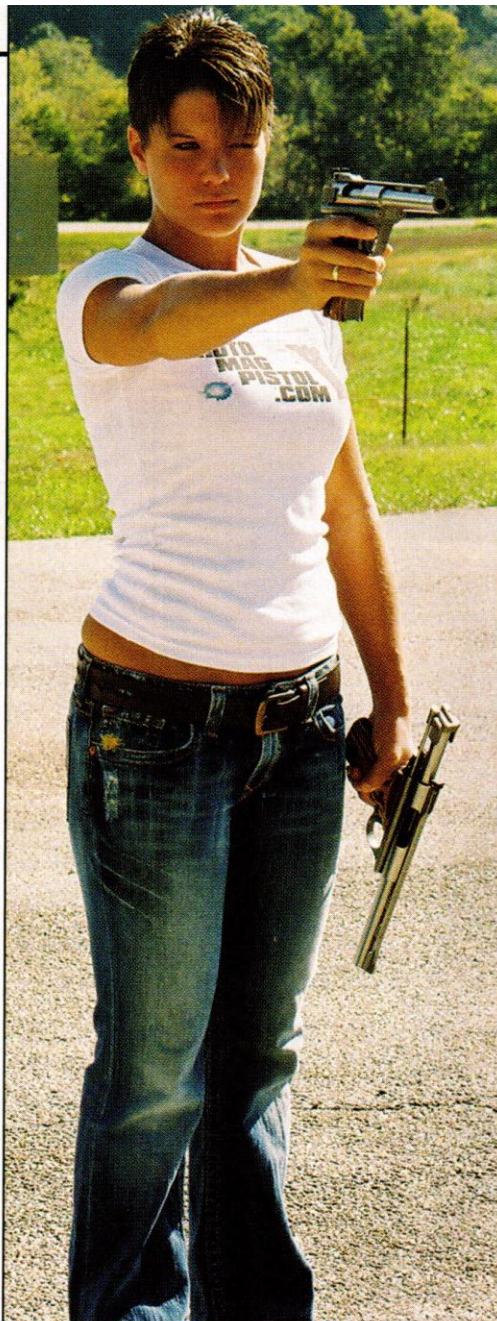
number and 368 with A in

serial number.

Lee Jurras: All Lee Jurras production and custom AutoMags were marked with a Lion Head Logo on the barrel.

Some with LEJ in serial number.

WARNING: Any loads mentioned in this are for the particular guns mentioned in this article and not others. If you are not qualified to disassemble a firearm, seek a professional gunsmith.



Practicing using two of these 3.6-pound pistols helps one to get the arms in shape, Maples observes.

recoil rods to come loose under fire, and this will lead to a broken bolt. Keep checking to make sure the recoil rods are staying tight after every three or four magazines fired until you are confident they are not coming loose.

You are now in a position to remove your bolt. Remove the bolt rotation pin, pull the bolt rearward and let the cocking piece rotate to

the left, and it will come off. Check the ejector to see if it moves freely and is flush with the rim of the bolt face.

The only thing left is removal of the firing pin and spring. Do not get any oil on the firing pin or spring. The firing pin moves by inertia, and oil may slow it down to the point where it will not move far enough when required to do so. Inspect the lugs at the rear of the bolt for cracks. If everything is acceptable, just reverse the procedure to put the pistol back together. If you find anything questionable about your Auto Mag, always consult a qualified gunsmith or an Auto Mag Specialist. If at any time you suspect any of the Auto Mag springs are weak, there are quality aftermarket springs available.

Ammo is currently being made, and so is the brass, if you want to roll your own. Several current reloading manuals, among them those from Hornady, Hodgdon and Sierra, contain .44 Auto Mag reloading data.

Get used to the 3.6-pound Auto Mag. If you are fortunate enough to have two, try some two-gun drills: Have one in each hand and aim one, aim them both. Practice inserting and removal of magazine and pulling the bolt back. Become familiar with your new best friend. Of course these exercises can apply to any (especially heavy) handguns. With the .44 Auto Mag, one must use a firm one-handed (not recommended) or two-handed grip. The Auto Mag needs something solid to recoil against or jams may occur. In

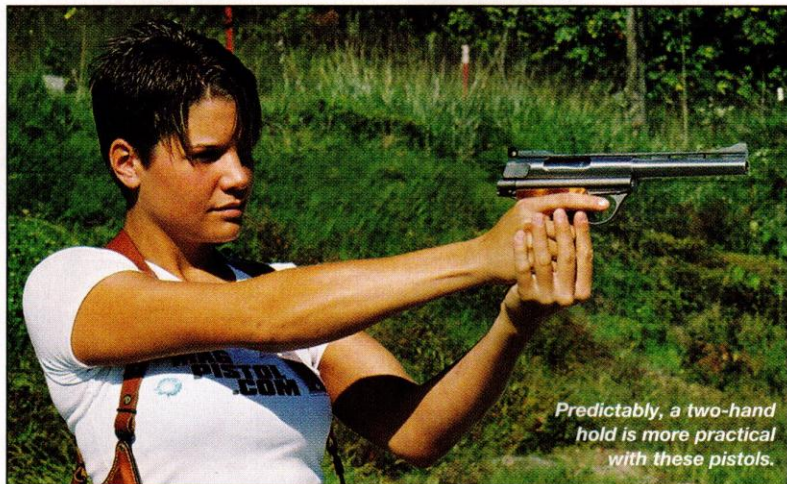
the course of the photo shoot for this article my model Samele fired a 50-round box and had no jams or malfunctions of any kind except one ejected round went down the front of her shirt!

So now your Auto Mag has been inspected, you have ammo, and you're ready to have some fun. Pick a safe place to shoot and have your shooting glasses and ear protection. Don't worry too much

about being accurate and hitting the bull's-eye. Remember, you're shooting to have fun—to experience the recoil, hear the bang, smell the powder and see the flame. Getting accurate will come later with practice.

Although the magazine capacity is seven rounds, I prefer to load with only five because those last two rounds can be difficult to get in the magazine. Insert the magazine, pull the bolt back and let the bolt forward, with the safety engaged until you are ready to shoot. Do not fear the recoil. As I said earlier, the weight and semi-automatic action will absorb a lot of the recoil, so you don't have to. I feel the .44 Auto Mag is more comfortable to shoot than Dirty Harry's Smith & Wesson .44 Magnum.

So have fun and be safe shooting that collectable .44 Auto Mag and don't forget to take some pictures! ©



Predictably, a two-hand hold is more practical with these pistols.

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