

THE AUTO MAG PISTOL

An old thumb buster barks again

By SAM PAREDES



World class marksman Mike Dalton enjoys a round with the Auto Mag.

Exposure on television and the silver screen can have an escalating effect on the popularity of any product, especially when it is used or endorsed by very popular personalities. A good example of this was the recent run on the candy known as "Reese's Pieces." After their use in the tremendously successful movie, "E.T.," it was a rare occasion when they could be found on store shelves.

The lack of this type of exposure can also have a definite effect. Case in point: the single action revolver was in it's second heyday just a few short years ago when prime time T.V. was filled with the likes of "Bonanza", "Gunsmoke," and "The Rifleman." John Wayne's films also served to glamorize the thumbbuster. The absence of such fare is seen by many as the main culprit for the dramatic drop in sales of the old "Peacemaker."

The most recent example of "celebrity influence" is the "Dirty Harry" phenomenon. Clint Eastwood's use of a .44 Magnum Smith and Wesson

(model 29) glamorized, as Inspector Harry Callahan would say through clenched teeth, "the most power handgun in the world . . ."

The subsequent effect on the demand for the Smith and Wesson Model 29 caused a five year backlog on orders of that particular revolver. Of course, the concept of supply and demand was fully realized as we saw prices skyrocket to eight hundred dollars (suggested retail was in the \$350 to \$400 range).

If history repeats itself, Clint Eastwood's latest episode, "Sudden Impact," will cause an enormous demand for Dirty Harry's newest hand cannon — the .44 Auto Mag Pistol (AMP). Unfortunately, there is a catch — it is no longer in production.

Harry Sanford, of AMT Hardballer, Back-up, and now Lightning fame, originally designed the AMP in 1971. As he puts it, "I thought there was a need for a magnum auto, so I made one."

Later in 1971, Harry sold the design

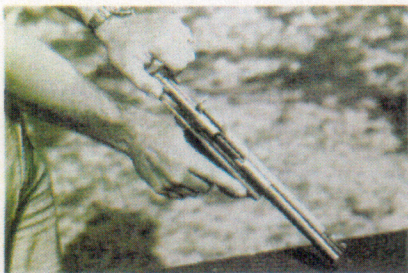
to a partnership in Pasadena, California, called the Auto Mag Corporation. This company manufactured and sold about two thousand handguns before succumbing to financial problems in 1972. Sanford then purchased the rights and all the remaining unassembled parts from the Bankruptcy Court.

Between 1972 and 1975, Sanford produced another six thousand handguns and sold them mainly to High Standard and Lee Jurras of Arizona. Sanford says that he quit producing because "no money was ever made on the gun. With every gun ever shipped, it was like a \$1,000 bill went out with it."

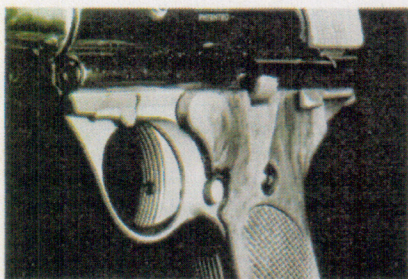
The unfortunate result of this chain of events is that very few shooters will ever get to see or fire one of these supremely innovative weapons.

The Auto Mag is constructed almost entirely of high quality stainless steel. The action consists of a rotating bolt

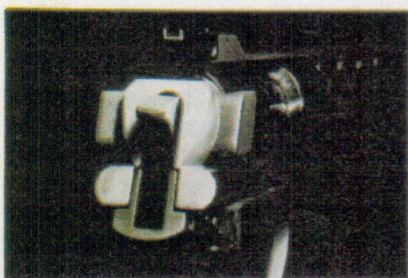
continued



Only cocking handle and rotating bolt cycle during recoil.



Bead blasted frame contrasts nicely with polished receiver and barrel.



Two rods dampened by twin springs return bolt into battery after recoil cycle.

much like the the ones used in the Colt AR-15, Ruger Mini-14, and M1 Carbine. This super strong system has the benefit of very light felt recoil. The rotating bolt, dampened by twin springs, serves to stretch the recoil cycle of the Auto Mag over a long curve. This is a more efficient system in reducing felt recoil over the semi-auto pistol of straight blow-back design. It is also more pleasurable to shoot than the magnum revolver which has no mechanical device that reduces felt recoil other than the overall weight of the gun.

It is easy to see why Clint Eastwood chose this mini-bazooka for his Dirty Harry role. The futuristic appearance of the Auto Mag gives it an almost magnetic quality. The pistol has a "laser gun" look with its dramatic ventilated rib, highly polished barrel and bolt housing, — handsomely contrasted by a bead blasted sighting surface and grip frame.

The kiss of death for the Auto Mag Pistol was probably the lack of factory loaded ammunition. The limited amount of ammo imported from Mexico (Cartuchos Deportivos y Munitiones) proved to be erratic in the AMP. Handloading is the order of the day for the .44 Auto Mag. Cases have to be developed from 30.06 or .308 brass. Cutting, trimming, sizing and loading the AMP cartridge is a time consuming proposition.

Overzealous handloaders gave the AMP somewhat of a bum rap. As Harry Sanford puts it, "Some of these guys developed loads that would be dangerous in a rifle action. Consequently, several guns were damaged or destroyed."

Those handloaders who maintained loads within the vicinity of the standard .44 Remington Magnum pressures (36,000 c.u.p.) and velocities (1200 to 1400 f.p.s.) found the AMP to be extremely accurate. Sub 2 inch groups at 100 yards were not uncommon.

During the formative days of the

metallic silhouette game, the AMP quickly rose to the forefront of popularity. Many of the early record scores were fired with the Auto Mag, king of the big bores in those days. It continued to rule supreme until the more accurate, rifle caliber pistols entered the scene.

Although many AMP owners have retired their increasingly popular investments, it is not unusual to see them at firing ranges or in the field, particularly in California and Arizona.

Even though production has long since ceased, parts for the Auto Mag are still available on a limited basis. To find them, unfortunately, one must continually scour the pages of Shotgun News. For those AMP owners who long for factory loaded ammunition, there are several possibilities. First, .44 AMP ammo manufactured by CDM, is available through Federal Ordnance. Their phone number is (800) 423-4552. Secondly, Norma Manufactures .44 AMP ammo in limited runs and it is available for about \$30 a box. Finally, a limited number of .45 Winchester Magnum barrels for the Auto Mag were developed and made available through J&G Sales in Arizona, (602) 445-9659. Contact these distributors for stock and availability.

Those wanting to acquire an Auto Mag pistol will have difficulty in getting AMP owners to part with their valuable possessions — it seems that this beautiful handgun was a little ahead of its time.

Clint Eastwood's popularization of the AMP, will most assuredly have a "Sudden Impact" on the price of those precious few guns that do become available. Harry Sanford tells us that Auto Mags will probably never again be manufactured — unless, that is, someone wishes to order a minimum of ten thousand units at a cost of around \$2,000 each!

Any takers?

