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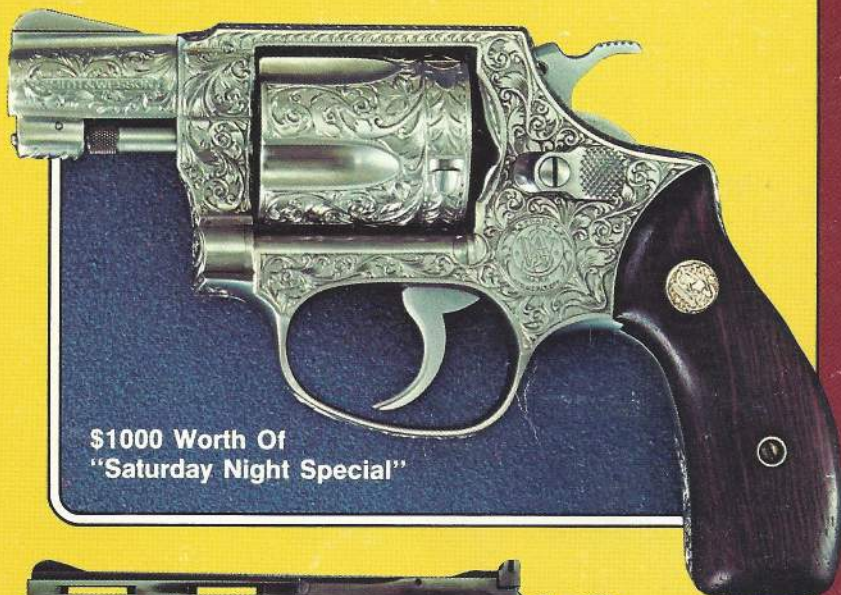
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Handgun hunting is growing rapidly. This L.E. Jarras .357 Auto Mag was 2½ years in the making. Engraving is by "Vasco." The ivory grips were done by David Travallion. Eagle is by Horacio Avenido. Price: \$13,000.

Through the 2X scope, the antelope's head looked as big as a 30-gallon drum. The crosshairs rested solidly on a point just below the ear. A 140-grain bullet from my .357 Herrett placed at that point would drop the buck in his tracks. I started to tighten on the trigger of the Contender, then quickly released the pressure. Now was the time to think the situation over. Once that excellent two-pound trigger on my Contender released, there would be no pulling the bullet back.

My Contender was sighted to place a 140-grain bullet from the .357 Herrett, two inches high at 100 yards. Exhaustive range tests had proved that the pistol-cartridge combination would group five shots in a 2¾-inch circle time after time—from a bench rest. Now things were different. My buck was an estimated 125 yards away, a strong crosswind was blowing and the evening light, thanks to a bank of clouds, was none too good. My pistol was solid on the makeshift rest consisting of my Stetson laid on a spindly sage, but my target was a tough one. The buck antelope, aware of my presence, hadn't moved for over fifteen minutes and only his head was showing above the rise of the ground 25 yards in front of me.

To drop that buck with one shot,

*If You're The Kind Of
Man Who's Looking For
A Hunting Challenge,
Look To The Handgun—
It's Got It All.*

• Bob Milek •

I'd have to put the bullet in an area no larger than three inches in diameter. An inch more in any direction could result in a wounded buck—bad trouble this late in the day. Could I do it? I spent five more minutes considering every angle, then centered the crosshair on a point below the buck's ear and squeezed the trigger.

I lost the target from view when the big pistol recoiled, but there was no doubt about the shot. I'd heard the bullet hit home and the buck was nowhere to be seen. I reloaded quickly, then waited a couple of minutes to make sure the buck didn't reappear. Once on my feet, I could see that a second shot wouldn't be needed. The antelope was on the ground, his legs folded under him—a sure sign that he'd dropped in his tracks. After many long hours at the range and several hundred rounds fired in practice, I'd bagged a very respectable pronghorn

with a single shot. I had a big investment in that buck—in time and ammo—but he was well worth it.

Taking big game animals with a pistol is, I believe, the ultimate challenge for the modern handgunner. Not because the target is a tough one—there's a lot more vital area on a deer than on a prairie dog or chuck—but because the size and tenacity of the quarry poses considerable challenge to the hunter—both as it relates to his equipment and to his hunting prowess.

The challenge to the equipment is in itself a big one. Consider the most powerful handgun cartridges on the market today—the .30 and .357 Herretts, the .357 and .44 Auto Mags and the .44 Magnum. They're all big and powerful as handgun cartridges go—head and shoulders above all the rest. But, they're all second to a rifle cartridge that many rifleman feel lacks the necessary power for big game hunting—the old .30-30. Realizing this, the handgunner must put things into perspective. Obviously, you're going to have to keep the shooting ranges short, no longer than that considered maximum for the .30-30; preferably much shorter.

Then there's that problem of bullets. Rifle shooters have a big variety to choose from, and nearly every one is designed for hunting. Not so for the

HANDGUNNING FOR BIG GAME



"Position" practice is important for the shooter who wants success, not failure. Whether it's standing, sitting or using a rest, it's important to know which positions you're effective from before you start.



Many long hours and a lot of components go into developing loads for big game hunting. Here, the Author checks 100-yard groups he fired with his .357 Herrett Contender. These were fired in the early stage of load development and each target was fired with a different load.

HANDGUN BIG GAME

der ideal conditions—a rock-solid rest, good light, little or no wind and good position of my quarry so that a vital area is properly presented. It's seldom that such ideal conditions are available in the field, so your maximum range must be reduced accordingly.

My major goal when hunting big game with a handgun is to stalk as close as possible before shooting. If I can cut the range to 25 yards—great. If not, I get as close as I can. I never try a shot when I have any doubt as to whether or not I can place the bullet properly to achieve a one-shot kill. I've had to pass up a good many trophies over the years because of this policy, but I've never had to go after a wounded animal.

Varmint hunting is the best practice a handgunner can get in preparation for a big game hunt, providing you use the pistol and loads you'll be taking along for big game. Chucks, prairie

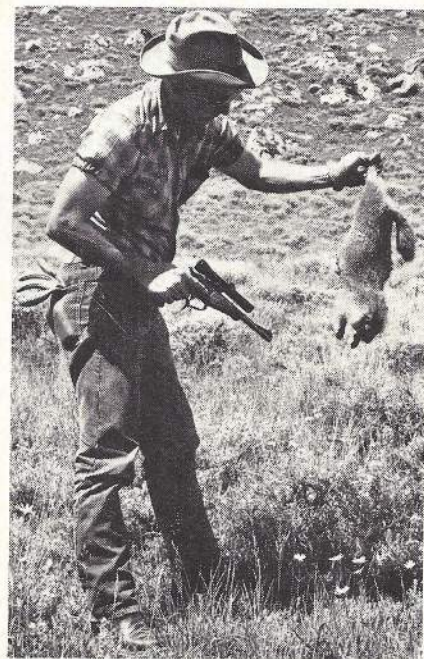
dogs and jackrabbits are all excellent practice and the more shooting you can get, the better. When you start connecting regularly on small targets at long range, the confidence required for successful big game hunting comes quickly.

So far I've discussed getting ready to hunt big game. Now, just which big game animals in North America fall within the realm of the handgun? I really can't think of one that doesn't. Antelope, deer, sheep, elk, goats, moose, caribou and bears—you can successfully bag any of these if you're properly prepared. When you get to the big bears—grizzly, Alaskan brown and polar varieties, you're treading on pretty thin ice. Oh, they can and have been stopped with a handgun on numerous occasions, but everything has to be just right. Wound one of these big carnivores and you might wind up being his evening meal.

Whenever you go after dangerous game, I strongly recommend that you have a partner armed with a big, powerful rifle to back you up. Then, if



Ruger's single actions chambered for .44 and .41 Magnum are very popular.



Taking chucks like this really builds shooter confidence.

something goes amiss and you don't drop the beast with the first shot from your pistol, the backup rifle will have things under control. You won't be facing a wounded, enraged animal you can't stop with the pistol, or turning a wounded one loose in the brush where it's a threat to you and any unsuspecting hunters that might be in the area. I know hunters who consider having a rifle backup a sure sign of lack of confidence on the part of the handgunner, but to me this is just muddled thinking. Remember, there are guides who won't consider taking a client for dangerous bears who are armed with anything less powerful than a .30-06. Some guides even insist on a .30 caliber magnum or larger. Are they chicken? Do they lack confidence? Not at all! They just know bears, how tough they can be and the mayhem they can dish out when they're wounded.

As far as suitable handgun cartridges for big game hunting are concerned, there aren't too many. The .357 Magnum should be considered minimum and I feel it's suitable only for deer-sized game at ranges under 100 yards. It's fine for deer in timber



Steve Herrett (L) and Warren Center, the man who designed the Contender pistol pose with one of the big Texas boars taken on a recent hunt. The .30 Herrett proved to be an effective cartridge on the big pigs. The Author felt the scopes were a mistake in the thick brush.

and brush, but I'd never consider it for open country. I really feel the same way about the .41 Magnum although it packs more of a punch than the .357 Magnum. Beyond 100 yards it has neither the accuracy nor the energy for big game hunting.

Of the popular straight-wall magnums, the big .44 is the best choice for big game hunting. It's a powerful cartridge, and an accurate one, in the hands of a man who can handle the arm-numbing recoil. Too often, a .44 owner, finding that the recoil is too punishing, turns to reduced loads and loses any advantage his .44 has over the .357 and .41 Magnums. I like the .44 in heavy brush and timber, or in any instance where the range is relatively close. Those big 240-grain jacketed bullets do a lot of damage. But alas, the .44 falls right in with its cousins at ranges beyond 100 yards. It just isn't accurate enough for really long range work.

The .357 and .44 Auto Mag cartridges were designed for hunting, and are offered only in the Auto Mag pistol, a big semi-automatic. These cartridges both have some advantage over their standard counterparts. Actually the .357 Auto Mag cartridge is

very similar ballistically to the .357/44 Bain & Davis, a wildcat, and the Auto Mag doesn't have much of an edge on a standard .357 Magnum fired from a 10-inch barreled Contender. The .44 Auto Mag isn't much of an improvement over the standard .44 Magnum. It's only advantage, if you want to call it that, is that it's available in a semi-auto pistol whose bulk, weight, and action absorbs a lot of the recoil. There have been some tales of fantastic long range kills made with both Auto Mag cartridges on big game, and I don't doubt their validity. However, when you look at the ballistics of these cartridges, it's hard to arrive at any conclusion other than that there was a lot of luck involved when ranges of 150+ yards were involved.

When it comes to long range hunting 100 to 200 yards there just isn't anything around that's as good as the .30 and .357 Herrett cartridges, as Contender pistols are presently chambered for them. Based on the .30-30 case, these two cartridges are essentially wildcats but making brass is easy and the Herretts are amassing a considerable following. The .30 Herrett attains 2500 fps with a 110-grain bullet, the .357 Herrett 2300 fps with a

140-grain bullet. Groups averaging three inches or less at 100 yards are the norm, and if you can see well enough with a 2X scope to do the job, six-inch groups at 200 yards are possible. Elk, deer, antelope, boar, moose and bear have fallen to the Herrett cartridges and the performance has always been good. I personally like the .30 Herrett for antelope and deer, but prefer the .357 for heavier animals.

The .30-30, a rifle cartridge, is available in Contender chambering, and runs the .30 Herrett a close second for long range antelope and deer shooting. It doesn't equal .30-30 rifle performance, but, properly loaded, the .30-30 Contender is potent big game medicine.

What more is there to say about big game handgunning? Possibly only that many states still haven't legalized handguns for big game, but more and more are changing their laws each day, and it won't be long before handgunners will enjoy the freedom to hunt big game in nearly every state. By now the beginner should be able to see what's expected of him, and if you've dabbled in the game but had bad experiences, perhaps this article will help you get started again—right. Hunting big game with a handgun demands a lot from you, your handgun and the cartridge, but the rewards are well worth the effort. I know of nothing more satisfying than topping off a long, difficult stalk by dropping a dandy buck with a single well-placed shot from a good handgun.



This bull elk was the Author's reward for a long stalk in Idaho's Salmon River country. There's no greater thrill than taking a trophy like this one with a single, well placed shot after a long stalk.