

# guns review



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Review of the AMT .22 Magnum Pistol  
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## The AMT Automag II



*The AMT Automag II in .22 Winchester Magnum Rimfire.*

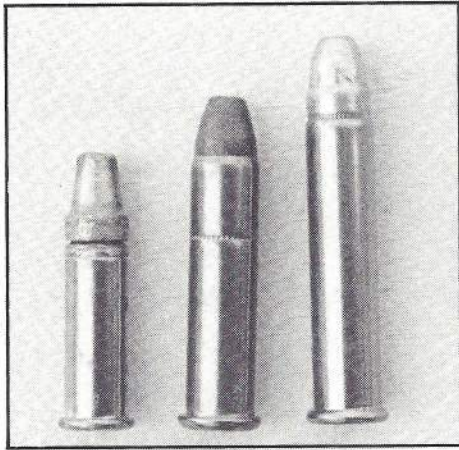
ARCADIA Machine and Tool Incorporated of California is probably best known for the AMT Hardballer, the first stainless steel version of the Colt Government Model and one that was an instant success. They followed that with long slide models and with handguns like the Backup. They specialise in stainless steel and have a line of pistols and one rifle, all in that material. The original Automag had a rotary bolt with six locking lugs and was chambered in a variety of ultra powerful cartridges such as the 44AMP. It was designed by AMT's President, Harry Sandford, but had a chequered career from its inception in the early 1960's. It had many unique features, including the use of gases to assist the breech mechanism.

Now we see Automag II, and indeed Automag III which we shall review shortly. The connection between the original Automag and Automag II may, superficially, seem to be limited to the fact that Harry Sandford's company is making them, but there are design features in the II which seem to be related to the original gun.

The Automag II is chambered for the .22 Winchester Magnum Rimfire cartridge. Winchester went very much their own way with rimfire cartridges with oddities like the .22 Winchester Auto for their Model 1903 rifle. No other rifle has ever used it and the rifle itself is obsolete. The cartridge was a fraction longer and a good deal fatter



*The distinctive signature impressed on the cartridge cases by the Automag's gas assisted system.*



*Left to right: The now standard .22 long rifle cartridge; the .22 Winchester rimfire; the .22 Winchester Magnum Rimfire.*

than the .22 long rifle. The 22 Winchester Rimfire came out in 1890, its bullet is a nominal thou' or so fatter than the .22 LR and the case is both longer and fatter. It never ousted the .22 lr. The .22 WRF was extended into the .22 Winchester Magnum Rimfire which has been a marked success since it was introduced in 1959. The .22 WRF cartridge can be fired in guns chambered for the .22 magnum rimfire though it is a good eighth of an inch shorter. We found that it would fire reliably in the Automag II but would not work the action. In any case, the use of shorter cartridge is not to be recommended.

The Automag II is an extremely attractive pistol. Made entirely of stainless steel, the frame and top of the slide are in a matt finish with the barrel a much smoother but not quite bright finish and the sides of the slide polished with an attractive 'graining' which may even be the machining marks but seems to us to be a deliberate and very attractive brushmarked finish. The grips are black hard rubber with deep horizontal grooving and the AMT logo. Millet sights are black with white lining to the rearsight and a red line to the foresight. The overall picture is both workmanlike and pleasant to look at.

The pistol has an elegant shape, long and slim, rather like those willowy females who use to appear in films. (Where have they all

gone - today's film stars seem to be more vulgar than elegant?) The six inch barrelled version of the pistol is 9½" from the muzzle to the rear of the grip spur and 5¼" from the top of the backsight to the magazine latch, but it is only 0.85" across the slide and 1.14" across the fattest part of the grip. That grip is extremely comfortable and far better suited to most hands than many of the fancy grips on other pistols. It may be that the length of the .22 Win Mag RF cartridges made it necessary for the grip frame to be 1⅞" from front to rear but the end product fits beautifully into the V of the hand and allows the fingers to wrap round just perfectly. Every one of the shooters who handled the pistol commented on the quality of the grip.

The breech mechanism of this pistol shows something of Automag thinking. A .22 rimfire pistol will almost invariably be straight blowback whilst the more powerful pistols will be locked breech and probably ninety per cent of those will use a modification of the Browning system. The Automag II has a gas assisted breech lock. The barrel, though detachable, does not move during firing. Delay in opening is achieved by having a series of eighteen holes in the chamber, arranged in three rings of six holes. Gas escaping into these holes exerts pressure on the case walls, holding the case in the chamber until pressure drops. This clever action gives the empty cases a signature which will allow them to be instantly recognised as having been fired in this pistol.

The slide mechanism owes much to Browning. Take down is very much on the Browning principle with a combined slide locking and take down catch on the left of the frame with a pin running through the frame and locking the barrel lug to the frame. The connection between barrel lug and pin is simple because it does not need to allow for the barrel to drop down after initial travel. With the slide lock removed, the slide and barrel will run off the frame together when the safety on the left rear of the slide is put to 'fire'. The recoil spring lies with its guide under the barrel. A barrel bushing locks the muzzle end of the barrel in place and its lower section holds the recoil spring into the slide.

The safety is positive in action. When applied, a block rotates around the rear end of the firing pin, preventing the hammer from striking it and at the same time a plunger locks the firing pin in its rearward position. The safety lever is convenient to the right thumb and easy to flick off.



*The Automag II field stripped.*

The eight shot magazine holds its cartridges in a single column and seems to be a considerable distance from front to rear. It is fed into the grip in the usual way and the magazine catch is at the rear of the bottom of the grip. The magazine base plate protrudes beyond the front strap of the grip. The design of the latch and this lip make removal of the empty magazine very convenient.

The pistol is single action only and the four and a half pound trigger is crisp on the break with just a little creep in the take up. During test firing that little bit of creep was simply not noticed.

The Millet sights are first class. The front sight is a broad sloping ramp with the top rounded a little to prevent snagging. The red insert gives a picture of a post with a squared top. The rearsight is adjustable for windage and elevation, marked to show the direction of movement and with notches which allow the user to identify the correct location. The square notch is white lined with a vertical white post below the notch. If, in fast sight acquisition the top of the white post is placed under the square on the red front sight, the sights are on. Finer and slow sight acquisition can be had in the usual way. Adjustments on the Millet sights are, as usual, firm, positive and without backlash.

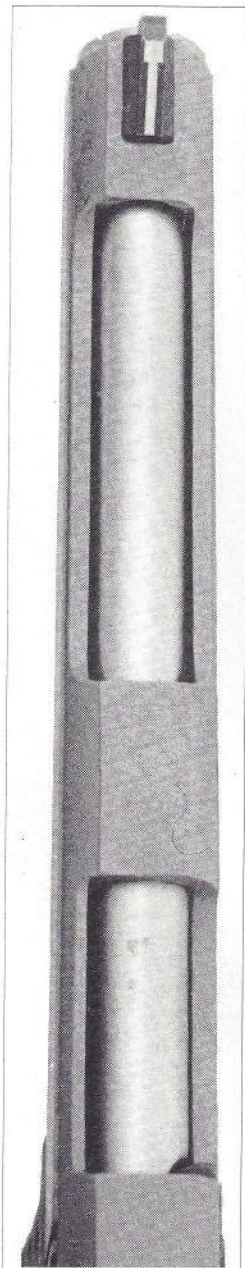
A note in the box suggested that CCI .22 Magnum ammunition loaded with flake powder would not operate the slide. We had some of that ammunition on hand and found that it functioned erratically in that respect and was not suited to the pistol. We understand that later loadings work well. The makers use Winchester ammunition to regulate the pistols and we found that Federal also worked very well.

The first few shots indicated that some of the power of the .22 rimfire magnum is wasted in this pistol. There is a considerable amount of muzzle flash, suggesting energy loss in ammunition which is generally designed to shoot in a 22" rifle barrel. 'Book' figures indicate that with the 50 grain bullet we were using, one would get about 1650 feet per second velocity with an energy of 300 foot pounds at the muzzle of a 22" rifle barrel. Our own earlier tests with the Heckler & Koch .22 magnum rimfire carbine gave us slightly higher figures with velocities averaging 1700 fps. We chronographed this pistol with Federal ammunition to get very consistent results at 1091 fps and 132 foot pounds, which is more or less what one can expect from a high velocity .22lr in a rifle. Essentially, the energy level of this pistol can be equated with a .22 rifle using ordinary high velocity ammunition, which makes it well suited to vermin control, rabbit and hare shooting but not suited to larger quarry.

On the range we found the pistol a real pleasure to shoot. From a rested position we got several groups of about one inch, centre to centre at twenty yards. That would have put all the shots into the ten ring of a standard pistol target. The fact that group sizes were enlarged when shooting free-hand is a comment on the skill of the shooter and not a criticism of the pistol. It was interesting to shoot the CCI ammunition which did not operate the slide consistently. Sometimes the slide operated fully, often it opened far enough to eject the fired case but not to reload a fresh one and on some shots it did not eject the fired case. The resultant group was excellent from side to side but was strung out over four inches top to bottom.

This is an attractive and well made pistol, a joy to shot and a joy to own. Its drawback is that .22 magnum rimfire ammunition costs considerably more than .22 lr and the feed bill is likely to be high. If you can manage that you will enjoy the pistol. A second word of warning is to watch the wording on the range safety certificate, some of which seem to exclude the .22 magnum rimfire, though there is no reason why they should and application for a change of wording will usually be readily agreed to.

AMT firearms are imported by Tim Hannam, The Granary, Wakefield Road, Swillington, Leeds, LS26 8UA (0532 862175) and the AMT Automag II costs £306.90 with the 6" barrel or the 4½" barrel.



*The Millet foresight's post with a square top is fast and easy to use. The open-topped slide will remind shooters of the Beretta, but, in fact, it is quite different in having the bridge across ahead of the ejection port.*



*Removing the grips from the frame shows the trigger system and disconnector.*



*Right: The Millet rearsight - clean, clear and easy to use either for fast shooting or precision work.*