

# Handloader

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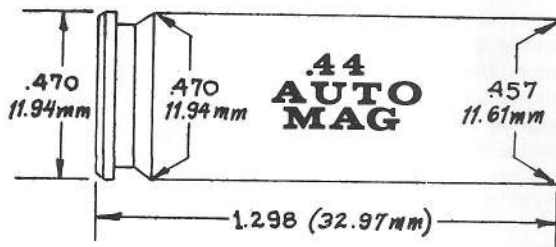
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# CARTRIDGE of the MONTH

## .44 Auto Mag



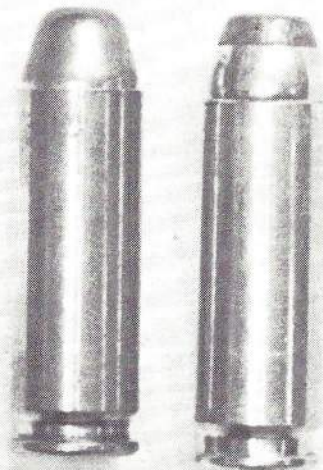
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**T**HOUGH IT SEEM longer, it was less than a decade ago that handgunners first heard of — and saw advertisements for — a gun named “Auto Mag.” Some of the early statements made about the gun were sufficiently vague that people believed it to be chambered for the .44 Magnum revolver cartridge. To be sure, it was of .44 caliber and its performance was in the magnum class, but it was chambered for an entirely new cartridge designated “.44 AMP” or “.44 Auto Mag.”

The .44 AMP was designed concurrently with the gun; both were intended for working chamber pressures in the 50,000 c.u.p. range never before encountered in handguns. We can't dwell on the pistol here, but the cartridge accomplished this by using a modified rifle-type case design. For convenience and economy, not for technical or ballistic

reasons, the .44 AMP case was simply the .308 Winchester or .30-06 case shortened to 1.310-inch length, sized at the mouth for .430-inch diameter bullets, and with mouth wall thickness reduced. All gun and load development was done with cases laboriously made by hand from .308/7.62mm NATO brass, and when guns finally become available (much, much later than intended) such hand-made cases and ammunition were supplied for them by the Auto Mag Corp.

Reports varied, but early Auto Mag owners claimed much higher velocities from the .44 AMP — with its 240-grain jacketed soft-point bullet — than the .44 Magnum revolver combination. Those few handloaders who could obtain one of the massive, stainless-steel, recoil-operated pistols had a field day. We know now that some of them shot loads developing in excess of 60,000 c.u.p.



A CDM factory load, left, is for comparison with a 240-grain Speer handload. The CDM factory cartridge was underloaded, and failed to function many Auto-Mag pistols properly. There is no longer a commercial load for the Auto-Mag pistol.

chamber pressure without hurting either themselves or their guns. Such pressures had never before been approached in any known handgun other than perhaps the XP-100, which is actually a rifle action. That nobody (that I know of) was hurt is a tribute to the strong, heavy, .308 case and rifle-type lockup of the gun.

Actually, working pressures were intended to be in the 45,000-50,000 c.u.p. range. Eventually factory-loaded ammunition became available, produced by the Mexican CDM plant, a subsidiary of Remington. Unfortunately, due to misunderstandings, this ammunition was too lightly loaded and did not produce the needed performance. In fact, it was so lightly loaded it would not cycle many Auto Mag pistols correctly. Pistoleros who expected a high-performance factory load were badly disappointed and had to fall back on handloads. The CDM load thus passed from the scene and is no longer made. In fact, since then there has been no .44 AMP factory load at all. Several custom loaders do supply proper ammunition in both hand-formed and CDM cases, but they aren't “factory.”

Loading .44 AMP ammunition isn't at all difficult, but it does require more attention to detail than other handgun calibers. It cannot be “loaded down” significantly or the gun won't function; light loads are out and lead bullets aren't often used. Standard .44 caliber jacketed bullets are correct, and Large-Pistol Magnum primers are preferred because of the large charge of slow-burning powder. Not many powders are suitable to this unusual cartridge, and H-110 and W-W 296 have proven to be best. Cases, however, can be a problem. Unless you can scare up some of the original CDM

### .44 AMP Load Data (6 1/2" Barrel)

Bullet	Weight	Powder	Weight, grains	MV, fps
SV/JHP	180	W-W 296	25.0	1,370
SV/JHP	180	W-W 296	27.0	1,520
SV/JHP	180	W-W 296	29.0	1,620
SV/JHP	180	W-W 296	31.0	1,750
SV/JHP	180	W-W 296	33.0	1,890
Speer/JSP	200	W-W 296	28.0	1,510
Speer/JSP	200	W-W 296	30.0	1,590
Speer/JSP	200	W-W 296	32.0	1,730
Sierra/JSP	240	W-W 296	21.0	1,120
Sierra/JSP	240	W-W 296	23.0	1,290
Sierra/JSP	240	W-W 296	25.0	1,490
Sierra/JSP	240	W-W 296	27.0	1,590
Hornady/JSP	265	W-W 296	20.0	1,140
Hornady/JSP	265	W-W 296	22.0	1,300
Hornady/JSP	265	W-W 296	24.0	1,420
Hornady/JSP	265	W-W 296	25.0	1,490

All above loads in new CDM cases. Reduce powder charge at least 10 percent when using formed cases.

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manufacture, you'll have to make your own, using a set of RCBS forming dies. If the latter, make all your cases from the same caliber and lot of brass to avoid wide variation in powder capacity. Nearly a dozen calibers can be used to form .44 AMP brass, but the .308 is best.

The .44 AMP is a true rimless case that headspaces on its mouth against a chamber shoulder as in the .45 ACP and 9mm Parabellum. Nominal case length is 1.310-inch to 1.315-inch. Length is somewhat critical; too much interferes with the gun locking properly and too little flattens primers and makes ignition erratic. Some handloaders match case length to individual guns, but this shouldn't really be necessary.

Forming cases consists briefly of the following steps: run case into form/trim die and saw off excess brass; file mouth smooth and deburr; run case into reaming die and ream neck to .015-inch wall thickness; size in full-length die; deprime and reprime; expand mouth with .293-inch expander rod; trim to final length.

Case mouths must be flared enough to permit starting bullets. This will look like too much flare because of the unusually

small, as-expanded neck diameter which is needed for a very tight grip on the bullet. Recoil and feeding forces are heavy and if the bullet isn't held very tightly, it may shift in the case.

Powder charges for full loads generally produce 100 percent loading density and some of them are heavily compressed. This also makes a very tight bullet/case fit necessary or the powder will expand and push the bullet forward. If this happens in the magazine, the cartridge will jam tight; if in storage, the cartridge won't go into the magazine. Annealing case mouths is not wise, for it reduces case grip on the bullet no matter how undersize the mouth might be before seating.

Compressed powder charges also make it necessary that the bullet-seating punches fit the bullet nose very closely. The extra pressure will deform bullet noses otherwise; hollow points may be somewhat deformed, no matter how well the punch fits. Since some bullets used are quite short, special care is needed to insure that they enter the case straight, not canted.

Bullets are seated an overall cartridge length of 1.6-inch, and bullets should not contact the rifling. The latter rules out very blunt or wadcutter forms. After seating, the flare must be removed and this is best done by applying a light taper crimp, which also increases bullet stability. A roll crimp or too-heavy taper crimp can cause an excess-headspace condition so needs to be avoided.

We don't show H-110 powder but it is widely used in the .44 AMP. One must take special note of the fact that current production appears to have a slower burning rate than the older stuff. Over several years it seems to have been successively reduced in burning rate. A charge weight originally developed with 10-year-old powder may be too light with new H-110. Conversely, a full load developed with today's H-110 may be excessive with older powders. The loads we show are with today's H-110; if older powder is used, reduce charge weight at least 15 percent, then work back up gradually.

Also, be especially leery of *anyone's* load data, even your own, due to the wide variations in cases. Reduced case capacity due to thick webs and walls will have far more effect than slight changes in powder burning rates.

There are only a few thousand .44 AMP Auto Mag pistols in existence and no other gun has been regularly chambered for this cartridge. If you have one, you'll be forced to load for it eventually. A little extra effort is required, but the performance it offers for hunting and long-range work is certainly worth it. ●

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