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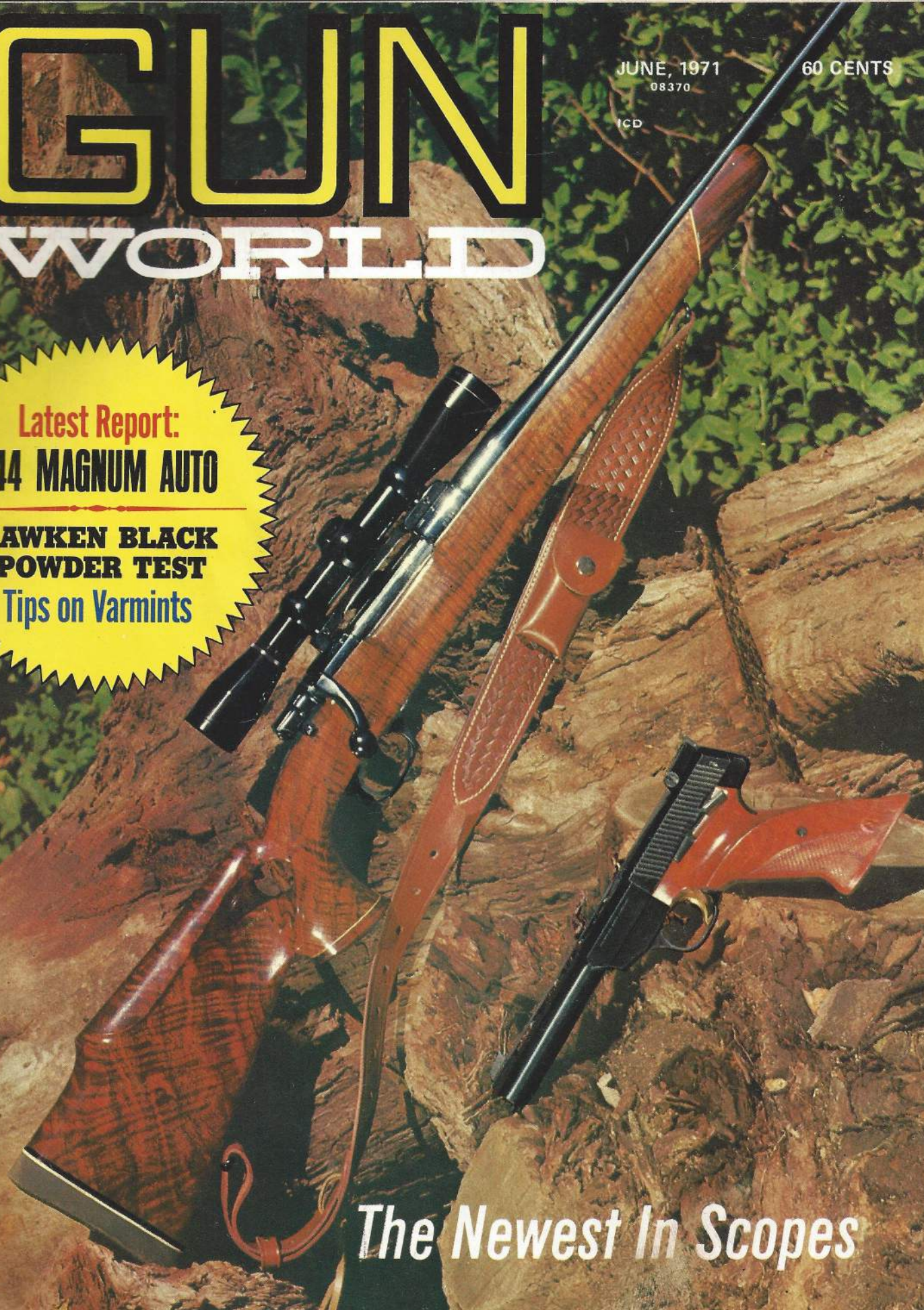
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By Walt Rickell & Jack Lewis

The .44 Magnum Semi-Automatic Pistol Has Been Discussed For Years, But Here Is The First To Prove Itself!

ALL OF US concerned with big magnum pistol cartridges for hunting, target work or just the Big Boom have had available in past years the most advanced cartridge components modern science can create. But we have had to shoot these wonders in handguns whose designs date back to the Civil War period.

The mainstay of the big .44 magnum cartridge has been the revolver, in various single and double action designs. For such arms, it is necessary that the bullet be roll-crimped securely into the neck of the case so that the rearward force of recoil will not inch the bullets out of the case, perhaps to hang up rotation of the cylinder and cause a stoppage. In certain instances, not only is the crimp required, but the case neck must grip the base of the bullet tightly so as to assure proper ignition of the powder.

The revolver has romance and that may be why it has been around as long as it has. Tom Mix made the single action famous in several hundred reels of motion picture film and followers carried on in everything from musical western extravaganzas to the so-called adult horse opera. Television has added to its romance. Today, although many of them carry .45 automatics on duty, such touted organizations as the Texas Rangers are obligated to turn out for ceremonies with low-slung buscadero rigs and sixguns of the type that won the west.

But all of that is changing. In recent years, with the public and the taxpayers being made aware of law enforcement needs, purse strings are being loosened — to a degree. Police departments have begun to turn in their cylinder guns for a variety of automatics, which are appearing these days with increased frequency in redesigned law enforcement holsters.

Harry Sanford of the Auto Mag Corporation of Pasadena, California, had become discouraged with the available hardware for magnum pistol shooting and even had discovered that

some wheel guns were pretty well worn out after firing only five hundred rounds or so. With this thought, he set about coming up with an auto designed to handle the .44 magnum velocities. His first thought was the .45 service auto, available for the past six decades. This thought soon was eliminated and his search became a plan on a drawing board for a new delayed blow-back system.

With Sanford's background as a gunsmith, he had an excellent working knowledge of firearms and soon had created a working model for the first .44 semi-automatic magnum handgun. Taking a rotary bolt similar to that of the M-16, he incorporated a limited recoiling barrel and receiver, using an accelerator and the recoil to turn and unlock the bolt. The magazine was

similar to that of the Colt 1911 automatic, but somewhat oversize, while the solid frame resembled that of the old High-Standard HD Military model. There also was an exposed hammer on the prototype. Then came the updating of the .44 magnum cartridge to the specifications required as an automatic round.

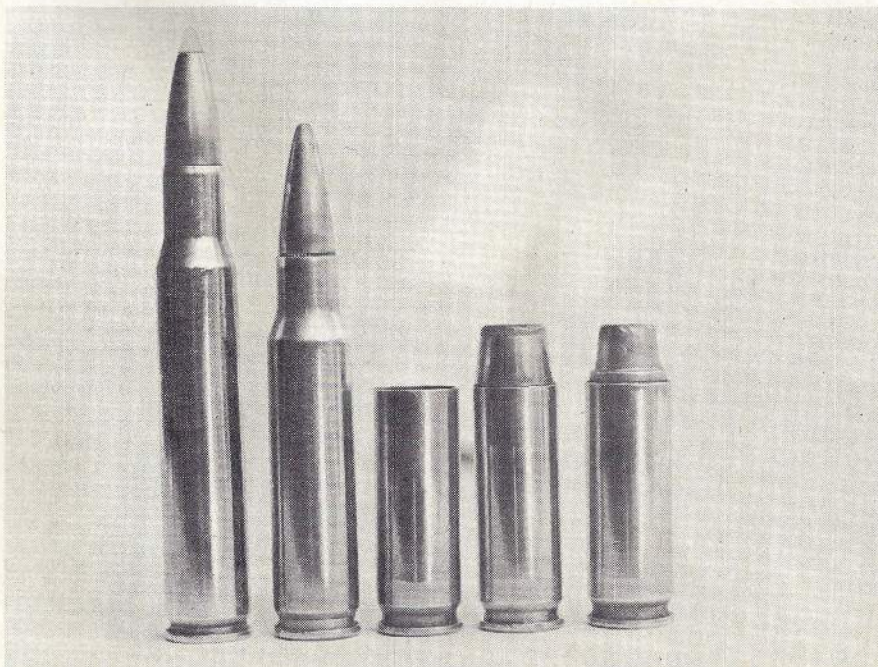
The gun now in production — still a limited production admittedly — is the Auto Mag Model 180. Constructed primarily of stainless steel, for rough work and a long-lasting finish, it has a seven-shot capacity and features a 6½-inch barrel, although models with longer barrels are in the planning stages.

Unloaded, the gun weighs fifty-six ounces. The front sight has a red insert and the rear sight is fully adjustable, a full ventilated rib connecting the two extremes. It looks a bit like a sawed-off rifle to some, perhaps, but the handgun is simple in design and function. It is chambered for the .44 Auto Mag cartridge.

The next obvious question is, "what the hell is the Auto Mag cartridge?" We knew you were going to ask, so we'll get that out of the way now.

According to Sanford, various loads are being worked out for handloaders by an Auto Mag team and a book with findings will be published. He also says that the manufacture of loaded

Shown, from left, are .30/06 Springfield, .308 Winchester cases, with empty and loaded .44 Auto Mag cartridges, made up from brass as described in accompanying text.

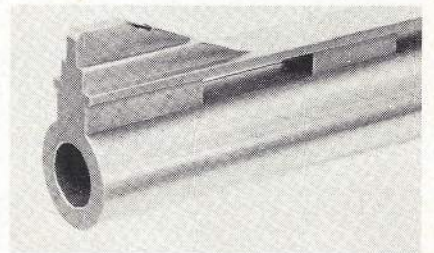




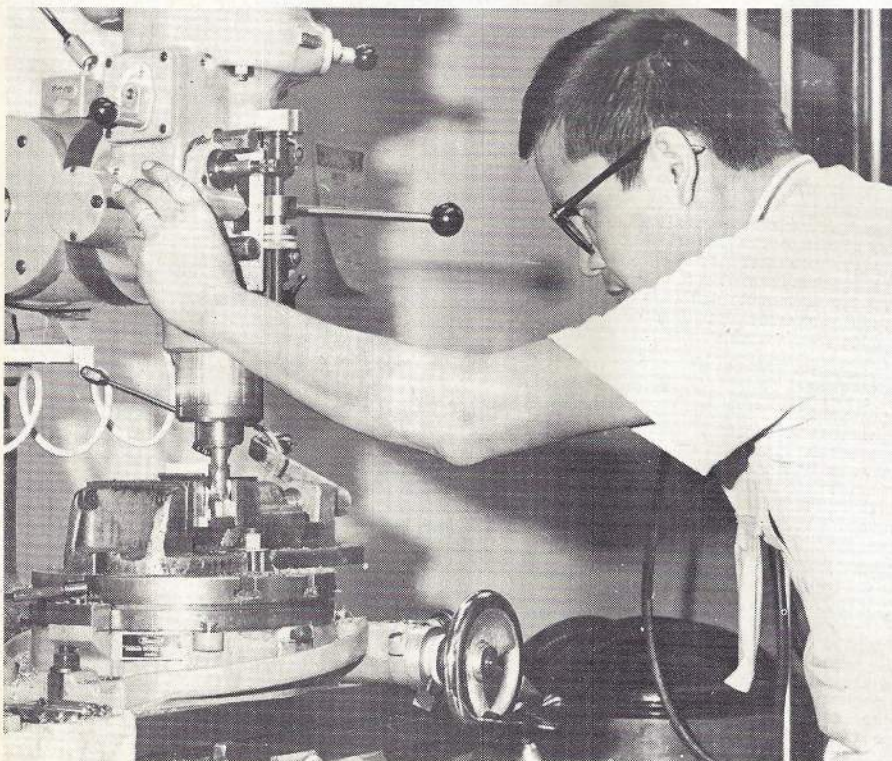
Barrels can be switched in seconds and sight system remains in place, retaining previous adjustments.



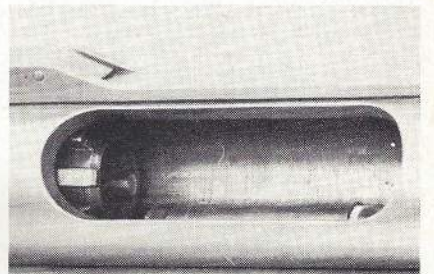
Breech assembly rides rearward on two guide rods, as shown in this disassembled illustration.



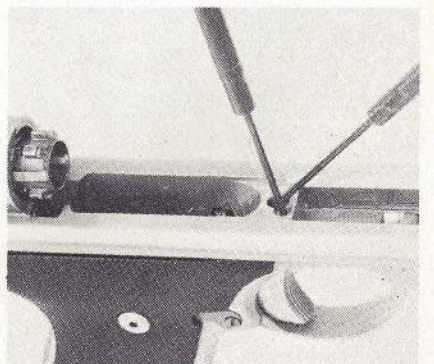
Close look at muzzle shows details of front sight, ventilated rib.



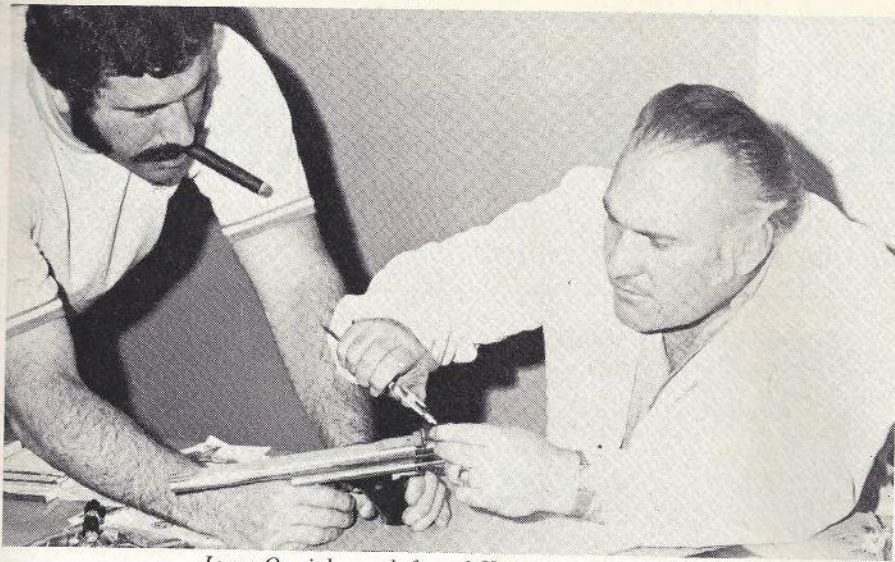
Improvements in design and production continue to be made. Here, machinist is producing a new jig for thumb safety.



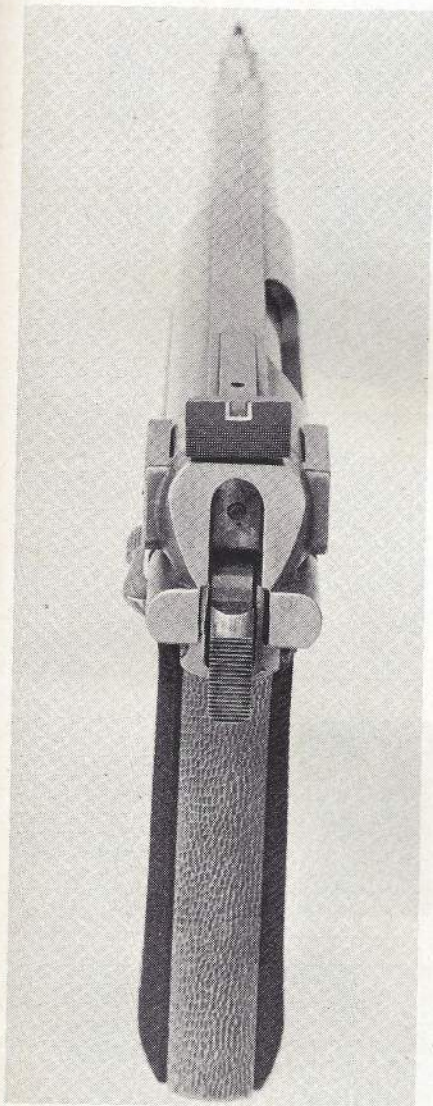
Receiver has side ejection, rotary bolt with seven locking lugs.



Barrel must be removed for access to two screws for trigger adjustment.



Jerry Ogniebene, left and Harry Sanford check a barrel assembly from production for dimensions.



Primarily of stainless steel, Auto Mag has exposed hammer, white outlined rear sight blade.

ammunition is being negotiated with two major firms, but for the time being, rolling your own is the answer. As for factory-loads, our advice is: don't hold your breath. It only took several decades for the .22/250, .25/06 and other variations to see the inside of a factory.

As it stands now, Auto Mag, from its California headquarters, plans to sell a four-die set with a reamer. They say that all one needs is some .30/06 or .308 brass, powder, primers and your favorite .44 bullets.

The first step, according to Harry Sanford, is to cut the rifle cases to 1.30 inches in length, then to ream out the wall thickness on the inside of the case, until the thickness at the mouth is .015 inches. This accomplished, reloading can be accomplished in the normal four-die procedure, although the one hangup is the fact that, at this writing, the Auto Mag group has not decided on a price for this set.

To operate the pistol, one first inserts a loaded magazine and grasps the two serrated ears at the rear of the receiver, pulling all the way to the rear. When it reaches its stop, release the slide and, as with the more familiar .45 service auto, a round is driven home in the chamber.

The thumb safety is located on the left side of the frame. It blocks the hammer and renders the pistol safe, when pushed upward. It acts as a slide release in the down position.

The slide is locked open automatically after the last shot, but there is no provision for a slide locking mechanism to hold it back, as with the .45 auto. However, with the magazine fully loaded, the slide can be locked to the rear manually. The safety factor of

having the slide locked to the rear and chamber cleared has been brought to the attention of Sanford and his cohorts, who are designing such a modification for later models, they say.

In order was a day on the range with Sanford and Jerry Ogniebene for long range accuracy testing. Several hundred rounds in various load combinations were fired, the big Auto Mag functioning without a kink. It handled loads of 13 grains of Norma 1020 up to 18 grains with various 240-grain jacketed hollow-point bullets. The 18 grains of 1020 gave the same velocity as 21 grains of 2400 in a revolver, but with less recoil. With the shock-absorbing qualities of the new semi-auto evident, we suspect this will put the .44 magnum in the pleasure-to-shoot category. For the record, velocities with the 18 grains of 1020 averaged 1448 fps.

We found that the pistol points well and that the sight picture is easy to recover with the reduced recoil. If one has not been used to shooting a stainless steel or nickel-plated handgun, it may take a little experience, as the sights are silver in color. However, the red front sight and the white-outlined rear help to maintain a six o'clock hold.

At twenty-five yards, the groups all were well within the black and at a hundred yards, Ogniebene fired a ten-shot group. Surprisingly, all of the holes were within the black of a standard fifty-yard pistol target. Pistol shooting at the century mark without the aid of a scope and not in the prone position is difficult, but further tests are being planned for accuracy and to test penetration at extended yardages.

In firing, the reduced recoil becomes evident, as opposed to the backlash in the revolver of the same caliber. In fact, we found it no tougher than the normal jolt from a .45 ACP hardball gun.

The action of this semi-auto is meant to reduce the velocities, but at the same time, one uses less powder to gain the same velocities as in the revolver, because of the lack of gas leakage. Another factor in reducing recoil is the fact that the roll crimp is eliminated. A chamfer type is used, for this case headspaced the same as the .45 ACP on the case length, thus more ease in loading and longer case life result.

The trigger pull is crisp and even and is fully adjustable with two allen screw stops positioned inside the frame. The trigger adjustment in this location means one has to remove the barrel assembly to adjust the trigger. This is a little inconvenient and some

Continued on page 61

would prefer it located externally, as on standard target pistols.

Removal of the barrel is simple; simply push it to the rear to disengage the bolt. Then push a small lever on the left front section of the frame and slide the barrel assembly forward. To assemble, reverse the order.

The barrel, rib, receiver and sights all constitute a single unit, so removal will not interfere with accuracy, if the designer's plan proves itself. One could have two or three barrels in various lengths — or calibers — that could be

from the rear of the frame. The bolt is inserted from the rear through the ring. A cross bolt is placed through the ring and a longitudinal slot in the bolt acts as the bolt stop.

Attached to the rear of the bolt is a wing-shaped affair with serrations on each side. Attached beneath this are two rods, one on either side of the frame, which extend from the tube-shaped structures on the frame that house the recoil springs. These rods act as guides and are attached to the bolt. We felt this might be a weakness, but



interchanged in seconds. Once they are sighted in individually, none would change the point of impact, no matter how many times they were changed, Sanford contends.

The grips of the test guns were made of rosewood, but the later models will feature plastic with sharp, fine-line checkering. The grip frame of the test gun fired sports a stippled finish for a non-slip surface, but plans are to change this to a grooved surface.

The head of the rotary bolt shrouds the cartridge base completely and features a rod-type ejector on the left side of the bolt face. This is thought to be the first time such a system has been used in a handgun. The bolt itself is supported by a ring extending upward

the designer claims it is strong enough and the only workable solution.

The frames are investment cast of stainless steel and all screws, except for the magazine catch, are of the allen, or hex-socket type.

The new auto has the exposed hammer that can be cocked in case of a misfire. With the completely enclosed case head, there is a side ejection port. These two items, combined with easy field stripping for cleaning and adjustment, do much to put this hunting handgun — for that was Sanford's original idea — in the category of the rifle insofar as safety and reliability are concerned. That is, if you want all those refinements for something like \$247.50 per copy. ●

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