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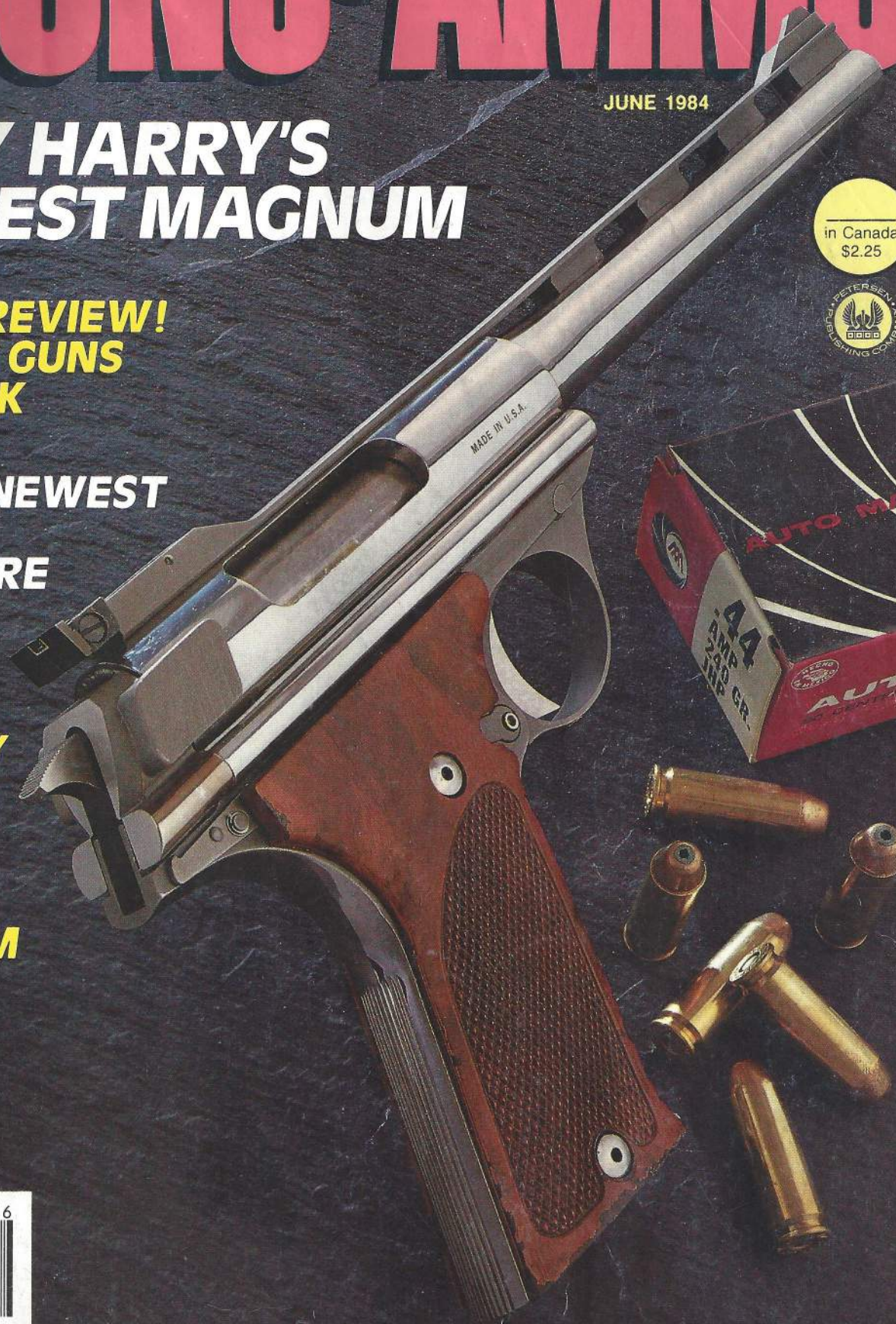
JUNE 1984

DIRTY HARRY'S BADDEST MAGNUM

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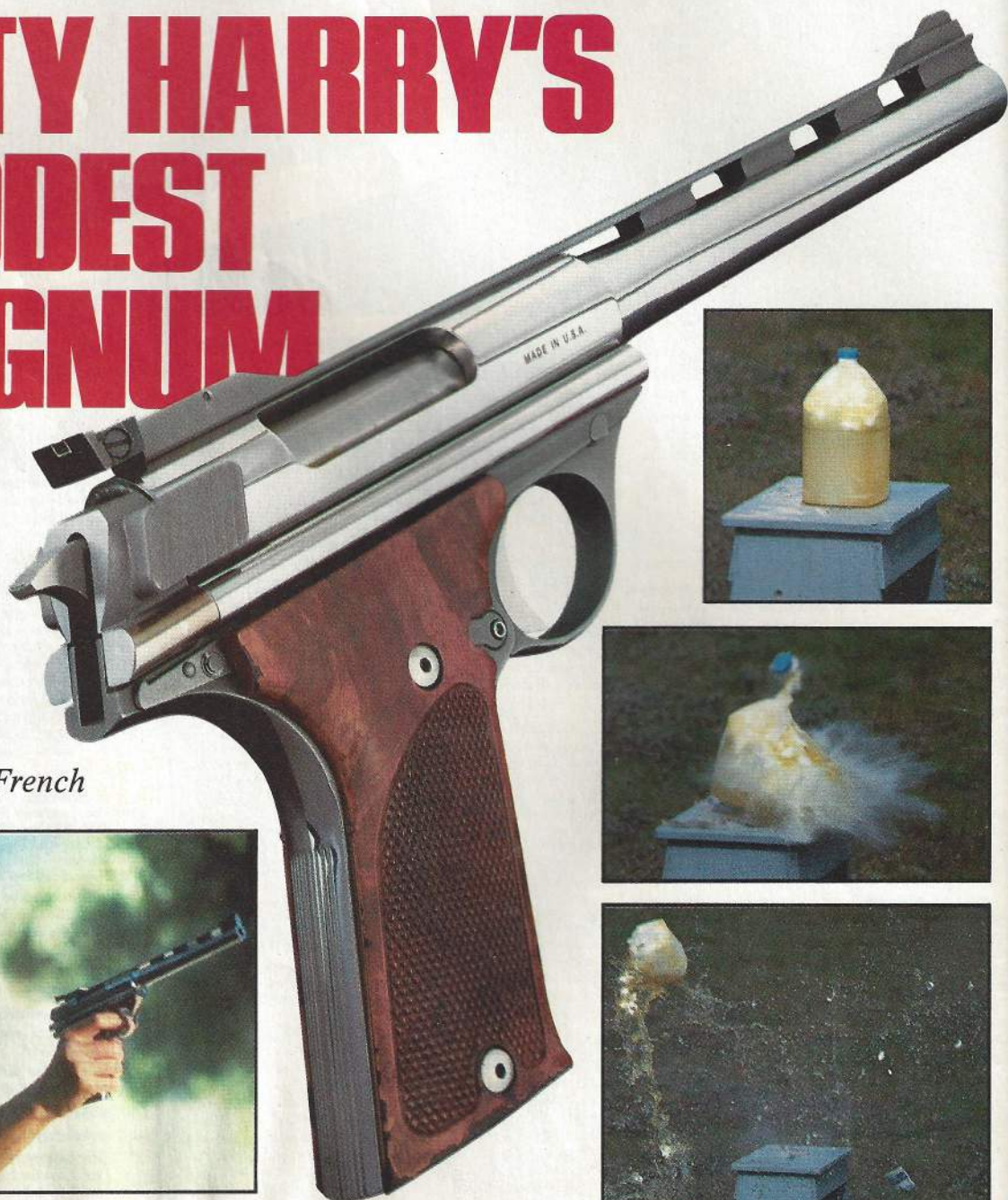
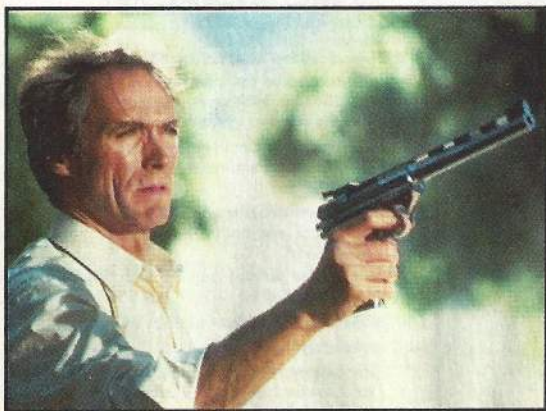




DIRTY HARRY'S BADDEST MAGNUM

*If you are
a big-bore fan,
Harry's
.44 Auto Mag
will...
make your day!*

By Howard E. French



The latest Dirty Harry movie, Sudden Impact, starring Clint Eastwood, also stars a .44 Magnum pistol, the Auto Mag. This autoloading powerhouse not only matches, but actually exceeds the punch of the justly famous Smith & Wesson Model 29 .44 Magnum, Harry's usual crime-busting tool. In our tests an Auto Mag showed that it had what it takes to vaporize concrete blocks and otherwise uphold the Dirty Harry tradition.

■ The latest Dirty Harry movie, *Sudden Impact*, which stars Clint Eastwood, has certainly had an impact on our readers. For those of you who have not yet seen this exciting film, Harry is jumped by a gang and brutally beaten. During the course of the melee both Harry and his Smith & Wesson Model 29 .44 Magnum end up in the Pacific Ocean. Harry survives, the .44 S&W Magnum doesn't!

Harry then turns to his second magnum, introduced earlier in the film as his ultimate answer to Mafioso-like hoods who tried to ambush him in their armored limousine. This second magnum pistol is a stainless steel, semi-auto powerhouse

boasting a cartridge which is an even more powerful rimless version of the .44 Magnum chambered in his justly famous Model 29 revolver. Needless to say, Harry uses his backup semi-auto .44 to even all scores, and then some!

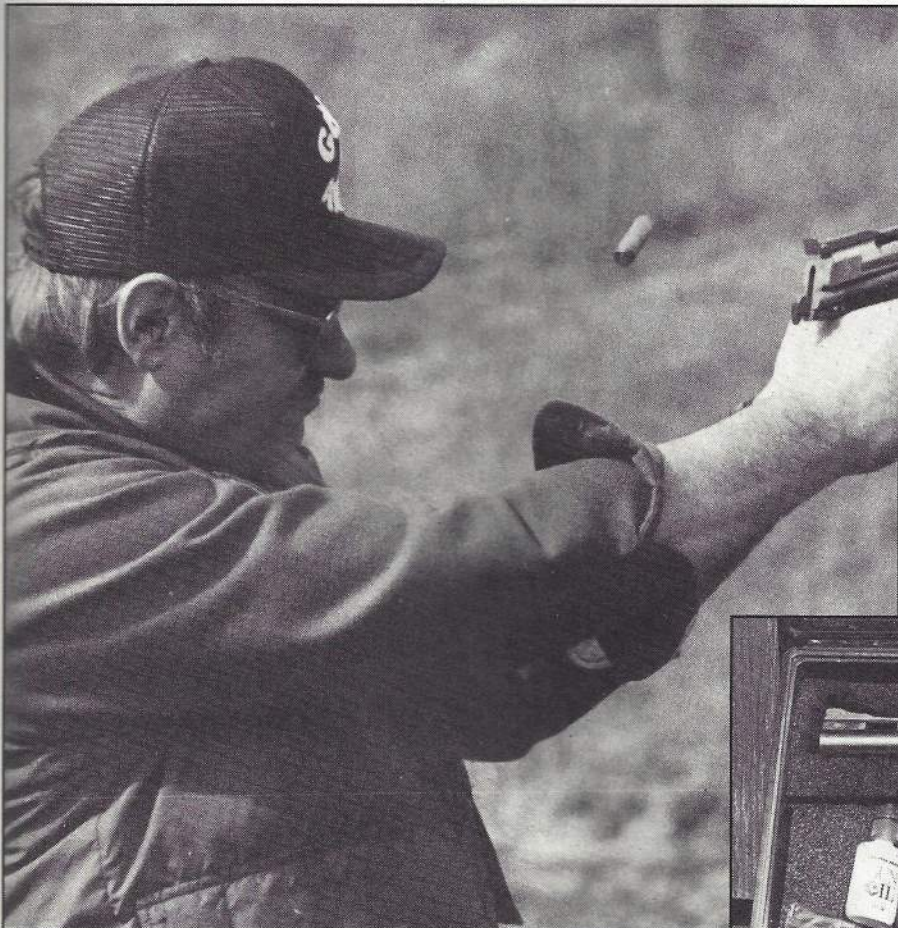
This then is the reemergence of the .44 Auto Mag, a pistol and cartridge combo that seems to revive, phoenix-like, from its own ashes. In its brief and stormy career the Auto Mag has been reincarnated several times before. However, from our readers' letters, it is obvious that few people remember the original Auto Mag and the impact it had on the shooting fraternity some 14 years ago.

We have received a flood of mail concerning the Auto Mag: What was this gun? Who made it? Is it currently available? And what in blazes does it really do? I guess it is no wonder that these questions have been raised as it has been a decade since *Guns & Ammo* covered the Harry Sanford-designed autoloading .44, and some 14 years since the first Auto Mag was delivered in October of 1970.

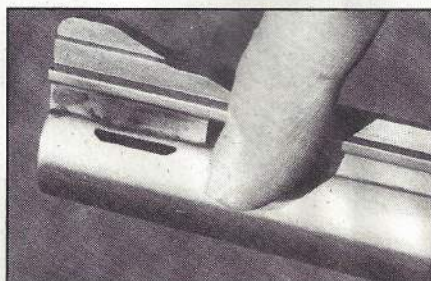
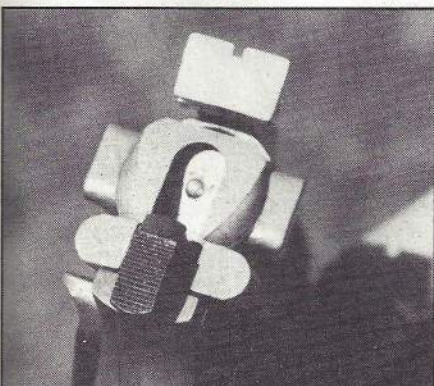
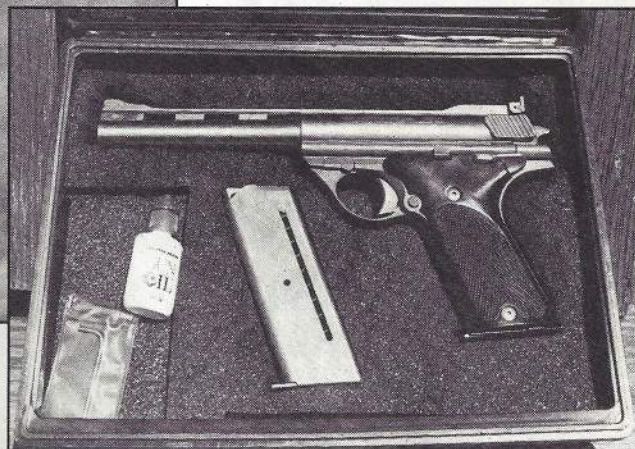
Harry Sanford was a visionary since, in 1970, the silhouette handgun game did not to any appreciable extent exist, and handgun hunting certainly did not have the wide support that it does today. Yet Harry designed and produced a pistol that was the most powerful autoloading arm available at that time, a self-loader that rivaled the justly famous Smith & Wesson Model 29 revolver in both power and accuracy.

Loading data, concurrent with the introduction of the Auto Mag, listed velocities that were enthusiastic, if not downright thrilling, as they touted buckets-full of powder under a 240-grain jacketed hollow point that would launch that projectile at a nickel under 1,600 feet per second (fps)! Now that's a MAGNUM. It was also probably a seams-busting, rip snorting, red lining, high pressure wildcat if there ever was one, for the first Auto Mags appeared before any factory ammo was available.

If you wanted to shoot an Auto Mag in those days you had to acquire special dies



Top: With a firm, two-handed grip, our .44 Auto Mag performed flawlessly with custom loaded ammunition using a variety of current bullets. **Right:** Some Auto Mags came in a space age plastic case complete with spare magazine, lubricating oil and a set of Allen wrenches.



The Auto Mag has a rear sight with a square notch, and this pistol has been Mag-na-ported for better controllability with potent loads.

from RCBS, a supply of rifle brass with a .30-06 head (.308, .30-06, .243, etc.) and expect to spend a lot of time and elbow grease forming, sizing, trimming and reaming before you could come up with a usable case. That case, incidentally, was hell-for-strong since it was made from rifle brass that had a working range in the 50,000 psi category. The pistol itself was also immensely strong as it used, and uses, a short recoil rotary bolt system similar to those in some rifles.

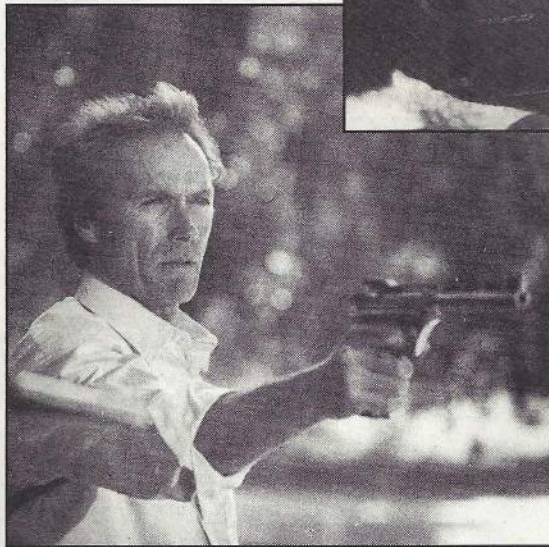
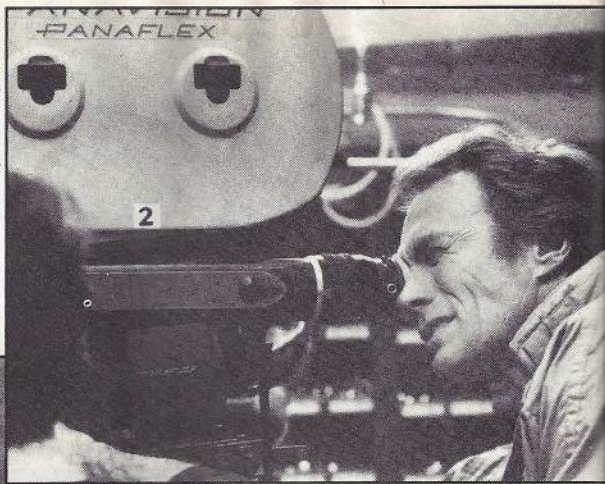
For a short period of time there was a supply of factory-loaded ammunition available for the .44 Auto Mag. This was a spe-

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cial run of 1,000,000 rounds that was loaded by a Mexican subsidiary of Remington, Cartouches Deportivos de Mexico, S.A. Naturally enough this mouthful was shortened to CDM. Today such ammunition is in the realm of collectible, and should certainly not be used for plinking, unless money/dinero means nothing to you.

I have never heard of a catastrophic failure of an Auto Mag pistol even though many were definitely overloaded in those innocent (?) days. I have been told that one rather forgetful, and hopefully nontypical, reloader forgot to put a charge of powder in a case. The force of the primer was sufficient to launch the bullet part way into the leade. Our intrepid pistolero then chambered a new cartridge, this time with the full complement of powder, ball and primer, and proceeded to force it home with a good whack on the rear of the action. This chambered the round, jamming the second bullet back into its case, compressing the powder charge. When he touched that round off, now augmented with an additional 240 grains of lead for a total payload of 480 grains, he got the definite impression that something might not be kosher. When he tried to open the breech it was no go. That massive overload had actually set back the locking lugs on the bolt, yet nothing

"Sudden Impact" is the first Dirty Harry movie that Clint Eastwood has both directed and produced and it has proven to be a smash hit at the box office, with "Callahan" abandoning his S&W for the formidable .44 Auto Mag.



The .44 Auto Mag has had a rebirth of interest since its use in "Sudden Impact." This potent magnum rivaled the justly famous S&W M-29, delivering semi-auto firepower and increased capacity.



Fieldstripping the Auto Mag is not exactly child's play as the design is fairly complicated. First, as always, check to make certain that the pistol is unloaded. Then, push down on the dismantling lever which allows the barrel and barrel extension to be removed from the frame. For normal cleaning this is all that is necessary. To completely strip the

pistol an Allen wrench is required to remove the twin recoil springs from their housings. The bolt and cocking piece can then be broken down in their component parts for thorough cleaning. This particular Auto Mag has been slightly modified from the original design to make it even more durable than the first pistol brought out by Harry Sanford over a decade ago.

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ing had let go, the shooter was unscathed, and the pistol required only minor refitting to be put back in shooting order!

So let's set the records straight; the Auto Mag is a potent autoloading magnum, but it has to be treated with the same respect that any high power arm, be it rifle or pistol, should be accorded.

With this in mind I called on the expertise of Ron Reiber, ballistician for Hornady/Pacific/Frontier. The Hornady manual is one of the few that lists reloading data for the .44 Auto Mag cartridge. Ron confirmed that this was indeed a high performance cartridge and that both the pistol and the cartridge cases were superbly strong. He did state that the loading data in the Hornady manual should not be exceeded and should be carefully worked up to as there were too many variables in what is still, essentially, a wildcat cartridge.

To begin with, there is a plethora of both military and civilian brass available to form .44 Auto Mag cases from and the formed brass can vary tremendously in final case capacity. Play it safe! Start low and carefully work up to published data. One further note of caution—use current

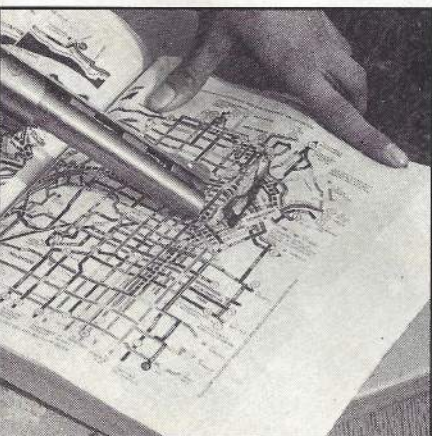
The massive Auto Mag magazine holds seven cartridges with room "up the spout" for one more to give it a substantial edge in firepower over the conventional wheelgun with only six rounds.



200-grain Speer, 240-grain Sierra and 240-grain Hornady FMJ were loaded in formed military brass and commercial CDM cases.



The Auto Mag demonstrated its ability to deliver lethal concentrations of .44 caliber projectiles into vital areas at combat ranges.



Speer's 240-grain full metal jacket bullets at 1,300 feet per second showed impressive penetration on phone books at point-blank range.

data, such as that from the Hornady or Hodgdon manuals and do not go back to decades-old material that has since been superseded.

But let's get back to Dirty Harry and his Auto Mag. What guns did he use in the *Sudden Impact* smash movie? In short, two custom-built pistols were assembled from a rare lot of parts still in the possession of Harry Sanford. These unique pistols were serial numbered Clint 1 and Clint 2, obviously in deference to Clint Eastwood. Clint

1 is a live-action pistol capable of shooting full power ammunition. Clint 2 was assembled from the same high quality parts, but subtly altered so that it would function with blank cartridges. After all, you don't really think Harry would waste a Screen Actor's Guild member, regardless of how nasty his celluloid character, do you?

The gun shown on this month's cover is Clint 2, the one actually used in the filming. Incidentally, it is valued at \$25,000 by its present owner. It has been altered to blank firing by fixing the receiver assembly so that it does not recoil as do the live firing guns. The recoil springs have been toned down and the bore is con-

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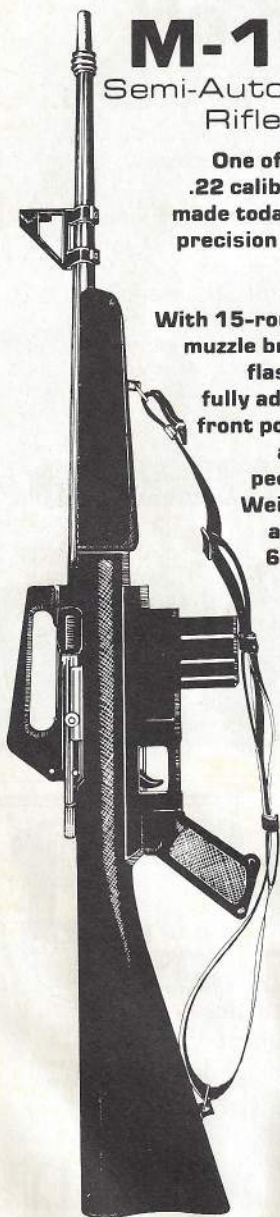
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stricted to utilize the gases from the blank rounds to cycle the action. Its appearance is identical with any other Auto Mag.

The Auto Mag is not currently in production and has not been offered for sale for several years. Total production was rather small, yet the Auto Mag offers a fertile field for collectors. The original Pasadena Auto Mag, so called because it was designed and built in Pasadena, California, was offered in .44 caliber only with a standard 6½-inch barrel. The first guns were serialized with the letter "A" prefix followed by the number. A few even had the owner's initials serving as part of the letter/number serialization. Then there were guns made at different factories in Southern California so some will be found with North Hollywood or El Monte markings. These later guns were chambered in either .44 or .357 Auto Mag calibers. The 6½-inch barrel remained standard on the .44s but the .357s could be had with 6½- or 8½-inch tubes. The longer .357 barrels did not carry the distinctive rib. Finally, there are some guns that carry High Standard or Lee Jurras logos. There were other variations and calibers so the list is almost endless. Even the company name changed over its production run. Initially it was called the Auto Mag Corp., then it was called the T.D.E. Corp., and a small handful were marked with the High Standard imprint. Suffice it to say it would be almost impossible to put together a complete collection of these arms.

History aside, many readers will, I am sure, want to know just what it is like to shoot this powerhouse. For one thing, when you first handle the Auto Mag you are impressed by its sheer size! The 6½-

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inch barreled pistols tip the scales at 57 ounces and the grip is a tad over two inches wide. It is obviously not in the hide-out gun class. The magazine capacity is seven rounds, with an extra one "up the spout," giving you two more rounds of firepower than the S&W revolver.

Not wishing to use up any of the small stock of factory ammunition still in my ammo locker, I turned to the loading bench as there was quite a supply of both CDM and brass formed from .308 hulls. These were segregated according to make and assembled on an RCBS Rock Chucker press using RCBS dies. Winchester/Western 296 propellant was selected for the powder and 200-grain Speer soft nose, 240-grain Sierra hollow point and 240-grain Speer full metal jacket bullets were used as

test projectiles. The loads were touched off with CCI large pistol primers.

In retrospect I believe that Magnum pistol primers would have been a better choice as chronograph figures showed that there was a considerable difference between the high and low velocity spread. Working up slowly from the Hornady data it was noticed that, predictably, there was a definite difference in the visual appearance of the primers in CDM cases and those in military brass, using the identical load. Those in the military brass, with their smaller capacity, were obviously being hammered with greater pressure.

Substituting the 240-grain Speer full metal jacket for the 240-grain Sierra hollow cavity also made a significant change in both velocity and the extreme spread of velocities. The Speer bullet must have both a heavier and stiffer jacket than that of the Sierra because velocity increased by an average of 34 fps over the same load with the Sierra bullet.

Because of the tremendous variety of options available when reloading the .44 Auto Mag, I do not feel that our test loading data should be reported. Refer to the Hodgdon or Hornady manuals and follow their advice, start low, and work up your personal loads carefully using those components that you feel will give you optimum performance. Incidentally, our loads did not match up to the velocities obtained with the older, and much hotter, data. The best we got from the 240-grain bullet was 1,301 average fps while the 200-grain pill clocked in at 1,305 fps.

These test loads were quite a bit under the velocities published by Hornady, possibly because of our use of a standard force primer, but they certainly had no flies on them in the performance department.

Penetration, expansion and accuracy were all you could expect from a magnum handgun. Concrete blocks literally disintegrated under the impact of either the 240-grain hollow point or full metal jacketed bullets. I really don't know what firing into a plastic jug full of water illustrates, but it is spectacular, and, if you are using a "ho hum" round, you just punch a neat little hole which dribbles out the liquid contents. In contrast, the Auto Mag blasts the jug into an impressive geyser of water coupled with a shower of fragments of the jug which certainly implies that you have reached a level of hydrostatic shock that eludes more mundane rounds.

The Auto Mag demands, if you will, a Dirty Harry tight-fisted grip. If you hold this blaster loosely, and allow it and your arms to recoil wildly, you are courting a jam. It would appear that the Auto Mag operates best at near peak pressures that are coupled with a firm, double-fisted grasp of the pistol. You must be in control and give this magnum something to recoil against.

It certainly does not take a superman to shoot an Auto Mag. Ten years ago this magazine ran an article on this same pistol that showed a nine-year-old youngster,

who happened to have a number of stitches on one finger, touching off full power loads with aplomb. And this was not just a single round—he begged to finish off the entire magazine!

So there you are. The Auto Mag has had a checkered history that might well have been rejuvenated by Dirty Harry's latest film. Looking into *Guns & Ammo's* crystal ball we see the distinct possibility that Dirty Harry might well turn in his S&W for the exotic Auto Mag, which means that the silver screen might be even more explosive than it has been in the past.

But where does that leave you? Is there an Auto Mag in *your* future? Frankly, we do not know. Harry Sanford has no plans to bring back the pistol he nurtured so many years ago. The Auto Mag is not ca-

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pable of being mass-produced; it demands a certain amount of tender loving care, and that does not come cheaply. Any time you have to lavish skilled, personal attention on a firearm you put it into the custom, or at least semi-custom class.

In an exclusive interview with *Guns & Ammo*, Gale Weaver of Sirius Inc., has advised us that he has personally contacted Harry Sanford with a proposition that could put the Auto Mag back in production as a strictly custom arm. Gale was involved with the original Pasadena Auto Mag and has a thorough handle on the expertise necessary to put such a piece back into production. If this does materialize you might see Auto Mags, with a new range of serial numbers beginning with Clint 3! This proposed special edition run could be available at your dealers sometime in the next twelve months.

This latest rejuvenation of the Auto Mag, if indeed it does manage another miraculous rebirth, will not be your average plinker, or even a typical long-range handgun, as the projected price is now \$2,500 for what must be considered a Dirty Harry commemorative edition.

Any requests for information on "Clint" pistols should be sent to: Auto Mag, P.O. Box 80242, World Way Postal Center, Los Angeles, CA 90080.

Will there be regular Auto Mags available to everyday shooters? Alas, the *G&A* crystal ball just got a sudden case of smog, low clouds and mist. To be frank, we do not know.

Until the Santana winds of Southern California blow away the ashes of this perennial phoenix to reveal yet another stainless steel image arising, perhaps with Dirty Harry holding it firmly in his grasp, there is no sure way to predict whether or not there will be an Auto Mag in your future.

We hope that the Auto Mag will be revived because it is certainly an arm that deserves another chance to prove its worth in a new and even more exciting, gun-wise, decade.

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