

AUTOMAG

COLLECTING AND SHOOTING THE ARISTOCRAT OF HANDGUNS

The author's .44 Automag, below, with extra .357 Automag barrel, top. Also shown are .357 bottleneck cartridges, left, and .44 cartridges. The grips are custom laminated walnut (Rick Maples).



On the left is the author's .357 Automag barrel and ammunition, and on the right is his .44 Automag barrel and ammunition (Rick Maples).



The author fires his .44 Automag. As you can see, the muzzle flash is impressive. Here the author is shooting .44 Automag ammunition with 22.0 grains of H110 powder to push the 240-grain hollow point bullet out the barrel at a velocity of 1,350 feet per second (Paula Maples)

**BY
RICK MAPLES**

It has been said many times: "the only thing that separates the men from the boys is the price of their toys." That statement certainly applies to this author, but with the addition of "how much fun you have with your toys."

For me, half the fun of collecting Automags is being able to shoot them. Like so many others, when the Automag was being produced in the early 1970s to early 1980s, I was interested in other things. Years later, when

the prices were high and availability is low, I got interested.

Finding Automags, original accessories, ammo, parts, pictures, articles etc., is indeed challenging. But when you do find these rare items, it is certainly exciting.

The Automag was the idea turned into reality of Harry Sanford back in 1971. They were first produced in Pasadena, California, and later moved to various locations and produced under different names. This makes research

and collecting of these fine handguns indeed enjoyable. To add to the excitement, this was the first all stainless production gun, it was also the first magnum semiauto production gun and two new cartridges were conceived, the .44 and .357 Automag. CDH, Norma and Super Vel produced limited quantities of ammo. This makes the ammo not only hard to get, but a challenge for the collector.

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The author's daughter firing the .44 Automag for the very first time. She stated afterward that she truly enjoyed the experience (Rick Maples).

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Automag were produced, the production guns were all in .44 Automag (See Automag, The Pasadena Days, by Bruce Stark, POB 3733 Van Nuys, CA 91407; \$40 + \$5 shipping.) All stainless steel, black plastic grips that were fully checkered, and a ventilated rib along the 6 1/2-inch barrel gave the Automag an aristocratic look in the handgun world.

Unfortunately after only about 3,300 of these magnificent pistols were built, Automag went bankrupt. This could have been the end of the Automag, but fortunately the company came back to life under the name of TDE (Trust Deeds Estates).

Not only did TDE produce about 4,900 Automags, but it spawned an array of variations. Now you were not only able to purchase your .44 Automag with 6 1/2-inch vent rib barrel, but

could also purchase the same in .357 Automag. Or just purchase the barrel and with a simple, easy, barrel and ammo change, you can shoot either caliber using the same frame, bolt, clip, etc. This was accomplished by necking down the .44 Automag case and reaming it to accept a .357 bullet. Even though it was advertised that you can just switch barrels, and this will work, it is recommended that you have a bolt matched to that switched barrel, which is switched with it. This will result in the lugs of the bolt and lugs in the barrel "wearing in together."

You could also order from TDE an optional 8 1/2-inch or 10 1/2-inch non ribbed barrel for your Automag.

High Standard became interested in the Automag and had about 500 made with their name put on the barrel. The only ones of these I've ever seen were the 6 1/2-inch vent-rib barrels.

Lee Jurras, of Super Vel ammo fame,

was so impressed with the Automag, he became the world wide distributor for Automag. The Automags Mr. Jurras distributed had a "Lion Head" logo behind the barrel markings. Also Jurras had TDE assign special serial numbers, beginning with "LEJ" (for Lee E. Jurras), to 100 .357 Automags and 100 .44 Automags. To distinguish between the two calibers, there was an "X" following each of these special serial numbers for the .44 Automags. There were also a very small number of other special Automags made. The "Backpacker" had a 4 1/2-inch barrel. The "Alaskan" had a 12-inch barrel and shoulder stock. The "International" had an 8 1/2-inch scoped barrel and stainless steel shoulder stock. These specially made Automags are very rare.

TDE was later merged with OMC (Ordnance Manufacturing Corp.) and after that, became AMT (Arcadia Machine & Tool). The last production

Automags were made in 1981. But that's not the end to the Automag story.

A new company, Automag, Inc., a division of Galena Industries, bought AMT recently, and is producing a special run of 1,000 Harry Sanford Commemorative Automags.

Shooting collectable ammo used to be expensive, if you could find it. But soon one of the major ammunition manufacturers, Cor-Bon, plans to be producing .44 Automag ammo. For those of you who like to "roll your own," a major supplier of brass, Starline (1-800-280-6660), will also soon be making the .44 Automag brass for reloaders.

The following are some hints to help keep your Automag purring.

Not all moving parts need to be oiled on the Automag. There are several parts for which oil may restrict performance. One should not oil the guide rod threads or the helicoils in the cocking piece where the guide rod threads screw into. If these areas are lubricated, when firing the Automag, there will be a tendency for the guide rods (you have two guide rods in the Automag) to back out of the cocking piece. If this occurs, there will be a very good chance the ears on the back of the bolt will break, and then your Automag is down. Even after firing a few rounds, one needs to check the guide rods for tightness until you feel confident they will not back out. There have been a number of Automag owners who have broken their bolts because they did not know this.

Do not use Loc-Tite because when field stripping your Automag for cleaning, when the guide rods come out so may your helicoils from the cocking piece.

The firing pin moves by inertia. Oil on the firing pin or spring may cause your Automag not to fire.

Check the ejector. It should move easily and be flush with the rim of the bolt face. If it projects beyond the bolt face, jams could occur.

When shooting the Automag, have a firm two handed grip or a straight arm. The Automag needs something solid to recoil against or you may be courting a jam.

I found the .44 Automag to be a very exciting pistol to shoot. The recoil is not as much as one would think, but it is still very impressive. The noise and the flash is tremendous (I have been mostly shooting reloads) Forty-Four Automags have been used on buffalo, wild boar, antelope, bear and deer with very good results.

I have found my .44 Automag to be inherently very accurate. I recently shot a 2-inch, 7-shot group (all the rounds in one 7-round magazine) at 25 yards. This was reloaded ammunition.

Perhaps this very fine handgun is making a comeback. I for one, sure hope it does. **ASG**

