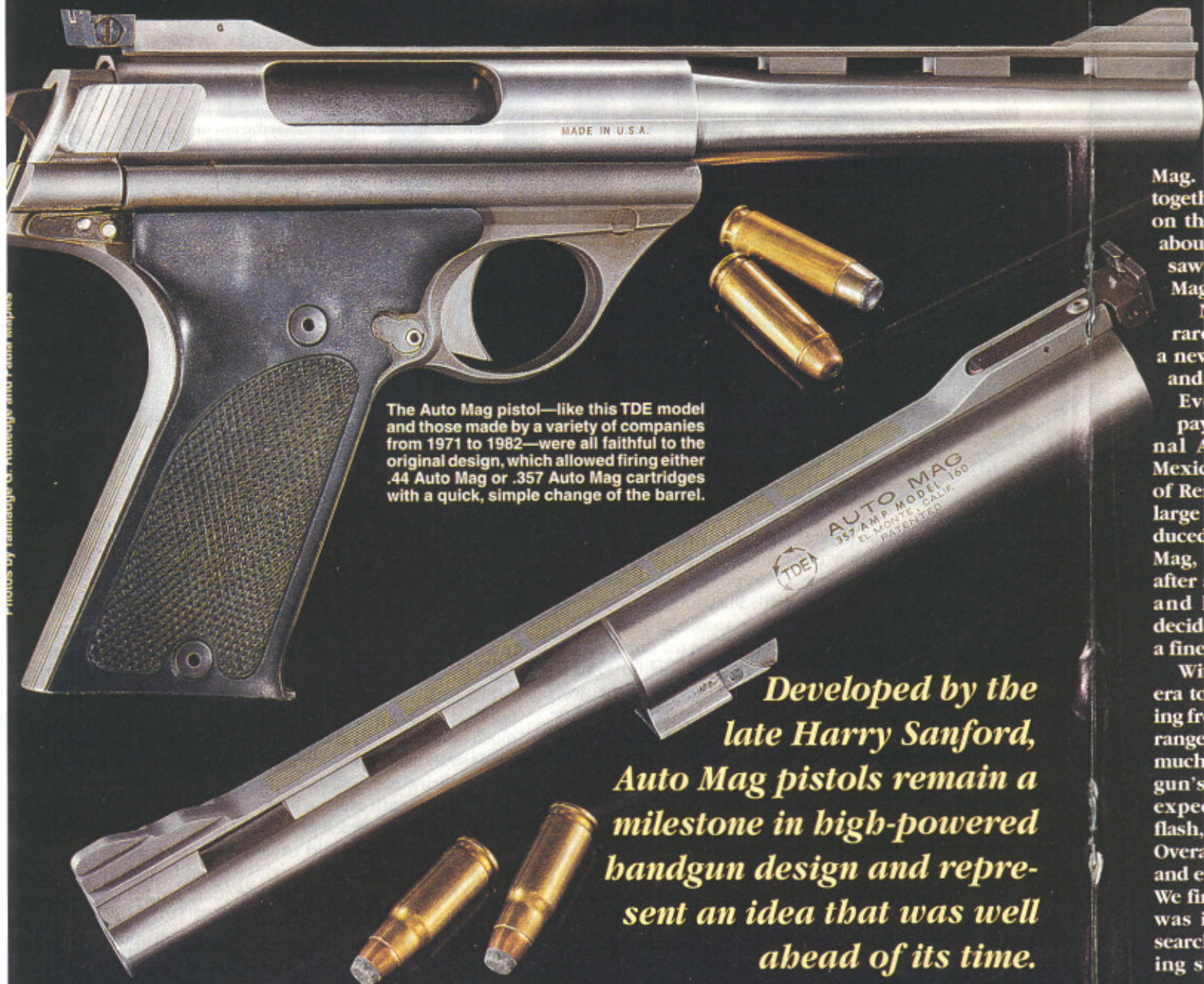


# in search of THE .44 AUTO MAG

By Rick Maples



The Auto Mag pistol—like this TDE model and those made by a variety of companies from 1971 to 1982—were all faithful to the original design, which allowed firing either .44 Auto Mag or .357 Auto Mag cartridges with a quick, simple change of the barrel.

*Developed by the late Harry Sanford, Auto Mag pistols remain a milestone in high-powered handgun design and represent an idea that was well ahead of its time.*

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**R**EMEMBER reading gun magazines back in the early 1970s and occasionally seeing pictures of a large, semi-auto magnum pistol. My interest at that time was in other types of firearms, so I simply gave the ads a brief look and went on. Some 25 years later, however, I found myself becoming more and more fascinated with the big gun every time I came across it in an old magazine. As I started checking prices on the few that were for sale, I found the going rate was \$2,000—a lot of money for a pistol. Besides, who wanted a gun that was no longer made and took obsolete ammunition? Somehow, it didn't seem to matter. I was hooked on the .44 Auto Mag.

So off I went trying to find out everything I could about the pistol, which had also been made in .357 Auto Mag. Before I knew it, I had put together quite a bit of information on this fascinating gun and, after about a year of watching prices, I saw an ad for an unfired .44 Auto Mag and took the plunge.

Now the proud owner of a rare and expensive pistol, I had a new challenge: finding the rare and expensive ammunition for it.

Eventually, I was successful, paying \$85 for one box of original Auto Mag ammo made in Mexico by CDM, then a subsidiary of Remington, as part of the only large lot of factory ammo ever produced. Norma later made .44 Auto Mag, but dropped it in 1981. So, after a year of enjoying looking at and handling the Auto Mag, I decided that half the fun of owning a fine gun is being able to shoot it.

With my wife manning the camera to record the first round roaring from the pistol in our back yard range, we fired the Auto Mag, and much to my surprise, I found the gun's recoil to be milder than I expected. The noise and muzzle flash, however, were tremendous. Overall, it was the most impressive and enjoyable gun I had ever fired. We fired 14 rounds that day, and it was indeed enjoyable. Now the search is on for more ammo, reloading supplies, spare parts, acces-



Factory Auto Mag cartridges were made by Cartuchos Deportivos Mexico or CDM. The .357 cases were necked down from .44 Auto Mag brass. Norma also loaded .44 Auto Mag.

sories, pictures and articles, etc. After all, that's part of the fun of collecting and shooting rare guns.

Not many guns are truly ahead of their time, but the Auto Mag is

one that was. It was the first semi-automatic magnum production gun and was the first all-stainless production gun. The Auto Mag concept also gave birth to two new cartridges: the .44 Auto Mag and .357 Auto Mag.

The genesis of the Auto Mag however, was not without its problems. Bringing such an idea into full production is no easily accomplished. Nevertheless, in 1971, Auto Mag developer Harry Sanford overcame those challenges and opened a factory—Auto Mag

Corp.—in Pasadena, California. Guns were made in both .44 Auto Mag and .357 Auto Mag, and changing calibers required only the additional barrel and cartridges. The same frame, magazine and bolt could be used on both. Unfortunately, after producing about 3,300 pistols, AMC went bankrupt.

Trust Deed Estates then took over and set up in North Hollywood California, later moving to El Monte California. During this time, High Standard had a number of Auto Mags made with its name on the guns. Also, Lee Jurras, of Super Vel ammunition fame, commissioned Auto Mags to be custom-made to his specifications. Later, Ordnance Manufacturing Corp. joined TDE and produced a few more guns (see accompanying table) and, finally, Arcadia Machine and Tool became the final resting place for the Auto Mag.

From 1971 to 1982, about 9,500 Auto Mags were made by different manufacturers and in different variations, which makes the gun perfect as the subject of research and as a goal for the collector.

In the end, Harry Sanford's massive, magnum autoloading pistol never garnered the appeal necessary to manufacture it in large numbers, but for those who believe in his concept, there is still only one gun to have: Auto Mag.

*Editor's Note: The .44 Auto Mag is back in limited production. A limited-edition Harry Sanford Commemorative .44 Auto Mag pistol—serial numbered from 1 to 1000—is now being produced for Arcadia Machine and Tool by Galena Industries (Dept. AR) 5463 Diaz St., Irwindale, CA 91706*

### THE AUTO MAG AT A GLANCE

**CALIBER:** .44 and .357 Auto Mag.  
**CONSTRUCTION:** stainless steel  
**STOCKS:** black plastic and custom wood  
**BARREL LENGTHS:** 6½" ribbed (most common)  
 8½" and 10½" non-ribbed.  
**WEIGHT:** .44 Auto Mag—3.6 pounds with 6½" ribbed barrel  
**MAGAZINE CAPACITY:** seven

#### MANUFACTURERS AND VARIATIONS:

Auto Mag Corp. (AMC): Known as Pasadena Model  
 Trust Deed Estates (TDE): Known as North Hollywood Model (first location)  
 (TDE): Known as El Monte Model (second location)  
 (TDE): Variations: High Standard Model  
 Lee Jurras Model  
 Trust Deed Estates/Ordnance Mfg. Corp.(TDC/OMC): Known as "B" series  
 Arcadia Machine and Tool (AMT): Known as "C" series  
 Last company to produce the .44 and .357 Auto Mag

#### MODEL NUMBERS:

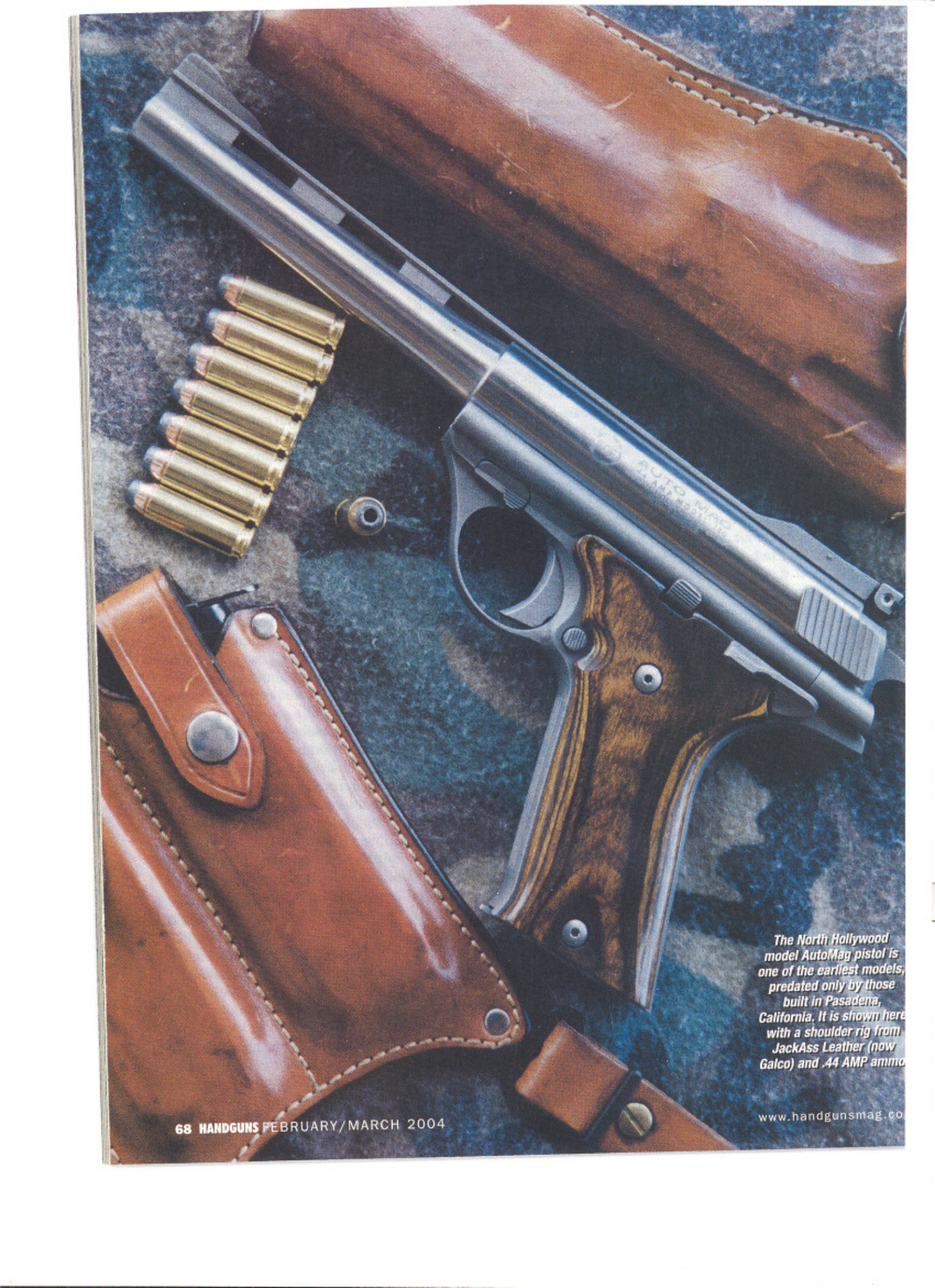
180 (.44 Auto Mag) and 160 (.357 Auto Mag). TDC/OMC and AMT changed 180 Model No. to 280 and 160 Model No. to 260. Jurras Models all Model 100.

#### SERIAL NUMBERS:

Pasadena A0001-A3300  
 North Hollywood A3400-A05015  
 El Monte A05016-A08300  
 High Standard 132 Auto Mags marked High Standard with "H" in serial number and 368 with "A" in serial number.  
 Lee Jurras LEJ001X-LEJ100X (.44 Auto Mag), LEJ001-LEF100 (.357 Auto Mag)  
 "B" Series B00001-B00370  
 "C" Series 50 Auto Mags with "C" serial number prefix  
 50 Auto Mags with serial number Last 1-Last 50

**DATES OF MANUFACTURE:** 1971 to 1982

**TOTAL BUILT:** Fewer than 9,500

A detailed photograph of a North Hollywood model AutoMag pistol. The pistol is the central focus, featuring a stainless steel slide and frame with a dark wood-grain grip. The slide is marked with "AUTO-MAG" and ".44 AMP". To the left of the pistol, a shoulder rig is attached to a brown leather shoulder bag. A magazine filled with .44 AMP ammunition is positioned above the pistol. The entire setup is laid out on a dark, textured surface. The lighting highlights the metallic sheen of the gun and the texture of the leather and wood.

*The North Hollywood model AutoMag pistol is one of the earliest models, predated only by those built in Pasadena, California. It is shown here with a shoulder rig from JackAss Leather (now Galco) and .44 AMP ammo*

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