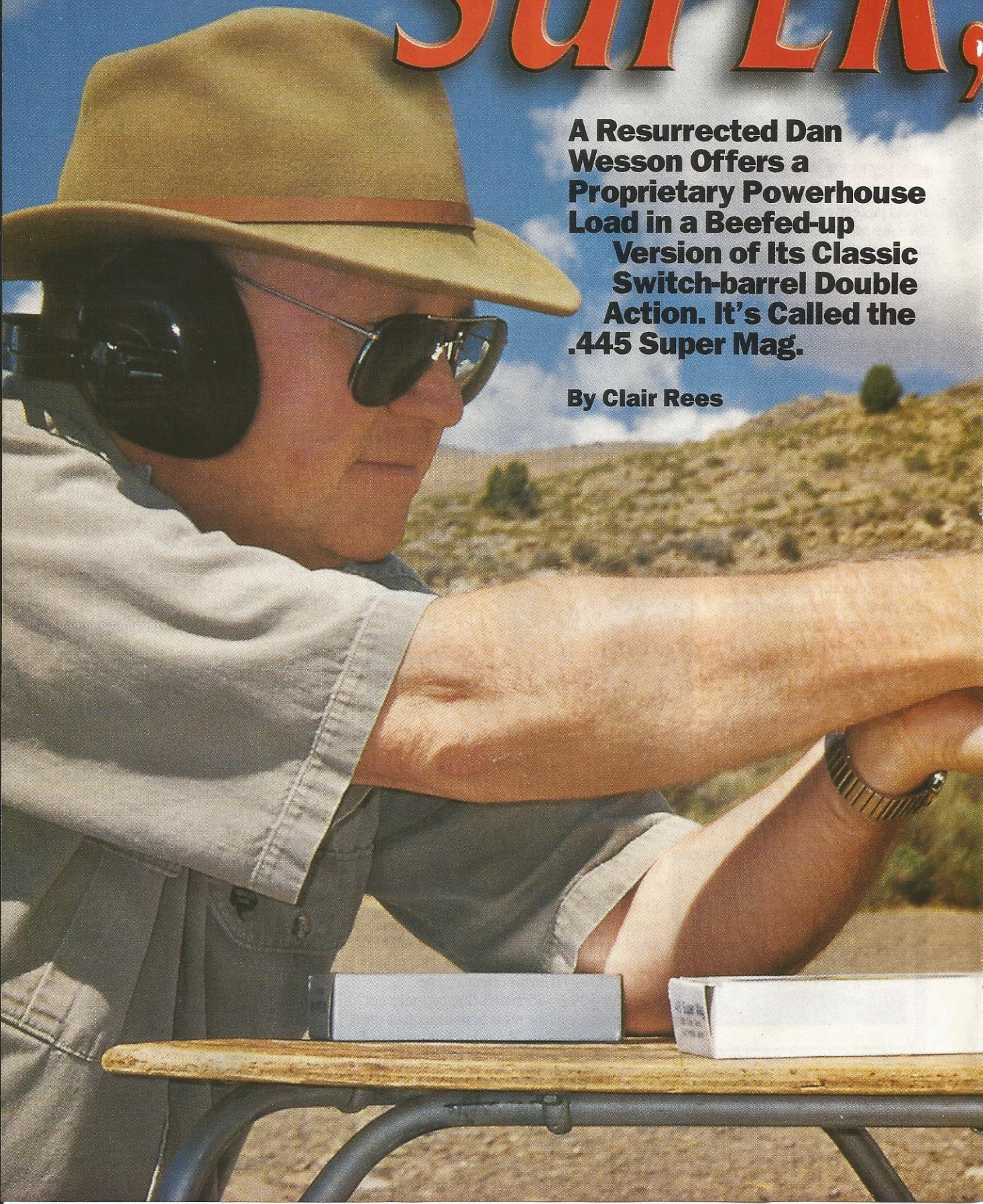


SUPER,

A Resurrected Dan Wesson Offers a Proprietary Powerhouse Load in a Beefed-up Version of Its Classic Switch-barrel Double Action. It's Called the .445 Super Mag.

By Clair Rees



Yet STOCK

In 1968, Dan Wesson—great-grandson of Smith & Wesson founder Daniel B. Wesson—launched Dan Wesson Firearms. He succeeded in creating accurate, innovative revolvers. His trademark? A wide selection of barrel lengths

and shrouds that could be quickly interchanged (within caliber) on a single frame. I acquired an early Dan Wesson .357 Magnum with both 4 and 8-inch barrels and shot the heck out of it. My son James “adopted” the gun several years ago and



The .445 Super Mag cartridge (right) is some $\frac{1}{8}$ inch longer than its .44 Magnum stable mate. Both cartridges can be fired in the big Dan Wesson revolver.

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continues to shoot it regularly.

While Dan Wesson made very good revolvers, the company's fortunes waxed and waned. New owners came and went and the company—then known as Wesson Firearms Co., Inc.—ceased operations in 1995. The following year, Robert W. Serva purchased the patents, trademarks and other assets, and the new Dan Wesson Firearms Co. was born.

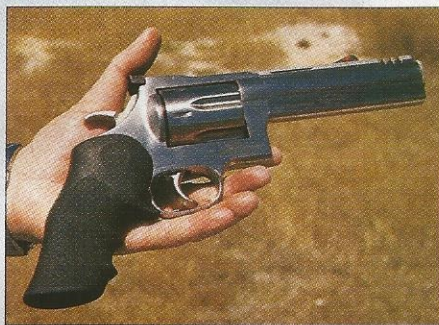
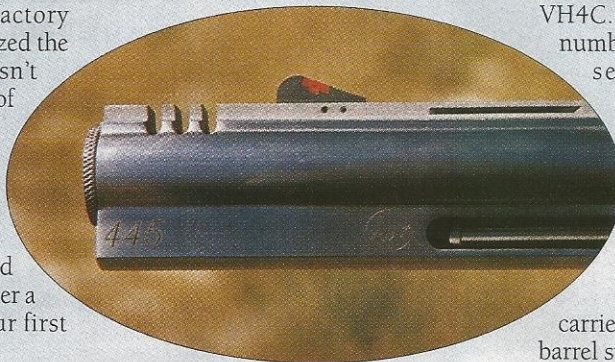
"After settling into our new factory near Norwich, New York, we realized the old tooling we'd purchased wasn't good enough to produce the kind of guns we had in mind," Serva says. "We scrapped the old machinery and started over with new CNC mills, lathes and other equipment. This allowed us to build guns to tighter tolerances and to significantly upgrade quality. After a lot of hard work, we shipped our first revolver in December, 1997.

"Fit and finish of the new guns were excellent, and they functioned beautifully," he adds. "Newly purchased YAG laser equipment dramatically improved the way serial numbers and other markings looked. We were extremely proud of our first production run."

Production remained low in 1998. The company was busy training new employees and refining the manufacturing and assembly process. New polishing equipment was also added. Now, the company appears to be over the hump. Guns are finally being produced and shipped in quantity, and a handful of new models have been added to the lineup with additional introductions on the horizon.

I recently received one of Dan

Wesson's flagship models for testing. The New Generation large-frame revolver was chambered for the .445 Super Mag cartridge. The elongated .44 Magnum round was designed by Elgin Gates to provide better knockdown power on 200-yard metal silhouettes. With its $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch longer case, the .445 Super Mag handily outperforms the .44 Magnum.



Recoil tamers: This .445 Super Mag (above bottom) in 4-inch trim sports Hogue Monogrips and a heavy compensated barrel. The compensated shroud extends 1½ inches forward of the true muzzle. That front sight blade (top) is interchangeable.

Both cartridges (and the .44 Special) can be used in the gun.

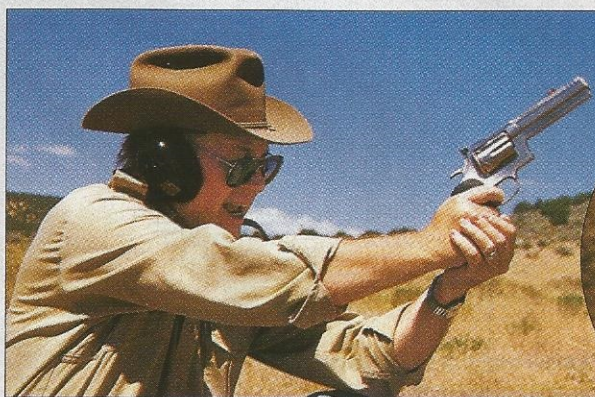
The big stainless steel revolver arrived with two barrel assemblies. One featured a 4-inch barrel with a 4¾-inch heavy shroud. The shroud sported a ventilated rib and a 3-slot compensator positioned well ahead of the front sight blade. With the barrel screwed into the frame, the shroud extends a full 1½ inches forward of the true muzzle. A knurled ring at the front of the shroud serves as a false muzzle.

With this barrel assembly installed, the revolver becomes the Model 7445-VH4C. The key to Dan Wesson model numbers? The first number (7) in this series identifies the gun as a stainless steel model. The next three numbers (445) designate caliber, while VH4 indicates barrel length (4 inches) and a Ventilated Heavy shroud. The final letter in the series, "C," stands for "compensated."

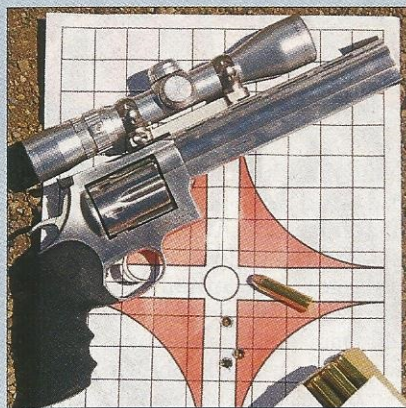
The other barrel assembly carries a VH8 designation—an 8-inch barrel surrounded by a heavy ventilated rib. The rib was drilled and tapped to accept a Burris stainless-steel base. I promptly mounted a Bausch & Lomb 2-6x Elite handgun scope to the base. Scoped, this outfit weighed a substantial 83 ounces—nearly 5½ pounds. With the 4-inch Ventilated Heavy Compensated barrel in place, weight drops to 55 ounces.

Few shooters can pack such heft at their a belt without listing 30 degrees to starboard. A Dan Wesson shoulder rig accompanying the big pistol solved the problem. The articulated holster is open at the muzzle to accommodate any barrel length, but it couldn't swallow the Bausch & Lomb scope.

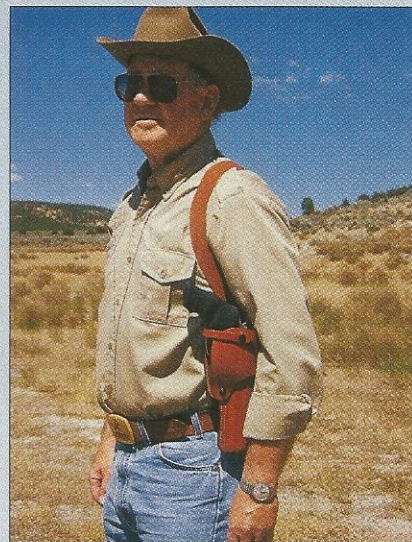
Bob Serva told me the new guns use the same basic design as earlier Dan



Rees tests the unscoped 4-inch-barreled version of Dan Wesson's revolver from the sitting position. The cylinder capacity of the .445 Super Mag (inset) is a standard six rounds. The ejector rod, incidentally, proved up to the task of fully kicking out those elongated empties.



With the author employing the 4-inch version from a sitting position, the Dan Wesson Super Mag punched five-shot, 2½-inch groups at 25 yards (left) with 250-grain ammo. At 50 yards from a sandbagged rest using the 8-inch scoped barrel, his best effort was a 1½-inch three-shot group (above) using the 300-grain factory loads.



Why hang this heavyweight on your belt? Dan Wesson's shoulder rig made toting the hefty handgun easy.

Wesson revolvers. Barrel threads are still compatible with older frames, which means you can mix and match new and old assemblies. The big difference is that tolerances are much tighter now, thanks to modern CNC machinery. Barrels are now made of 416R stainless steel.

Changing to a different length barrel is easy (2, 4, 6 and 8-inch tubes are available). First, make sure the gun is unloaded, then use the palm-sized tool provided to back out the forward barrel nut. Next, pull the shroud forward and off the barrel and unscrew the barrel itself. Reassembly is done in reverse order, with one additional step required. As you screw the new barrel in place, slide the lightweight shim provided between barrel and cylinder. Continue to rotate the barrel until it exerts slight pressure on the gauge. Finally, slide the shim free and install the shroud. The gauge insures sufficient gap between barrel and cylinder to prevent binding, while minimizing the potential for spitting lead. For standard calibers, this gap is set at .006 inch; Super Mag revolvers require a narrower .002-inch opening.

In addition to quick-switch barrel assemblies, the Dan Wesson design offers another useful advantage. Barrels are threaded front and back. When the barrel is locked in place, opposing pressure is exerted at both ends. Constant tension reduces flexing and vibration, promoting better accuracy.

Cylinder lockup is very positive. A strong forward latch locks the crane solidly to the frame. Positioning this latch forward of the cylinder also prevents it from biting the shooter's thumb. When the cylinder is closed, a springloaded ball bearing in the frame snaps into a recess at the rear of the extractor assembly. This additional lockup

point helps keep the cylinder centered.

Another plus is the unique grip frame extension. A variety of one-piece grips can be quickly installed with the aid of a single bolt. My revolver came supplied with Hogue's hand-filling rubber Monogrip—an excellent choice for this big-bore hunting gun.

Although my old Dan Wesson had a notably smooth action, the new Super Mag operates even more smoothly. The

wide, deeply checkered hammer spur sports a pleasingly low profile and falls handily under the thumb. The firing pin is frame-mounted, and a transfer-bar safety prevents contact between hammer and firing pin unless the trigger is pulled.

Cocking the gun for single-action shooting produces a trio of muffled clicks. Everything about this gun feels bank-vault solid. The single-action trigger breaks crisply at 3½ pounds. There's an adjustable stop to eliminate possible backlash. The double-action pull went off my 12-pound scale, but the trigger's wide, smooth face made it easy to control. Dan Wesson guns have always been noted for short lock times—this, too, contributes to accuracy.

How accurate? I had a generous supply of Dan Wesson factory loads with 250- and 300-grain JHP bullets, so I packed up the gun and ammo and headed for the desert.

Before I started perforating targets, I fired several rounds to get the feel of the gun. It was my first experience with a .445 Super Mag, and I wanted to become familiar with its recoil prior to shooting test groups. I began with the 4-inch compensated barrel in place and was pleasantly surprised by the low recoil. This gun was a pussycat! I wasn't sure how potent the ammo was, but the gun didn't buck and roar. It behaved much like any heavyweight .44 Magnum.

When I began punching paper, the gun consistently produced five-round groups measuring 2¾ to 2½ inches between centers. This shooting wasn't done from the bench, but from a solid sitting position at 25 yards. I was very pleased with the result.

Then I switched to the Bausch & Lomb-scoped 8-inch Heavy Vent barrel.

| SPECIFICATIONS | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| DAN WESSON SUPER MAG | |
| Model: | 7445-VH8/7445-VH4c Super Mag Revolver |
| Maker: | Dan Wesson Firearms Dept. GA 119 Kemper Lane Norwich, NY 13815 dwessongun@aol.com |
| Action: | Double-action revolver |
| Caliber: | .445 Super Magnum |
| Capacity: | 6 |
| Cylinder length: | 2½ inches |
| Barrel assemblies: | 8 inches (with Vent Heavy shroud) 4 inches (with 4½-inch Vent Heavy Compensated shroud) |
| Overall length: | 14½ inches (with 8-inch barrel) |
| Weight: | 72 ounces (with 8-inch Vent Heavy barrel) 55 ounces (with 4-inch Vent Heavy Compensated barrel) |
| Finish: | Matte stainless steel |
| Sights: | Fully adjustable Patridge-style target sights (Bausch & Lomb 2-6x Elite 3000 mounted for tests) |
| Grips: | Hogue Monogrip |
| Price: | \$899 |

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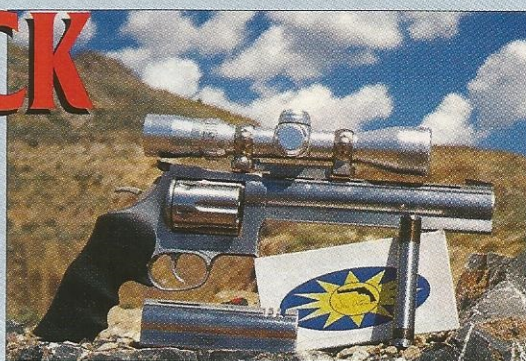
This time I fired from a sandbagged rest and doubled the distance to 50 yards. In this configuration, the big Dan Wesson is a pure hunting gun, so I triggered three-shot groups. The 300-grain loads produced 1 1/4-inch groups, while the 250-grain fodder went 1 1/2 inches center-to-center—excellent accuracy from a magnum wheelgun.

So, how much punch and hustle does the .445 Super Mag churn up? D.J. Bushman, a Dan Wesson consultant engaged in developing new loads for the company, had warned me that the factory fodder was general purpose ammo. It was loaded too mild to push the big gun to its full potential.

When I later chronographed the gun, I

found the 300-grain hunting load exited the 8-inch barrel at an average velocity of 1,292 fps. The 250-grain silhouette loads moved out at 1,481 fps. That's a full 200 fps faster than 240-grain .44 Magnum ammo from a similar-length tube. On the other hand, 300-grain .445 Super Mag loads bested 300-grain .44 Magnum performance by just 42 fps. When I tried 240-grain .44 Remington Magnum softpoints in the .445, velocities averaged 1,379 fps from the 8-inch tube.

The Hornady Handbook of Cartridge Reloading (14th edition) lists 200-grain



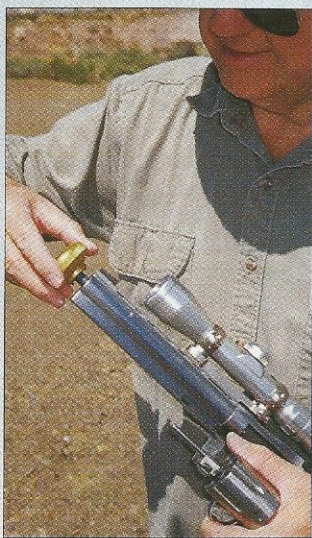
The Dan Wesson advantage, of course, is the interchangeable barrel system. Now it's been married to a proprietary heavyweight cartridge—the .445 Super Mag. The result is an exceptionally versatile hunting handgun.

.445 Super Mag loads topping 1,700 fps and 240-grain loadings in the 1,600 fps range. With 300-grain Hornady XTP hollowpoints, 1,400 fps speeds can be safely achieved—provided you start with milder loads and work up while keeping an eye open for signs of excessive pressure. D.J. tells me he's loaded Barnes 200-grain molycoated bullets to 1,900 fps without encountering pressure problems.

This is a very sturdy gun handloaders should love. I was highly impressed with Dan Wesson's new .445 Super Mag. It's a big, strong revolver with enough heft to soak up magnum recoil. Accuracy was excellent, and quality appeared to be topnotch. The ability to swap barrel lengths (and shroud configurations) at a moment's notice is a unique feature many appreciate.

Dan Wesson Pistol Packs are now being shipped, and I'm told Hunter Packs should be available by the time you read this. Pistol Packs feature smaller-framed .22, .32 H&R and .357 Magnum guns complete with a hard carrying case and four different barrel assemblies. Hunter Packs are built around large-frame .357, .414 and .445 Super Mag revolvers and include a trio of interchangeable barrels.

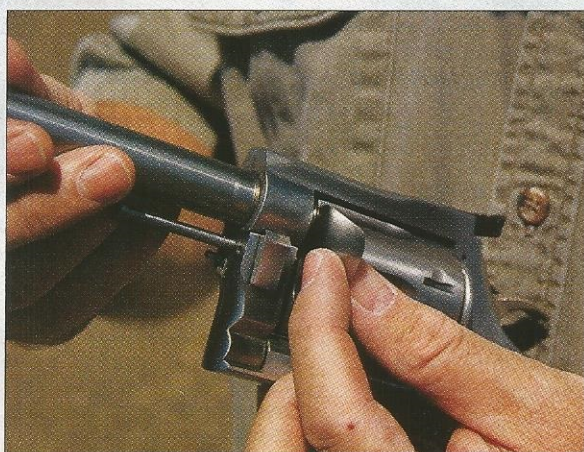
Dan Wesson's Super Mag may discourage some buyers with its \$899 price tag. It's a big investment—but shooters looking for a quality hunting handgun with serious punch should give it a close look. 🐾



The first step in switching barrels is to remove the front barrel nut with the Dan Wesson tool.



Next, pull the shroud forward and clear of the barrel.



Finally, unscrew the barrel itself (left). Once a new barrel is installed, use the factory supplied shim (right) to ensure that the gap dimension between cylinder in barrel is correct.