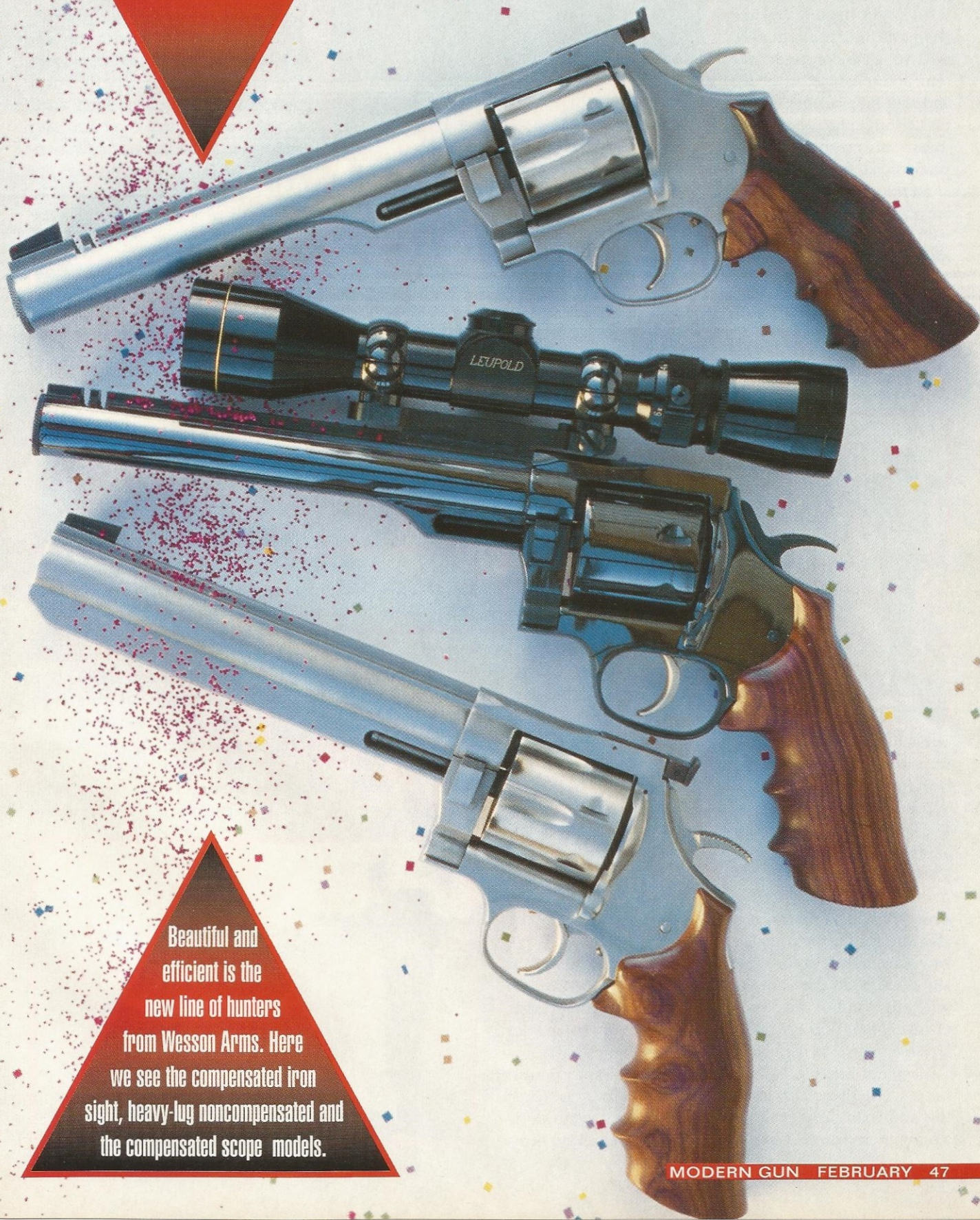


WESSON'S NEW FIXED HUNTER SERIES

by Jim Gosnell

Action photos by Robert Buckwalter



Beautiful and efficient is the new line of hunters from Wesson Arms. Here we see the compensated iron sight, heavy-lug noncompensated and the compensated scope models.

Wesson Firearms is, with the publication of this article, announcing the offering of a new line of handguns designed with the hunter in mind. These guns are set up with fixed barrels (rather than the interchangeable system), a fabulous sight system, interchangeable grips, and will be available in several configurations and calibers. This makes for a fine professional system.

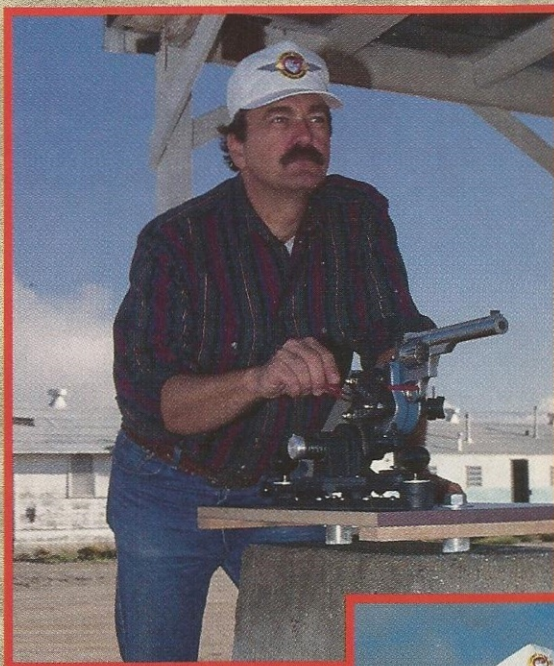
Mention Wesson Arms to anyone even slightly familiar with handguns and they will most likely think of interchangeable barrels, barrel shrouds, special barrel

Author gets his jollies by blasting a .44 through a two-liter bottle of soda pop that he apparently was not fond of. ▼



wrenches and leaf gauges to measure cylinder gap. It has been the trademark for Wesson Arms since Dan Wesson was fired from Smith & Wesson in the early 1960s and left to start his own company, Dan Wesson Arms. Wesson firearms are also famous for their quality and outstanding accuracy, so much so that they have literally dominated the silhouette competition for years. So with this kind of success, why rock the boat and offer change? Simple. The world changes, and smart companies are able to foresee the needs and desires of consumers.

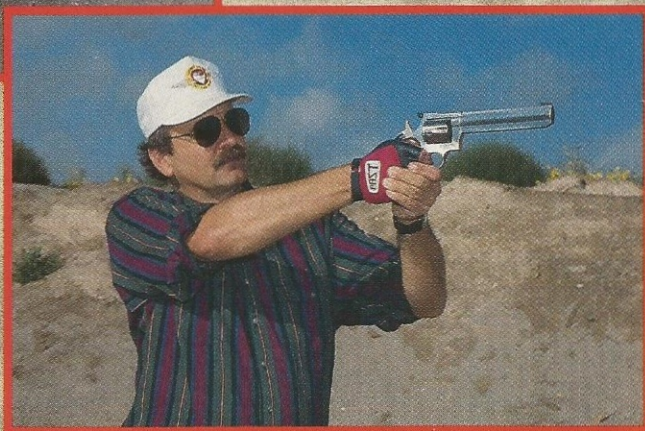
Handgun hunting has always been somewhat popular, but it is entering a new age with new and improved sights, the availability of better bullets, and the recognition by ammunition manufacturers of the need to now load heav-



◀ *The author prepares to touch off a compensated iron-sight pistol in a Ransom test. This is the only true way to effectively test the pistol and ammunition for accuracy.*

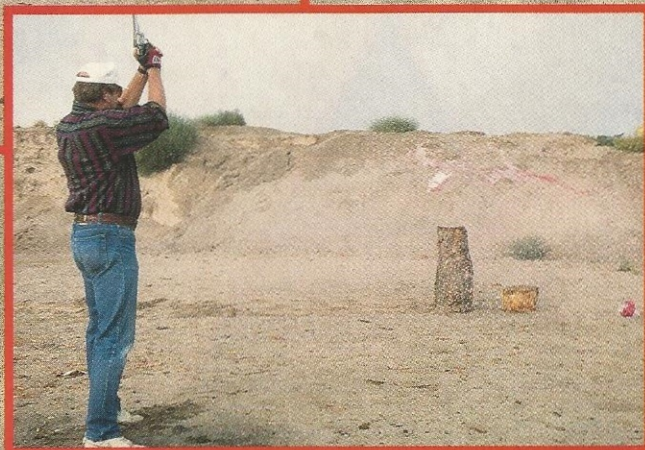
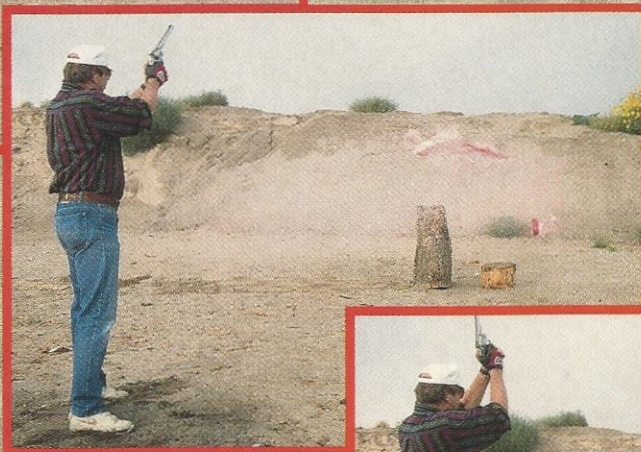
ier handgun bullets. Add this up and it equals a real shot in the arm for handgun hunting. There is also the fact that some people, and understandably so, just don't want to mess with setting the barrel gap and would rather have a profession-

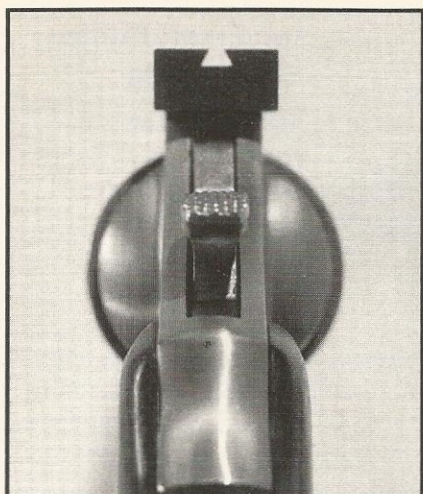
The author prepares to drop the hammer on the noncompensated lugged pistol. ▼



al do it. A considerable number of hunters spend a lot of time "tuning" their hunting gun, and once it is set up they do not want to change it. A removable barrel is of little use in such a case.

I received the company's only three preproduction prototypes of this new series for evaluation, each chambered for .44 Remington Magnum, and I must admit I was somewhat apprehensive about the

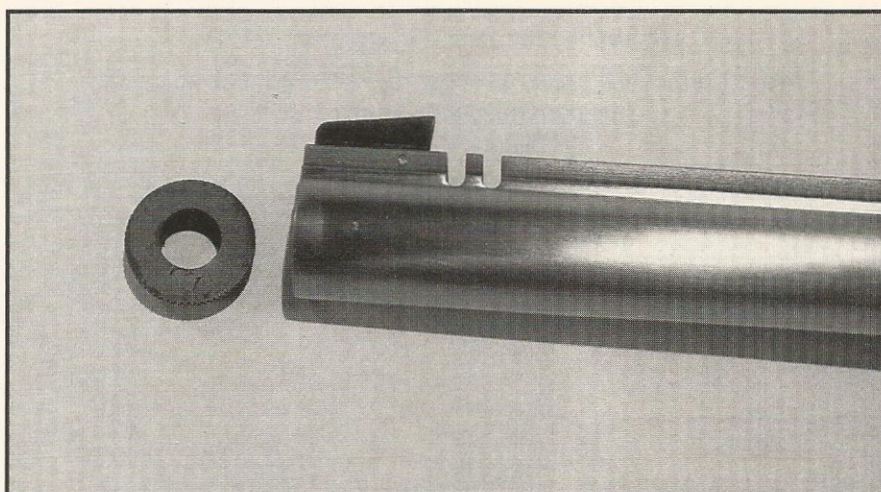




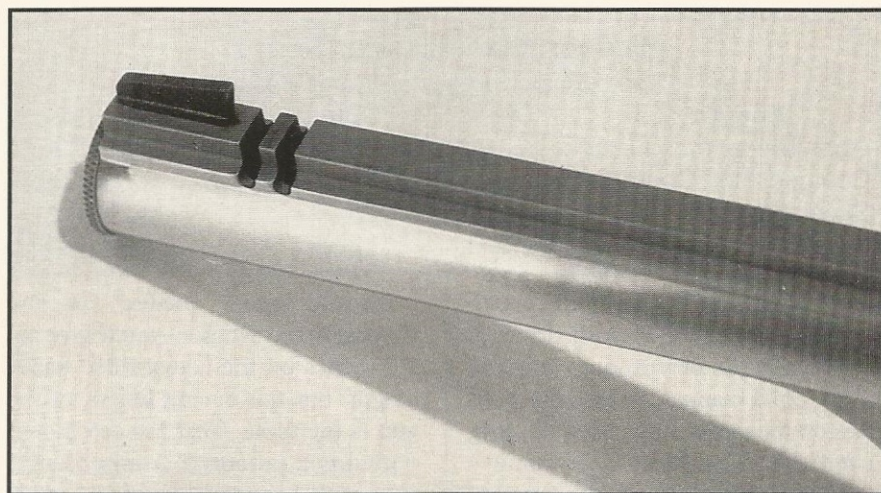
Rear-sight view of the new Wesson hunter pistol shows the new sight design. When the front post is viewed through this rear blade, the results are fast sight pickup as well as accuracy—it is flat neat!

thought of trying to introduce a new handgun in today's market. Opening the box, I found three hard cases, each containing one version of the new Hunter Series Wesson Handguns nestled in camouflaged foam protection and an additional Hogue rubber grip to replace the wood grip which is on the gun. Because these are pre-production guns, the foam inserts were hand-cut and the inserts for the production models will be neatly formed for each gun. After inspecting the guns, my doubts disappeared and I was most anxious to get to the range to shoot these beauties.

So, aside from the case and interchangeable grips, what makes these



Compensated barrel with end cap removed for cleaning. The barrel area is opened up for about one inch in length in this area to allow for an expansion chamber for the gases to exit through the slots cut in the top. This is a very efficient design.



Top view of assembled compensated barrel showing the end cap in place. The two slots coupled with the expansion chamber work very well in recoil reduction.



Wesson Arms features a large and comfortable nonslip hammer on pistols that are intended for a lot of single-action work.

guns so different from others? Quite a bit, actually. First is the sight system, where the purchaser has the choice of open sights or rings and base for a scope (which is supplied by the customer). In an effort to expedite my tests, mine came equipped with a Leupold 2.5x to 8x variable handgun scope, which is exactly what I would choose if I were to order this gun. The open-sight model is equipped with a dovetailed rear sight from Iron Sight Gun Works and is absolutely incredible. This sight is a natural for fast eye alignment and, if a person were so inclined, horizontal lines could be cut in the front sight and highlighted for fast elevation ▶

Wesson Hunter Series Accuracy

Preproduction test pistols as supplied—without improved throat.*

Test performed with Ransom Rest.

Distance: 25 yards

<u>Ammunition</u>	<u>Bullet</u>	<u>Best Group</u>	<u>Avg. Velocity</u>
Hornady	300 JHP	0.94	1078
Hornady	180 JHP	0.90	1574
WW Silvertip	210 JHP	2.31	1283
WW Black Talon	250 JHP	1.29	1224
4W	300 Lead	0.85	1192
4W	240 JHP	1.12	1363
CCI Blazer	200 JHP	1.43	1161
CCI Lawman	240 JHP	1.30	1233
Corbon	180 JHP	1.35	1248
Federal	250 JHP	1.25	1273
Eldorado Starfire	240 JHP	1.30	1178

All velocities measured with a PACT Professional Chronograph with sky screens ten feet from muzzle.

*See Throat Test data box on page 51.

Wesson Fixed Hunter Series

Approximate Suggested Retail Prices

<u>Model</u>	<u>Blue</u>	<u>Stainless</u>
Open Hunter	\$765.00	\$804.00
Compensated Open Hunter	795.00	833.00
Scoped Hunter	798.00	836.00
Compensated Scoped Hunter	828.00	866.00

adjustments at long range (Keith style). I experimented with dry runs by bringing the firearm onto target in a very rapid manner. By keeping both eyes on the target and raising the gun, it fell right into place every time—most impressive! This procedure will be different for each person. Some people close one eye, while others leave both open; I prefer keeping both eyes open. It will also depend on how you hold the firearm, but everyone that I had try these sights (including our editor, who also tested the guns) was in unanimous agreement that they were the best iron sights they had ever used.

We already know these guns have fixed barrels, but that's only the beginning of the story on the barrels. When you order one of the series, you will have the choice of a compensated barrel or the standard barrel. The standard barrel has a heavy lug on the underside of the barrel shroud which runs the full length of the barrel to add forward weight in order to help control recoil and to aid in a steady hold.

Should your choice be the Compensated Hunter, you'll give up 1.5 inches on the actual rifled barrel length, but the overall length of the gun is the same. That last 1.5 inches contains a patented compensating system that works amazingly well. It is actually an opened-up expansion chamber at the end of the barrel which forces gases out of two slots cut in the top. These slots are angled forward 15 degrees. If the angle were slightly to the rear, even better control could be achieved, but then gases would be sent toward the shooter, a less than ideal situation. Since the bullet has already left the barrel, it has no negative effect on accuracy. The compensated model is a full seven ounces lighter than the long-lug model because it has no barrel lug and the rifled portion of the barrel is 1.5 inches shorter. The loss of that 1.5 inches of barrel only caused an average loss of about 50 feet per second on velocity—hardly a concern.

To test this compensator system, I loaded this gun with Hornady ammu-

Wesson Fixed Hunter Series Data

Manufacturer: Wesson Firearms Co. Inc.

Model: Fixed Hunter Series

Caliber: .357 Magnum, .41 Remington Magnum, .44 Remington Magnum, .445 Super Magnum

Barrel Length: 7½ inches non-compensated, 7 inches compensated Scoped Hunter, 6 inches compensated Open Hunter

Weight: 3 pounds, 15.1 ounces for the Open Hunter, 3 pounds, 8.1 ounces for the compensated Open Hunter, and 3 pounds, 15 ounces for the compensated Scoped Hunter without scope

Trigger Pull Weight, double action: 12 pounds

Trigger Pull Weight, single action: 3 pounds, 2 ounces (production models to be at 2 pounds to 2½ pounds)

nition which was packed with 300-grain bullets, and fired three rounds. I then unscrewed the plug in the end of the barrel shroud and fired again. WOW, what a difference! The muzzle jumped up and I could feel the gun torque twisting back in my hand in a much more violent manner. Of the two styles, the Compensated Hunter is definitely much more comfortable to shoot, in my opinion.

The letter that came with the guns indicated an Alan Taylor throat in the barrel. Try as I might, I just could not tell any difference in the throat on these guns compared with other handguns. I called Bob Talbot, designer and engineer at Wesson Firearms, to find out just what an Alan Taylor throat is, how it will help and how a person can tell if the gun is so equipped. The reason I could not tell any difference in these guns was that they did not have the Taylor throat. These are preproduction prototypes, and the deadline for this article forced Bob to get these out the door much faster than he was comfortable with. In fact, the production

Alan Taylor Throat Test

Test performed with Ransom Rest

Distance: 25 yards

.44 Magnum

<u>Bullet</u>	<u>Pre-Taylor Group Size</u>	<u>Post-Taylor Group Size</u>
4W Ammunition 300 gr.....	1.40	0.90
300-gr. Speer	1.20	1.00
Barnes 265-gr. Solid	1.70	1.30

.445 Super Magnum

<u>Bullet</u>	<u>Pre-Taylor Group Size</u>	<u>Post-Taylor Group Size</u>
Black Diamond 300 gr.....	1.40	0.85
300-gr. Speer	1.70	0.80
Barnes 265-gr. Solid.....	2.20	1.40

Note: Future Wesson hunter pistols will have this accuracy enhancer machined in at no extra cost. Our preproduction .44 pistols did not. However, the author had both pre- and post-modifications to his own pistols; the above is that information.

Wesson Fixed Hunter Series

These Wesson guns were most pleasant to shoot as .44 Magnums go. The weight of the full-lug barrel and the compensators on the others accounted for this, along with the excellent grip design by Hogue. I sent all three to our editor for his evaluation and he, too, found them extremely comfortable. So comfortable, in fact, that he commented that a person could go to sleep holding one of these guns—the dolt probably did!

Why are they so comfortable? They're designed to fit your hand. Many handgun grips, both custom and standard, are designed with a flare at the bottom. Try this experiment: Hold your hand in front of your chest with the palm up. Now start to close your fingers as if you are about to grip a handgun. The last three fingers are the ones that will be holding the grip. Notice that your grip is widest with the middle finger and smallest at the little finger. The Hogue grips are designed with this in mind, a natural fit. This way they provide better control because your hand is not doing unnatural things.

Why Four Different Models?

There will no doubt be questions as to why Wesson is offering four models as opposed to two. Why not just tap the Open Hunter frame for scope mounts and let the customer make the choice from there? The answer is that most hunters do not like to change anything on a gun they have set up for hunting. Serious hunters are for the most part very particular about their hunting guns, hence the goal of Wesson Firearms: to offer more choices so that the purchaser does not have to get additional work done. I suppose a person could have the Open Hunter tapped for scope mounts, but why bother? If you prefer to hunt with open sights, then order your gun so equipped. If you would rather use a scope, then Wesson offers the choice. You order the gun the way you want it.

of this series was accelerated by at least four months so that we could review them for MODERN GUN.

To satisfy my curiosity about the Taylor throat, Bob explained that it is designed to open up the throat and have the rifling actually start about half an inch down the bore. He went on to explain the logic behind this design: "With pistols not equipped with the Taylor forcing cone, as the bullet leaves the cylinder, it jumps the cylinder gap, enters the forcing cone and rifling (which is actually swaging the bullet down in size), and begins to rotate due to the rifling." That is a considerable number of things to have happen all at once. By using the Taylor throat, the bullet is allowed to cross the cylinder gap and enter the barrel before entering the rifling, the theory being that with fewer things happening at once, the better chance the bullet has to stabilize.

This sounded logical, and I really wanted to see some results from tests, so I asked Bob if I could send him the barrels from a .445 Super Magnum and an older Dan Wesson .44 Magnum that I have. He said, "no problem," so I set both guns up in a Ransom Rest to get the "before" part of this test. First I fired a cylinder full of 4W Ammunition .44 Magnum loaded with Black Diamond 300-grain cast bullets. I also fired handloads with the 300-grain Speer and 265-grain Barnes solid. In the .445 I used the same bullets with a fair charge of H-110. After firing several test groups with my original barrels, I removed the barrels and sent them to Wesson to have the Alan Taylor throat installed. A few days later they were returned, and I reinstalled them on my pistols and headed back out to the range. I repeated the firing sequence and was pleasantly surprised to find the groups were notably smaller. The accompanying table (top left) shows comparisons. It is obvious to me that the Taylor throating has a significantly positive effect on accuracy and will be a most welcome addition to the Hunter Series.

Another major difference in the Wesson guns, as opposed to other

(Cont. on pg. 66)

but I found the sights to be too coarse for precise aiming at that range. I alternated five-shot groups with our local gunsmith, Aaron Arnett, and by eliminating the called flyers, we were able to keep them within about ten inches. This was in spite of a relatively small black bull we were using to sight against.

Just as we were about to complete our evaluation of the prototype, L.A.R. had a batch of their own barrels ready, along with the proper magazines. Since the company is located about 200 miles north of where I call home, I had a Grizzly in virtually final form after a quick trip up Interstate 15. Further testing was conducted with no malfunctions whatsoever. Furthermore, 20-yard groups shrunk to well under two inches and 80-yard groups were between five inches and eight inches with iron sights. With a heavy-duty pistol scope properly mounted, I have no doubt that the groups would have been considerably smaller.

After firing seven boxes of factory ammunition in the Grizzly 50, I can at

least give a qualified recommendation as to its high level of reliability. Several full magazines were run through the autoloader rapid-fire, and what an experience that was! It was nothing short of exhilarating!


Five rounds were chronographed at ten feet in front of the muzzle and measured from a low velocity of 1,313 f.p.s. to a high velocity of 1,362 f.p.s. The mean velocity was 1,333 f.p.s. with a standard deviation of 19 f.p.s. This combination of bullet weight and velocity teams up to generate almost 1,400 foot-pounds of energy.

Obviously, the Grizzly 50 is not the handgun for everyone. It will probably be most popular with big-game handgun hunters for virtually all North American game with the possible exception of the big bears of the North. Even then, some will be ready to try it on dangerous game, including some African species. I have no doubt that with proper bullet placement it will be very effective.

Another potential market will be the guides in Alaska and other areas of

the world who are confident in their ability with a handgun. The Grizzly Win Mag in .45 Winchester Magnum has been quite popular in our northernmost state, and I suspect the new model in .50 AE caliber will do even better.

Another market includes people like me who just like to shoot powerful handguns. I am anxious to work up various handloads for this caliber, and have placed my order to RCBS for a set of reloading dies. Speer suggests charges of Olin 296 and Hodgson H110 for good performance with their 325-grain bullet. They list a maximum of 32.6 grains of H110 for a muzzle velocity of 1,437 f.p.s. when shot in the Magnum Research six-inch Desert Eagle.

In addition to recreational shooting, I will use my Grizzly 50 during the Utah deer and elk hunts and will take it to Arizona for the next javelina hunt. You will probably find me using it on an occasional jackrabbit hunt or coyote hunt. I have now convinced myself that the uses of the big .50 are virtually endless! 

WESSON

(Cont. from pg. 51)

makes, is that they use cut rifling rather than button rifling. Cut rifling takes longer to complete but is known for its accuracy and long life. Wesson guns are some of the most consistently accurate production revolvers that I have ever fired, so there must be something to this.

In the course of testing these guns, I fired a wide variety of factory ammunition and some handloads. I found them most pleasant to handle and very accurate (remember, these test guns did *not* have the Alan Taylor throat). Accuracy testing was done at a range of 25 yards with a Ransom Rest. Three loads that gave me groups of less than an inch were Hornady 300 grain, Hornady 180 grain and 4W Ammunition 300-grain Lead. When shooting offhand, I managed a six-shot group of 0.75 inches with 4W 240 JHP at a distance of 15 yards using the Compensated Hunter.

The more I shot these guns, the more the groups tightened up. This is

most likely due to bore lapping. I have found through experience that barrel lapping definitely improves accuracy, and this seems to be especially true with cut rifling. The Wesson guns have cut-rifling barrels. Initial rounds fired through barrels like this will smooth the surface of the barrel, giving the bullet a cleaner path to travel through. One way to accomplish this is to just fire lead bullets through a new barrel. It takes time, but I clean the barrel after each 12 rounds and continue this for at least 200 rounds. Another method is known as "fire lapping," using superfine valve grinding compound. Be sure to use superfine compound, as the use of anything more coarse will lead to disaster. Dip the tips of loaded lead bullets into the compound (only lead bullets should be used), getting a very small amount on the front of the bullet, and then fire it. The spinning action of the bullet resulting from the rifling will spread the compound onto the bore surface, and the bullet will then travel over it, lapping the bore. I would clean the bore after

every other round for fast results.

Cut barrels generally have more prominent lands and grooves, which, correctly done (as by the folks at Wesson), make for excellent life and accuracy.

The triggers on these guns are fabulous. I consider trigger performance on a hunting gun of paramount importance, and just about every gun I use for hunting has had the trigger worked on to meet my demands. Using an RCBS Premium Trigger Gauge, I averaged ten readings on each gun in single-action mode. Two were at three pounds, one ounce; the third was breaking at three pounds, two ounces. There is absolutely no creep, providing a perfectly clean, crisp break. The production guns will have 100% action jobs with triggers breaking at the two-pound to 2½-pound mark. There will be no need to spend time and money working on these triggers.

A problem that I encountered was a tendency for these guns to "spit" back at the shooter. This appeared to

(Cont. on pg. 76)

WESSON

(Cont. from pg. 66)

be powder only—not lead or copper shavings—and was not particularly severe, just a minor annoyance. When I sent the guns to our editor, I intentionally did not mention this problem. After a shooting session he called me to ask if I had noticed that these guns were “spitting.” Convinced it wasn’t just me, I checked with the folks at Wesson Firearms and was reminded that these guns are preproduction and sent out under a very tight deadline as well. I was assured there would be no such problem with production guns, and I have every reason to believe that. (This powder-residue spitting was noticeable off of sandbags. It is possible that some of this was coming off of the sandbags as a ricochet, so to speak. It was not encountered during offhand shooting.—Ed.)

Using sandbag rests, I was able to hit a 12-inch-square gong at 200 yards on a regular basis, and with the Scoped Hunter I was hammering a six-inch circle at that distance with

little effort. There is also an 18-inch steel plate at the 200-yard mark at our range, and it was no problem to “ring” that while offhand firing. I really wanted to do some shooting at 300+ yards with handloads pushing a 320-grain cast LBT (Lead Bullet Technology) bullet, but time would not permit. This would be a challenge, but these guns are designed for long-range shooting. I am sure the results would be rewarding.

Another choice the prospective purchaser of these guns will be faced with is the choice of finish: blue or stainless steel. A point that Wesson is famous for is their fantastic blue finish. It is highly polished and appears to be deep enough to stick your finger an inch into. I will go so far as to say it is one of the finest blue finishes available on production handguns. The problem with getting this blue finish is having the courage to carry it out into the field for fear of scratching it! The stainless steel is also of high quality and tough. After firing hundreds of rounds, I cleaned the black off of it with a quick application of Outers Crud Cutter. You will

just have to make your choice according to your own particular needs and wants.

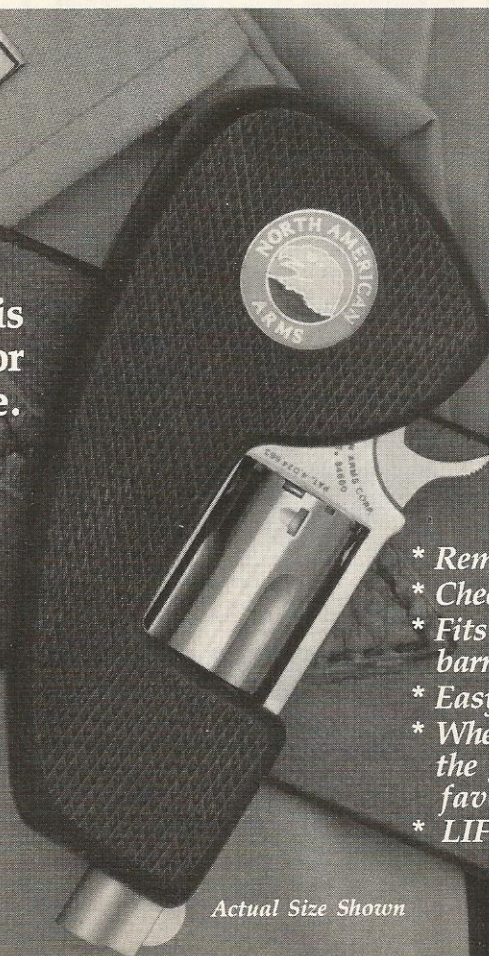
Carrying a long-barreled handgun can present problems, but there are two methods that I have found to be most convenient and comfortable. First is in a cross-draw-type holster. The advantages with this type over conventional holsters are quicker access, more comfort while sitting, and keeping the handgun out of the way when you carry a rifle as well. The other type of holster, and the one I really prefer for hunting, is the shoulder holster. I have been using an Uncle Mike’s shoulder holster for years and find it to be nearly perfect, and, best of all, you don’t have to take out a second mortgage on your house to get one.

The Fixed Hunter Series will be available in four different calibers, each with its own distinctive name. The series I tested was in the .44 Remington Magnum which will be called the “Buck Series.” The other three are the “Grizzly Series,” which is chambered for .445 Super Mag-

(Cont. on pg. 82)



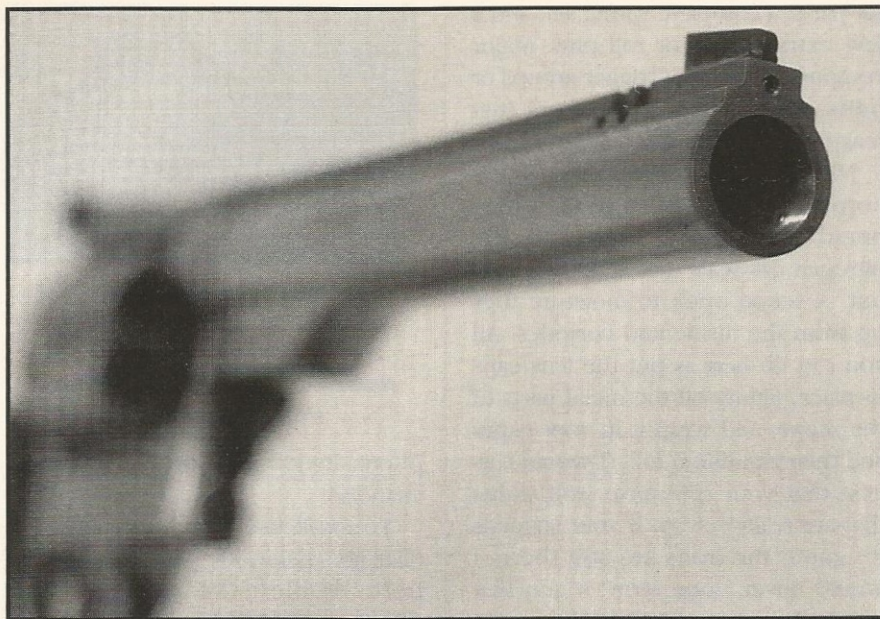
The NAA Holster Grip is the ultimate accessory for the NAA .22 Long Rifle.



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Front view without the end cap makes for an awesome-looking "cannon" (about .75 caliber). This gives you some idea of the size of the expansion chamber. The author found that when fired with just this cap removed, the recoil was up there with like-size .44 Magnums.

WESSON

(Cont. from pg. 76)


num, the "Boar Series" in .41 Remington Magnum and the "Varmint Series" shooting the .357 Super Magnum. That should cover the needs of most handgun hunters. Something to keep in mind when stewing over choice of calibers is that the .445 will also shoot .44 Magnum and the .357 Super Magnum will handle the .357 Magnum as well.

The production guns will have another nice feature which is not on our test guns. Each gun will have a laser-engraved outline of an animal on the frame just above the grip. The picture will correspond with the series which you choose, i.e., the head of a buck deer for the Buck Series. This may not help accuracy, but it is another nice cosmetic touch. Wesson Firearms is also looking at the strong possibility of offering an aftermarket bipod which would be great for the Varmint Series or the Scoped Hunter Series.

What Wesson Firearms intends to do is to offer the hunter a true hunting handgun that is already set up and ready to go, without the buyer having to take it to a gunsmith for modifications. You have your choice

of caliber, finish, sights and barrel design. Wesson has already done the action job, provided two different grips and thrown in a hard case as well. The action job alone is worth \$75 and possibly more. In today's world it seems even more important to get the most out of our money, considering how taxes and inflation

are taking their toll. This is what is known as "value-added pricing" in the marketing circles, and I truly think Wesson is offering an excellent value for the dollar with the Hunter Series. There will be no price difference for caliber choice, which makes the .445 Super Mag a helluva buy!

If you are a serious handgun hunter, then I suggest you give this series a serious look. As I stated before, they offer excellent value for your money. I have been carrying a Dan Wesson eight-inch .44 Magnum with blue finish on hunts for quite a number of years, and I am strongly considering the possibility of trading it in on a stainless Compensated Open Hunter. On the other hand, I doubt that I will be able to part with a gun that has served me so well for so long, so I'll have to get a companion gun—the .445 Super Magnum. It's not hard to justify a new gun when you really want one! 

FIND OUT MORE

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Wesson guns don't impress you much when the grips are removed, but the bottom line is that they work very well, and the smoothness of their actions, regardless of model, price, etc., is phenomenal. Here the hammer spring may be seen in its cylinder.