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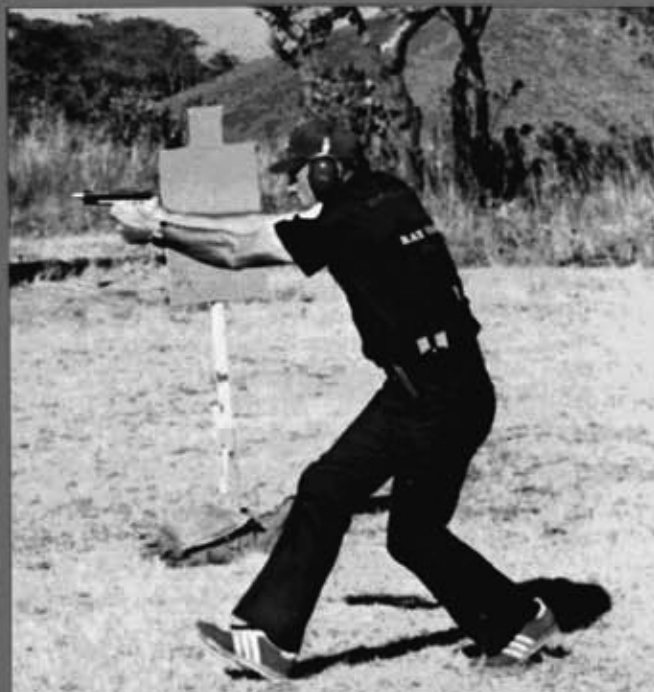
SPECIAL COVERAGE - '77 IPSC WORLD MATCHES

Test Reports: Beretta D.A. Autos - 357/44 Bobcat



.357/44 The Sensible Wildcat!

The Bobcat Magnum Collars the Problem of Necked Cases

By MASSAD AYOOB

For well over a year now, Robert Booth of Bobcat Magnums, 2560 San Carlos Avenue, Dept. AH, Castro Valley, CA 94546, has been turning out a fascinating cartridge-revolver combo of extraordinary midmagnum capability. He calls it the .357/44 Bobcat Magnum, and while it has at least as much bite as its namesake, it's a lot easier to handle, and a *heck* of a lot easier to come by.

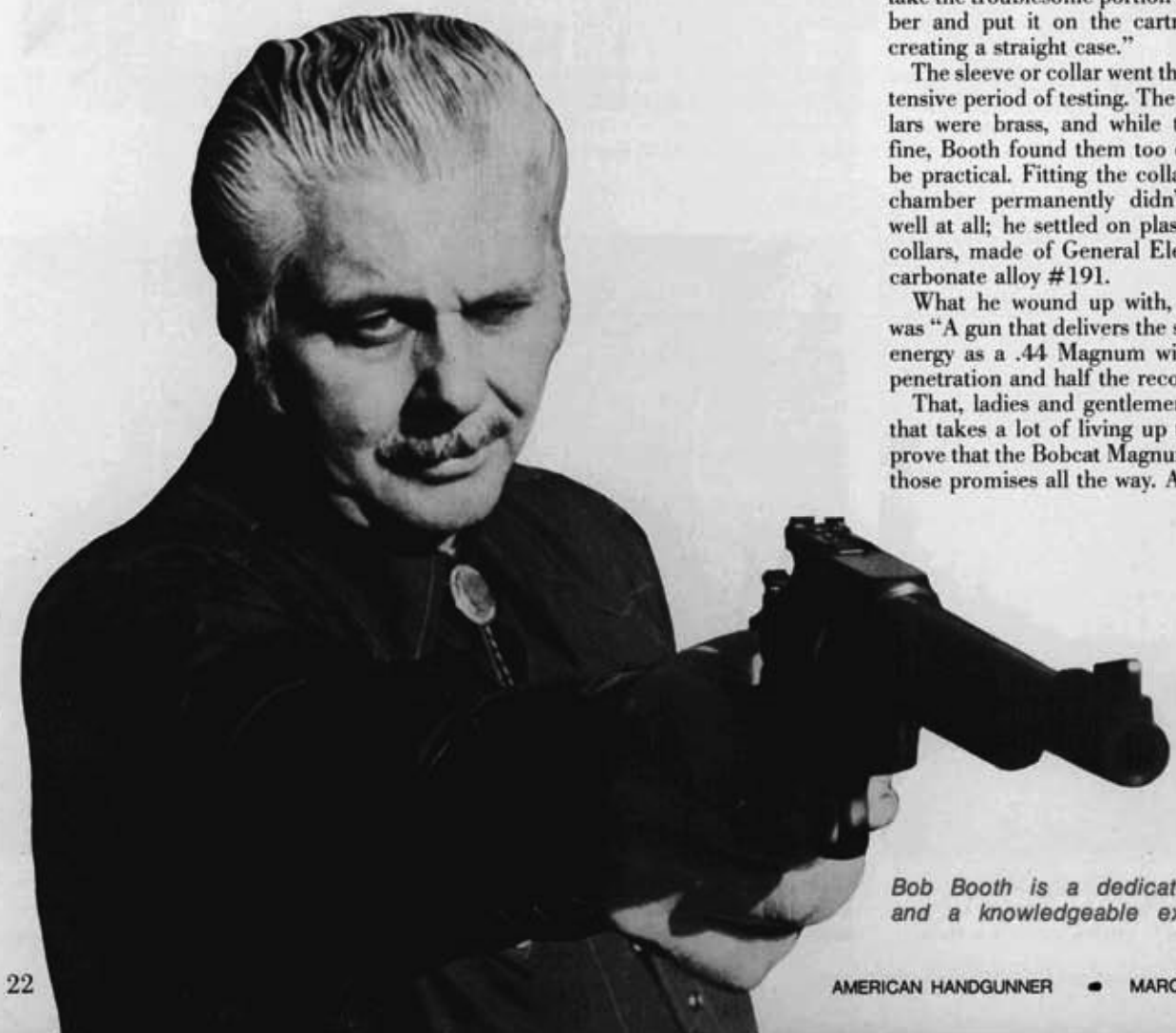
The round is formed by necking standard .44 Magnum brass down to .357, and attaching a plastic collar around the neck to flesh out the case to .44 Mag dimensions. Standard .357 bullets are loaded into the wildcat. Backed by the bucketful of powder that fits the big .44 hull, they come out roaring.

Bob Booth explains the concept thus: "It is, of course, common knowledge that the bottleneck is a more efficient design in the interest of velocity and trajectory, and I have been discouraged in the past with other attempts to get it to work. I realize the problem of the bottleneck in a revolver is that expansion of the brass shoulder against the hard steel chamber causes a backing out of the case. My idea was to take the troublesome portion of the chamber and put it on the cartridge, hence creating a straight case."

The sleeve or collar went through an extensive period of testing. The original collars were brass, and while they worked fine, Booth found them too expensive to be practical. Fitting the collar inside the chamber permanently didn't work out well at all; he settled on plastic cartridge collars, made of General Electric's polycarbonate alloy #191.

What he wound up with, says Booth, was "A gun that delivers the same muzzle energy as a .44 Magnum with twice the penetration and half the recoil."

That, ladies and gentlemen, is a claim that takes a lot of living up to. Our tests prove that the Bobcat Magnum lives up to those promises all the way. Almost . . .

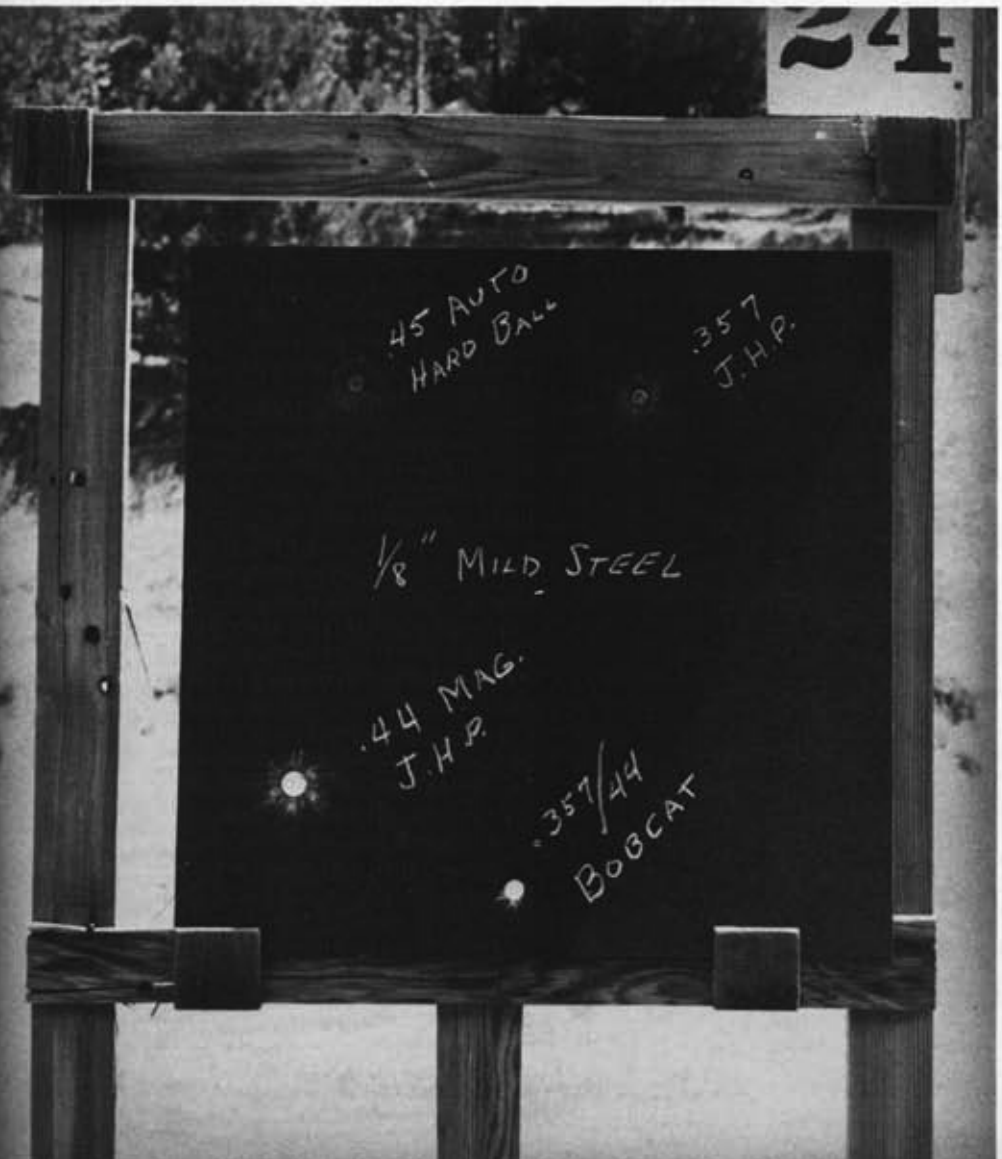


Bob Booth is a dedicated shooter and a knowledgeable experimenter.

In Booth's tests, he used "diamond steel" plates of 3/16" and 1/4" thickness. They stopped every non-armor-piercing .357 and .44 Magnum load Booth and his associates threw at it, yet every bullet weight of Bobcat Magnum went sailing on through, Booth told this writer.

Getting down to a little finer test, I used a large pad of Kevlar, the DuPont fabric used as a replacement for steel in belted radial tires. My test piece was 16 layers thick. A .357 Magnum Federal High-speed 110-grain hollowpoint stopped at the fourth layer, mushroomed perfectly back over the bullet base, fired out of a 6" Ruger Security Six. The Bobcat Magnum with the 110-grain SJHP configuration, went through all 16 layers and two inches into the soft earth behind it, mushrooming fully but a little more raggedly; the jacket fell off when the spent round was picked up. The 125 and 140 grain Bobcat Magnums also penetrated every stitch of the tight-denier Kevlar, and buried themselves so deep into the earth that we couldn't recover them; all three were from my 6½" Blackhawk Bobcat Magnum.

Progression of the conversion shows .44 Magnum case (left); a necked case; a loaded round; the collars and a complete round ready to go.



By contrast, no .44 Magnum I've ever fired at this substance has completely penetrated 16 layers, and they usually stop half or two thirds of the way through the swatch. When Booth says he's got twice the penetration of a .44 Magnum with equivalent bullet types, believe him. He's telling you the truth, and so am I, right here.

Now, about that "half the recoil of the .44 Magnum" statement. Bob says he arrived at that conclusion from his own subjective tests, and from handing the gun up and down firing lines of novice-through-master shooters, and asking them to fire the gun next to a .44 Magnum of identical configuration.

My observations, like Bob's are subjective. I'd rather say that while apparent *muzzle lift* is much more than half of the .44 Maggie's, it's a whole lot more comfortable to shoot. The .357/44 Bobcat, at least in my new model Ruger Blackhawk, still has plenty of upflip, enough to roll the gun back in my hand during offhand firing. The single action winds up in the same position—with the hammer spur against the web of my hand—that a Super Blackhawk fetches up to when I shoot *it* one handed with a full-house load. However, recoil is largely a function of bullet-weight, and when you drop from 240 to 110, something's got to be missing in the kick department. And it is: with the Bob-

Steel plate shot at 50 feet. Only the .44 Magnum and the Bobcat penetrated the plate.

Here's a tougher test. The 1/4" steel plate was easily punched through by the .357/44 Bobcat.

cat Magnum, you don't feel that "impact shock" in the palm of your hand that gets you when you touch off a full-house .44.

All that happens when you touch off a .357/44 Bobcat is that the gun rolls back in your hand and lifts. With a good two-hand hold, it doesn't even roll back appreciably; that's in the Ruger configuration, which I find eminently comfortable to shoot.

I haven't fired the Smith & Wesson conversion yet, and that may be a different story. Booth says one reason he prefers to convert the Ruger is that, in his words, "The recoil in the Smith & Wesson configuration bothers Hell out of me!" This is no big news, as .44 Mag buffs have known for years: the Model 29 S&W kicks harder than the Ruger Super Blackhawk, but has faster locktime, better trigger, and a lighter hammer fall, making it more conducive to precision accuracy.

The same is not necessarily true in the Bobcat Magnum; here, the Ruger SA makes more sense vis-a-vis the DA Smith than anywhere else. Booth likes the heavier cylinder on the Blackhawk, and especially, the rifling twist: he finds that the one in 16 inches twist of the Ruger is significantly more stabilizing at his speeds than the one in 18¾ inch twist of the Smith. I haven't shot a Smith & Wesson Bobcat Magnum, but his comments make sense: I know my Ruger shoots super.

Just what speeds is he talking about? Friends, the loading data for the Bobcat Magnum virtually duplicates that of the .357 AutoMag that handgun buffs have been raving about for the past few years. A table accompanies this article, but we can look here at some of the more spectacular figures: right around two thousand feet per second with the 110 grain semi-jacketed pill (using 19.5 grains of Blue Dot for an absolute red line load); close to 1700 fps with the 158 grainers when cranked all the way up with 22.4 grains of 296 (hitting almost half a ton of muzzle energy); and just about 1800 fps with the 140 grain slugs, using 23.5 grains of 296. The 125-grain, while it can come within spitting distance of 1900 fps with 25 grains of 296, seems to give its finest accuracy when you sacrifice 90-some odd fps with a charge of 24.6 grains of H110. The latter is the powder Booth prefers, finding it the most accurate and consistent in all his Bobcat Magnum guns and loads.

Booth is sometimes conservative, sometimes a trifle extravagant in his claims for his Bobcat Magnum. When he shipped me mine, he promised that with the 125-grain bullet, sighted at 25 yards, drop would be less than two inches at 100 yards. That was a conservative promise: in my 6½" Ruger, it was *less* than "less than two inches." At 25 yards, the 125 grain loads I was using were grouping at the edge of the line between the 7 and 8 rings of the 25-yd slow fire bull: a bit less than an inch above my 6 o'clock point of aim. Three shot groups, incidentally, ran well under an inch center to center at that dis-

RCBS CHRONOGRAPH REPORT • RUGER BOBCAT MAGNUM*

No.	Grains	Powder	Primer	Case Make	Weight	Bullet Make	Type	Muzzle Energy	Average Muzzle Velocity
1	23.7	296	Win	Win	140	Speer	H.P.	941	1743
2	24	H110	Win	Win	125	Speer	H.P.	909	1808
3	25	H110	Win	Win	125	Speer	H.P.	965	1865
4	25	296	Win	Win	125	Speer	H.P.	944	1845
5	25.2	296	Win	Win	125	Speer	H.P.	955	1850
6	26.3	H110	Win	Win	110	Speer	H.P.	928	1947
7	26.3	296	Win	Win	110	Speer	H.P.	836	1851
8	26.7	246	Win	Win	110	Speer	H.P.	913	1934
9	27	H110	Win	Win	90	Sierra**	H.P.	842	2053
10	27	296	Win	Win	90	Sierra**	H.P.	738	1923
11	27.5	296	Win	Win	90	Sierra**	H.P.	810	2017

*= *Ruger Blackhawk, 6½" bbl., 16" twist*
**= *.355 diameter*

Dick Brown fires the Bobcat to show that though kick is still there, it's not uncomfortable.

tance with all bullet weights, using a double-fisted right hand barricade position.

At a hundred yards, I figured, my center hold would equate to mucho drop, so I switched to a B-27 silhouette and held for the neck with one group, for the center head for another. Upon examination of the target, I found one group in the neck area, another in the head: there had been no drop from point of aim, and the sights hadn't changed. Conclusion: in my gun, the 125-gr. bullet backed by 25 grains of H110 was dropping no more than an inch between 25 and 100 yards. For handgun hunters, who will take most of their shots somewhere between those two distances, that's good news indeed: hold on the critter's eye if that's all that's exposed to you, and that's where you'll hit without any hold over. Even at point blank range (during the 10-foot penetration tests), a dead-on hold put the bullet's point of impact at point of aim, which isn't so strange to remark on: some rounds, notably the .38 mid-range wadcutter, will shoot 2" low at 7 yards when the gun is sighted center at 25.

Moving out another hundred yards, we found the first Bobcat claim that might have been called extravagant: while Bob had told me the drop at 200 yards would be no more than eight inches with a gun sighted for 25 yards, my Ruger was putting them in the hip area of the silhouette with the same neck hold that had been dead on at 100 yards: a drop of more like two feet. In fairness, Bob's claim was based on the 158-grain load, which I didn't test, but if the 158 drops only eight inches, a faster-stepping 125 in the same gun shouldn't drop three times as much.

But back to the *fulfilled* promises: Bob had told me, "The average Blackhawk with open sights can hold a 14" group at 200 yards." My own did a bit over half that off a bench at 200; one memorable group measured just under eight inches with a called flyer, and with two of the 125-grain bullets almost touching each other.

My total impression of the .357/44 Bobcat Magnum is strongly positive. The accuracy and trajectory are excellent, and give a handgun hunter all the confidence he could want. Penetration is excellent, as is uniformity and completeness of bullet expansion, and these are things I want in a hunting handgun. I never agreed with the theory that the bullet should stop inside the animal and "expend its total energy;" I'd much rather have a .357/44 slug, expanded to fifty or sixty caliber, go crashing out through the other side of the animal's chest. That way, there's more tissue damaged, plus another hole through which the air can rush in and aid the collapse of the lungs and cause pneumothorax, squeezing the heart until it stops and plunges the animal into painless unconsciousness. A bullet-damaged heart can still beat wildly and erratically with enough efficiency to keep oxygenated blood circulating through the brain for a span of time, but a heart compressed by air and by two collapsed lungs isn't going to beat as long. Complete penetration also increases the blood trail for the hunter to follow. The penetration characteristics of the .357/44 Bobcat Magnum also seem likely to eliminate a problem that has plagued .357-armed handgun hunters for so long: the danger that an otherwise more efficient expanding bullet will be defeated when it encounters heavy bone. I have no doubt that a slug which can pierce 16 layers of Kevlar and still travel deep into damp earth and maintain a perfect mushroom, can be counted on not to shatter on a shoulder bone and turn a clean kill into a crippling wound.

It's not a load for police, and Bob Booth agrees, though he has reluctantly done a few conversions on Highway Patrolman revolvers for Southern California cops. One insisted on it after his standard .357 failed to penetrate a felon's car door in a running shootout. I personally don't care for the idea: the Bobcat Mag's penetration makes it dangerous for police, who always have to contend with the possibility that an innocent victim may be standing unseen behind the gunman they drop the hammer on.

(Continued on page 51)

Though the plastic collars on the neck of the Bobcat often split upon firing, it has no effect on performance, being designed for one-time use.