

A quarter century ago, a handgun cartridge known as the .357 magnum was cooked up by Colonel Doug Wesson. The announcement of this elongated version of the p'or ol' .38 Special created quite a storm. Handgunners flocked to the shootzshops to buy a factory-announced whirlwind 1510 feet per second, and the gun-scribes went right along, agog with ejaculations like, "This is the most powerful handgun cartridge in the world!"

They were right, but, since there was no such thing as the .44 magnum, or revolvers that would withstand magnum loads in the .45 Long Colt, the rest of the competition left the victory as bare as winning a strip poker game with a gang of nudists!

No one I ever heard of was able to buy that original 1510 fps in a .357 magnum over the counter. Outside the laboratory, where it shot from test barrels or on paper, it never existed. The same is true of the currently advertised 1410 to 1430 f/s. These latter figures reflect a reduction in factory loading. 'Twould have seemed better to have left the loading alone and downgraded the velocity claims!

Colonel Charles Askins, writing in these pages a while back, recounted his efforts to hike that max-1430 f/s from the .357 magnum. Barrels of up to ten inches in length were used on revolvers, with no success. Finally, a Model 92 carbine was made up, using an eighteen inch barrel. The velocity was 1434 f/s! A marvelously deflating "grain of salt" in the mumbo-jumbo of sales potion that says you

can expect 1410 to 1430 f/s for the .357's 158-grain bullet from an 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch pipe!!

Checks made in recent months with some of the newly-released cartridges have shown factory velocity figures to be, if anything, a bit on the conservative side. This is good to see. Still, the misinformation about velocities of the .357 magnum and other earlier cartridges hangs on. Despite the incessant carping of experimenters about these real grim fairy tales, the tables are reprinted, year after year, with religious adherence to widely disproved velocity, energy, and trajectory figures. A lot of gun buyers know the score and buy .357 magnum revolvers because of things like loading and caliber versatility, and because the .357 is, at least, a whale of a lot more load than the .38 Special. Others continue to be disappointed after hocking their eye teeth to get ballistics that only "shoot" on paper!

This brings us to the .44/.357. It's simply the mighty .44 magnum case, necked down for .357 bullets. Earlier, gunsmith Keith Davis and the writer had discussed the pros and cons of necking this same hull down for a magnum .32. Since that time, however, other tentative developments on such a round have been made and, unless all bets go wrong, the .32 magnum for handgunners will be announced in a few months. For now, however, the quest was for a cartridge that would at least duplicate the performance *claims* made for the .357 magnum. That sort of thing takes a lot of doin'! How sensational can something be if it only measures

# MORE POWDER= MORE POWER!

By Dan Cotterman