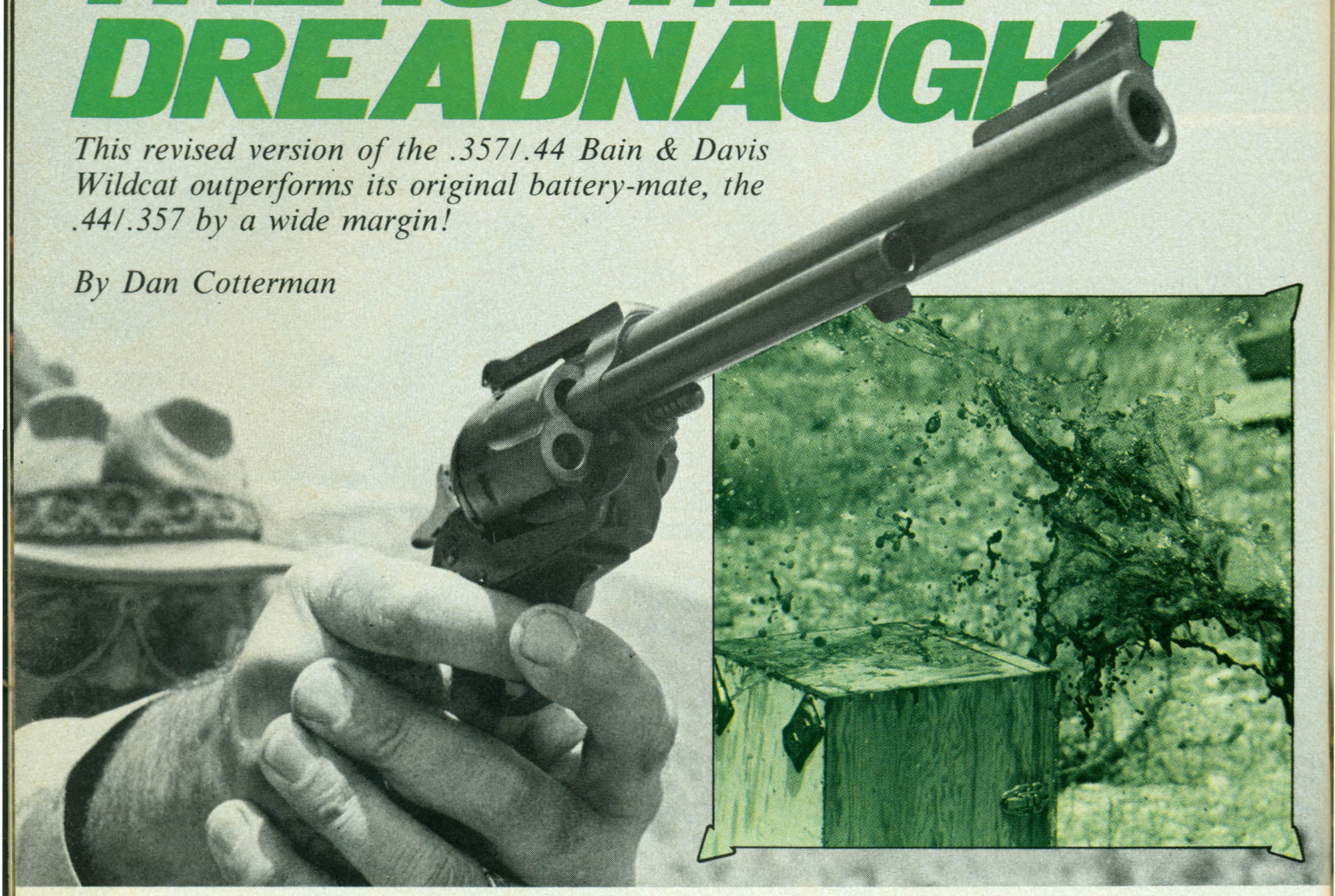
THE .357/.44 DREADNAUGHT

This revised version of the .357/.44 Bain & Davis Wildcat outperforms its original battery-mate, the .44/.357 by a wide margin!

By Dan Cotterman

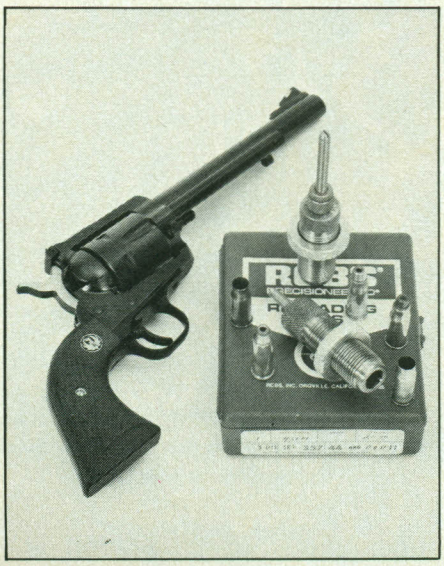


☐ A bit over forty years ago Doug Wesson and Phil Sharpe fostered a stretched-out version of the tired old .38 Special that was to start a new age in the quest for greater power from handguns. Their brainstorm amounted to a super-slammer now well known as the .357 Magnum. There was, of course, the .38 Super for auto-loading handguns, but super as it may have been, it still couldn't match the bewildering performance of the new revolver round.

News of the .357 Magnum spread like . . . well, like wildfire. The thought of a revolver loosing a 158-grain bullet at a factory-announced 1,510 fps and thereby amassing nigh onto 800 foot pounds of muzzle energy virtually dripped with a sort of ghastly fascination.

But bubbles have a way of popping: The Blonde Bombshell turned out to be Ma Kettle's ugly sister as, one by one, chronographs told a different story. No one, to my knowledge was ever able to buy that originally advertised 1,510 fps across the counter. It simply never existed this side of test barrels that were used, sans cylinder-to-barrel gap, in laboratory firings. Ultimately, the ammo makers revised their claims for the .357's velocity potential to figures that ran from 1,410 to 1,430 fps.

Faced with the challenge of improving a successful idea, the author chose these main ingredients to whip up a batch of ballistical effectiveness utilizing the strength of the Ruger Blackhawk revolver—the precisioness of RCBS loading dies—and the well-performing Sierra bullets—to create this most effective wildcat.



These days—and for several years past—the factory folk have their feet more firmly planted in reality. Remington, for example, now lists velocities for their magnum handgun calibers from their new vented test barrels. The key to Remington's patented system involves the introduction of a gap in the cylinder-to-barrel area which is controlled at .008-inch with a four-inch barrel. Then, to minimize shot-to-shot inconsistencies of velocity readings, the powder charge is orientated horizontally within the case before firing. The claim for the 158-grain bullet is thus listed as a more realistic 1,235 fps. Alongside the vent-barrel velocity figure one can still note a sensational 1,550 fps for a 158-grain from the .357 Magnum fired from an 8⅜ths-inch test barrel. Winchester-Western factory ammo not too surprisingly lists the same 1,235 fps for the 158-grainer from a vented barrel.

But the .357 Magnum—perhaps more aptly named the .38 Extra Long—still managed to hold forth as an extremely effective handgun round. It's just that it would have been so much greater had it measured up to its original ballyhoo. That is, in a reasonably-sized revolver