

## DREADNAUGHT

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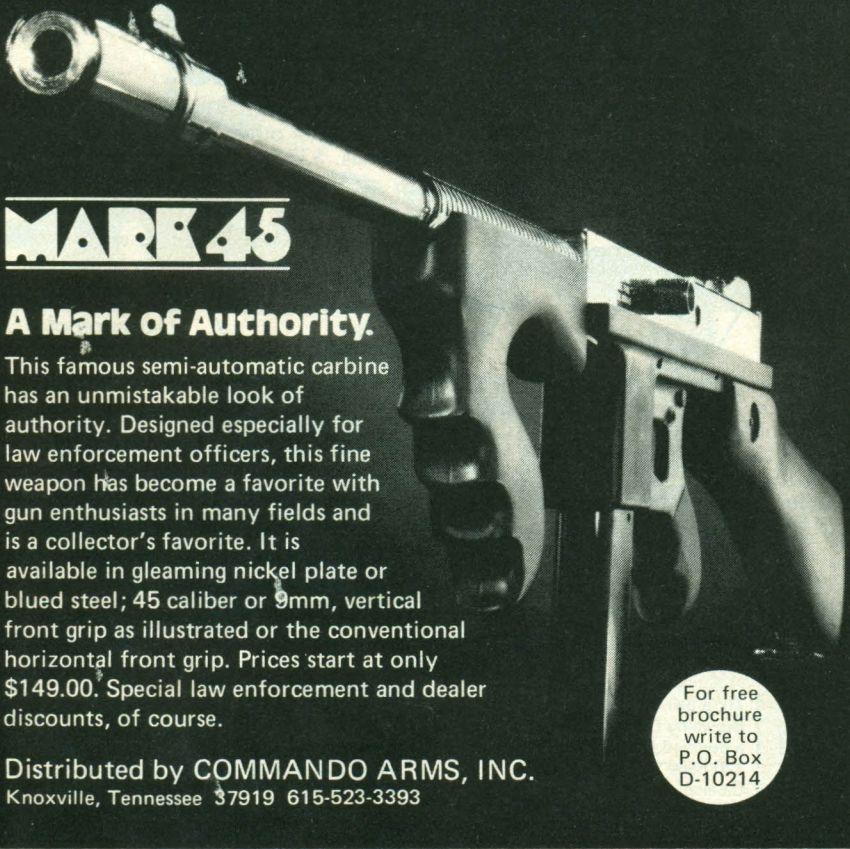
itself ideal. For example, a charge of 14 grains propelled hand-swaged 113-grainers along at an average velocity of 2,170 fps for a muzzle energy of over 1,181 foot-pounds, again topping the .44 Magnum catalog energy figures. I hasten to add, however, that the superior energy figure is insignificant—a sort of abstract comparison—in terms of actual bullet performance. If the well-known chips were down, I'd still go with the .44 Magnum's 240-grainer.

The implied superiority of the .357/.44 versus the .44 Magnum lies not with light, high-speed projectiles, but with bullets of around 150-grains in weight and up. The 158s, in my opinion, offer an optimum balance between attainable velocity, bullet weight and operation within safe pressure limits.

Ruger's New Model Blackhawk, as chambered for these tests by gunsmiths Red Little and Ron Kinstof of Bain & Davis differed from the Smith & Wesson used in the original tests in ways other than weight, chamber wall thickness, price, availability, and so on. In the first place the barrel was not 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ -of an inch in length, but 6 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches, thus implying a minor deficit in terms of attainable velocities. Nonetheless, some of the disadvantage of a shorter barrel was offset by virtue of the fact that the cylinder-to-barrel gap in the original revolver ran from .004-inch to .006-inch, depending upon the rotation of the cylinder. The test Ruger possessed a gap that varied only slightly from a tight .003-inch to an equally tight .004-inch, again depending on the position to which the cylinder was turned. There would, by reasonable inference, be less cylinder-to-barrel pressure loss with the Ruger.

Our first session afield with the *Guns & Ammo* portable electronic chronograph gave rise to a number of fascinating revelations. A string of five factory-loaded .357 Magnum rounds yielded an average 1,245 fps for the semi-jacketed 158-grain hollow-pointed bullets, somewhat superior to factory loads used during the original chronographings those many years back. The improvement may be attributed, in part, to the fact that the air temperature in the parched river bed we had found for the purpose of carrying out the testing was around the century mark, perhaps 30 to 35 degrees greater than the temperature that night inside the Bain & Davis shop.

As if bullet speed were an end in itself, and in the interests of pure experimentation, a number of 90-grain Sierra .355-inch bullets were loaded. These 90s, as well as the 115s I used are intended primarily for use in re-loading the likes of the 9mm Luger, .380 ACP and so on. The .002-inch



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