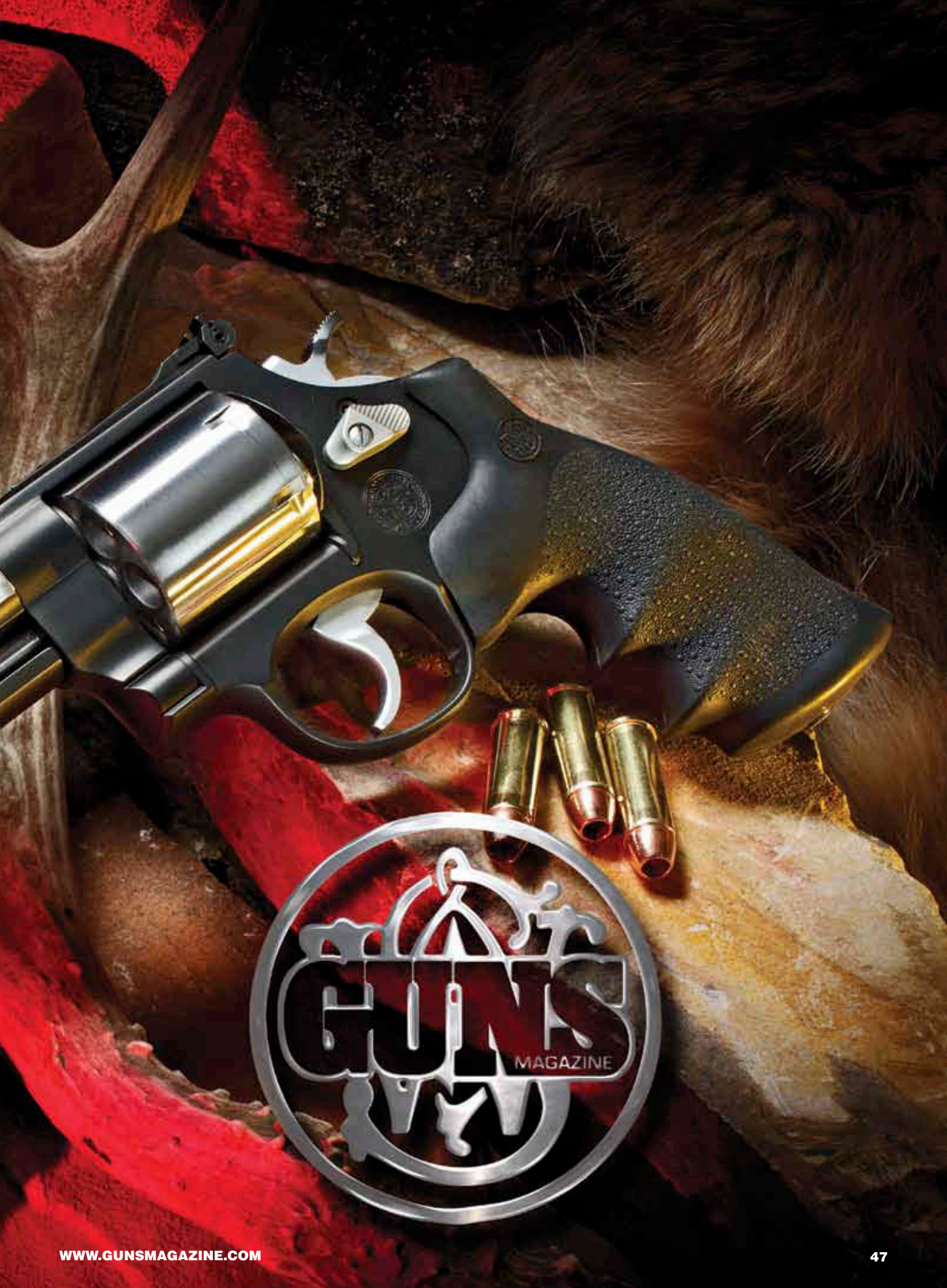


THE KING OF SINGLEGUNS



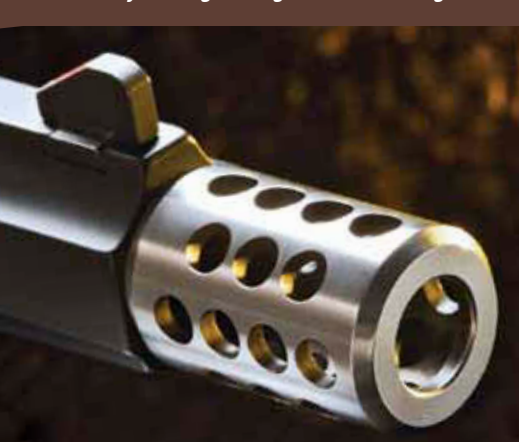




The M629 Hunter comes with traditional fully adjustable iron rear sights in addition to the Leaper's red/green-dot sight.



Like all modern S&W revolvers, the firing pin is now mounted in the frame. The top of the hammer is wide and sharply checkered for easy cocking for single-action shooting.



The barrel (above) is fitted with a muzzlebrake and, combined with the revolver's 57-1/2 ounce weight makes for a pleasant shooting .44 Magnum. A backup iron front sight is dovetailed into the barrel. The swing-out cylinder (below) is unfluted and left unblackened in contrast with the frame and barrel.



Fine Pedigree

The .44 Magnum in its original form from Smith & Wesson is one of the finest, perhaps *the* finest sixgun to ever come from the Springfield factory. Starting with the 1950 Target .44 Special as the basic platform, the cylinder was lengthened to fill out the frame window, the barrel was changed to a bull-barrel configuration as found on the 1955 Target .45 introduced earlier in the year, special heat treating was applied, a target trigger and hammer along with target stocks were utilized, and the sights consisted of a white-outlined, rear-adjustable sight matched up with a red ramp front sight. All in all, it was a most magnificent sixgun!

I have recounted in the past my first experience with the S&W .44 Magnum. The local gun range rented a 4" version with six rounds of ammunition to anyone brave enough to try. My teenage friends and I tried, almost cried, and then we lied and said it wasn't bad. It would take several years before I could even come close to handling the .44 Magnum. In the ensuing years I did a lot of growing up.

The .44 Magnum cartridge in its original form used a 240-grain bullet, at the same muzzle velocity as the 158-grain .357 Magnum from 20 years earlier. Elmer Keith said the recoil would not bother a "seasoned sixgun man" and was actually less than a .38 Special J-Frame. He also called it the greatest revolver and ammunition development in his lifetime. Major Hatcher of the NRA said shooting the new Smith & Wesson was like getting hit in the hand with a baseball bat. Colonel Askins, always one to try to stir up controversy, said he thought the good Major probably had lace on his panties. A few years later Askins would say the .44 Magnum should have been stillborn.

With the introduction of the .44 Magnum and the tremendous power it gave to sixgun hunters, there were still detractors who said: "Yes, but it's not a

.45!" It is simply impossible to please some people. Since the introduction of the .44 Magnum there has been a long list of more powerful cartridges chambered in factory sixguns. In fact, while Smith & Wesson was developing the .44 Magnum, Dick Casull was working on what would become the .454 Casull. Just over 25 years after the introduction of the .44 Magnum, Freedom Arms started manufacturing the .454 which allows the use of a 300-grain bullet 200 fps faster than the original .44 Magnum. Over the past 1/4 century the .44 Magnum has also been overshadowed, at least in some minds, by the .445 SuperMag, .475 and .500 Linebaughs, .480 Ruger, 500 Wyoming Express and even two more S&W Magnums, the .500 and .460.

Smith & Wesson's original .44 Magnum was available in blue and nickel finishes with barrel lengths of 4", 6-1/2" and 8-3/8" cataloged along with a special run of 500 5" sixguns in 1958. All were magnificent sixguns. *But* since we are being truthful I will admit today's sixguns are better built with tighter tolerances, better steel and they mostly shoot better. They just aren't "classic." I think that is an attitude that comes with being a "seasoned citizen."

During the heyday of long-range silhouetting in the 1980s, there was also a 10-1/2" model with special sights. The original .44 became known as the Model 29 in 1957 and then was joined by a stainless steel version, the Model 629 in 1979. Although we learned to handle the recoil of the S&W .44 Magnum that had so intimidated us in the early days, the reality of heavy recoil did change. In the early 1990s, Smith & Wesson addressed this by the introduction of the Endurance Package, which lessened the stress of interior parts against each other and added weight with the heavy underlugged barrel. In the beginning decade of this still relatively new century, the Smith & Wesson Performance Center began offering special editions of their revolvers. The latest is the Model 629 .44 Magnum Hunter. **GUNS**

for the full 360 degrees. At the other end we have recoil-reducing rubber fingergrooved grips. Rubber grips are never attractive but their lack of form is highly overshadowed by the great function they perform. Add in the weight of the red/green-dot scope and we have a .44 Magnum that is quite comfortable to use.

Ten factory loads weighing from 180 to 300 grains were fired in the Performance Center .44 Magnum Hunter. It performed well with all loads and when sighted in with 240-grain bullets, as expected, shot

slightly high with the 300-grain bullets, and slightly low with the 180-grain loads. Of the 10 loads tried, nine were jacketed while one was a gas-checked hollowpoint cast bullet, "The Deer Magnum" from Buffalo Bore. The Magnum Hunter shot the latter just as well as it shot jacketed bullets. The average group size for five shots at 25 yards using the red-dot scope was less than 1-1/8". Looking at both ends of the spectrum, Hornady's 180-grain XTP-JHP grouped into 5/8" for five shots while the 300-grain version did 7/8". That is excellent performance for

The Model 629 Hunter comes with a Leapers dot sight selectable for a red or green dot depending on hunting conditions—a perfect set up for wild boar in cover. The knife is a Grayman Knives Suenami (www.gunsmagazine.com/grayman-knives).

MODEL 629 HUNTER

MAKER: SMITH & WESSON
2100 ROOSEVELT AVE.
SPRINGFIELD, MA 01104
(800) 331-0852
WWW.GUNSMAGAZINE.COM/
SMITH-WESSON

Action Type:

Double action

Caliber:

.44 Magnum

Capacity:

6

Barrel Length:

7-1/2"

Overall Length:

14"

Weight:

57-1/2 ounces

Finish:

2-tone stainless steel

Sights:

Adjustable iron sights, dot sight

Grips:

Rubber fingergroove

Price:

\$1,329

SCP-RD40RGW

MAKER: LEAPERS
32700 CAPITOL ST.
LIVONIA, MI 48150
(734) 542-1500
WWW.GUNSMAGAZINE.COM/
LEAPERS

Tube Diameter:

38mm

Objective Diameter:

30mm

Field of View:

16.5' at 100 yards

Eye Relief:

Flexible

Exit Pupil:

25mm

Click Value:

1/2" elevation & windage at 100 yards

Length:

119mm

Weight:

7.4 ounces

Batteries:

CR2032 3V

Reticles:

Red and green dot

Price:

\$43.95

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Forever Changed

Sixgunning was forever changed with the introduction of the Smith & Wesson .357 Magnum in 1935. Up to this point the most powerful factory loaded cartridge available was the black powder, (yes, black powder) .45 Colt. The .357 Magnum used a 158-grain bullet at over 1,500 fps from an 8-3/4" barreled sixgun; this was unheard of power in a revolver.

However there were those who looked at the .357 Magnum and said, "Yes, but it's not a .44 Special." Those devotees of the .44 Special had already been loading heavy .44 Specials for nearly 10 years and, led by such experimenters as Elmer Keith, John LaChuk and members of the .44 Associates, they continued to push for a factory loaded heavy .44 Special. They finally got even more than they asked for and the result in the waning days of 1955 was Smith & Wesson's .44 Magnum with ammunition developed by Remington. **GUNS**

.44 MAGNUM FACTORY AMMO PERFORMANCE

LOAD (BRAND, BULLET WEIGHT, TYPE)	VELOCITY (FPS)	GROUP SIZE (INCHES)
American Eagle 240 JHP	1,395	1
Black Hills 240 JHP	1,276	1-1/2
Buffalo Bore 240 Cast-HP Deer Magnum	1,586	1-1/4
CorBon 225 DPX	1,391	1
Federal 225 Barnes HP	1,398	1-3/8
Hornady 180 XTP-JHP	1,704	5/8
Hornady 200 XTP-JHP	1,312	7/8
Hornady 240 XTP-JHP	1,437	1-1/8
Hornady 300 XTP-JHP	1,126	7/8
Winchester 250 Platinum Tip HP	1,385	1-1/4

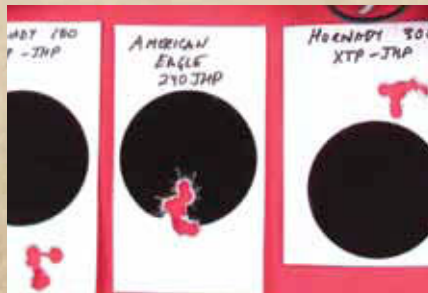
Notes: Groups the product of best 5 of 6 shots at 25 yards.
Chronograph screens set at 10' from muzzle.
Temperature: 35 degrees F.

the ammunition, sixgun and this very well seasoned shooter.

Over the past year, I've written up several Performance Center Smith & Wessons for both this magazine and our sister publication *American Handgunner*. For the latter it was the .500 S&W Bone Collector, and for *GUNS* it was my pleasure to do both



John found the Smith & Wesson Performance Center Model 629 .44 Magnum Hunter (above) a pleasant shooting and pleasantly accurate sixgun. These targets (below) were shot with 180-, 240- and 300-grain bullets. Notice the different points of impact.



a Packin' Pistol .44 and a Hunter Model .44. The latest version is my favorite of the four. I also think it's the most attractive of the four big bores. In talking with Tony Miele of the Smith & Wesson Performance Center, I found the idea behind this latest creation was his concept of the perfect sixgun for hunting wild boars. Of course, it is not confined to that as it also will work just fine for any other hunting application a .44 Magnum might be called upon to perform. Set up as it came from the Performance Center, it is just about perfect for deep woods use.

I have been a fan of Smith & Wesson sixguns seemingly forever. My first in 1957 was a WWI Model 1917 in .45 ACP. Virtually every one of us teenagers had such a Smith & Wesson, as well as a surplus 1911 and a Springfield 1903-A3. They were the cheapest guns available. In 1958, I purchased my first new Smith & Wesson, a 4" Highway Patrolman, and then for our first Christmas together in 1959, Diamond Dot gave me a 1950 Target .44 Special. My first .44 Magnum from Smith & Wesson was purchased in 1963. Over the following years there have been many Smith & Wessons in all the various chamberings, including a dozen or more .44 Magnums. The N-Frame Smith & Wessons are simply my favorite double-action revolvers. **GUNS**