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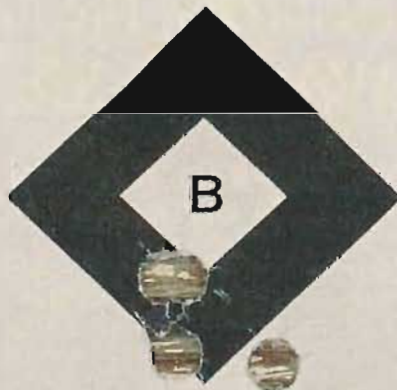
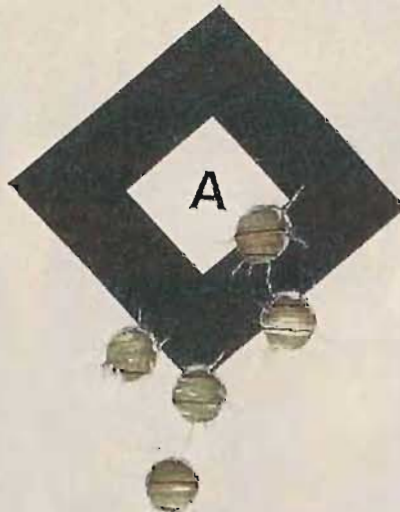


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The other magnum.



**Loads
for the**

.41

Brian Pearce

In the past two decades, several articles have appeared that predicted or at least indicated the .41 Remington Magnum cartridge was headed for obsolescence. I don't claim to be able to predict the future, but it looks as though the .41 is going to be with us for years to come, as new sixguns continue to appear; and sales, while not huge, remain steady. With so many good big-bore revolver cartridges, such as the .44 Special, .44 Magnum and .45 Colt, we may ask where does the .41 Magnum fit in and why do dedicated fans swear by it?

In 1963 at the annual NRA meetings, Elmer Keith and Bill Jordan discussed the possibility of a new cartridge in .40 or .41 caliber.

Just like its big brother the .44 Magnum, the .41 Magnum was introduced as a joint effort between Remington and Smith & Wesson in 1964, but it was really the brainchild of the late Bill Jordan. Bill obtained extensive combat experience during World War II, then after the war served in various factions of law enforcement including the U.S. Border Patrol during a time when "things were rough along the river."

Bill's extreme skill (speed and accuracy) with the combat handgun brought him considerable notoriety. When he mapped out the details of what he considered the "ideal law enforcement officer's handgun," Smith & Wesson not only listened but also responded by bringing out his exact design in 1955 as the "Model 19 Combat Magnum." This gun evolved into the Model 66, one of the most popular revolvers ever with law enforcement and sportsmen alike.



The .41 Magnum (center) fills the gap between the .357 Magnum (left) and the .44 Magnum (right).

Even though Bill obviously thought highly of the .357 Magnum for combat, he admitted it was "a little short on shocking power" and that a cartridge of larger caliber with a heavier bullet would be a better option. He carried and experimented with a Smith & Wesson Model 29 .44 Magnum with a 4-inch barrel as a duty gun. While he loved the power, he was concerned that fast follow-up shots would be too slow, due to the heavy recoil, should the need arise to shoot more than one target who was shooting back!

In 1963 at the annual NRA meetings, Elmer Keith and Bill Jordan discussed the possibility of a new cartridge in .40 or .41 caliber specifically for law enforcement. Bill's original idea was a cartridge that would drive a 200-grain bullet at something around 1,200 fps from a 4-inch barrel. (This sort of sounds like the highly regarded 10mm, but in a revolver.) Elmer naturally agreed with Bill that the police needed a more powerful handgun and took the bull by the horns; both men headed to the Remington booth and committed the company to make the ammunition, if Smith & Wesson and Ruger would build the guns. Obviously Elmer and Bill were equally successful at Smith & Wesson and Ruger booths. (I would have enjoyed watching these two colorful characters march into booths and with great determination request a new cartridge and gun! And who in their right mind would have had the nerve to deny their request?) To prevent

Magnum



.41 Magnum

the new ammunition from being chambered in an ancient Colt SAA chambered in .41, which was really a .40 caliber, they recommended the new cartridge have a groove diameter of .410 inch.

I believe Bill (and possibly Elmer) had imagined a lighter handgun than the Model 29, possibly a midsized frame like the Smith & Wesson L-Frame, which wouldn't appear until the early 1980s. And Bill wanted a cartridge that is best described as a ".41 Special," rather than a "Magnum." At any rate when the new gun appeared as the Model 57 in 1964, it was built on the big N-Frame, externally the same size as the Model 29. Worst of all it weighed more due to the smaller diameter bore and chambers, which would limit appeal for police officers who carried a duty weapon daily. The S&W Model 58 soon followed with fixed service-type sights and an attractive price tag in hopes that police departments would be enticed into upgrading their current service revolvers. Ruger brought out its single-action Blackhawk .41 Magnum in that same year.

The .41 Magnum cartridge case was slightly (.005 inch) longer than the .44 Magnum and required bullets that were a mere .019 inch smaller in diameter at .410 inch. Early factory loads were advertised to drive a 210-grain jacketed softpoint (JSP) bullet at 1,500 fps or a 210-grain lead semiwadcutter



Several factory loads were fired to compare with handloads.

(SWC) at 1,050 fps, although this latter load actually produced about 950 fps from a 4-inch barrel and the former load about 1,350 fps from the same length barrel. The soft swaged lead bullet was void of a gas check, which unfortunately gave the .41 Magnum a reputation for leading barrels.

While a few police departments adopted this gun/cartridge combination, its acceptance among law enforcement was limited due mostly to the heavy guns and factory loads that were less than ideal, as the high velocity load kicked too much and the reduced load leaded. Had the ammunition been closer to what Bill Jordan desired (200-grain slugs at 1,200 fps) and the gun on a smaller frame and lighter, its acceptance among law enforcement might have been much different.

Outdoorsmen took the .41 Magnum afield and found it was very effective on deer, black bear and even elk.

On the other hand, interest in handgun hunting was on the rise, and outdoorsmen took the .41 Magnum afield and found it was very effective on deer, black bear and even elk as long as the right bullets were used. What appealed to many was that it had a significant power edge over the popular .357 Magnum but didn't kick as hard as the .44 Magnum. During the 1970s, when .44 Magnums were really difficult to find (thanks to Clint Eastwood), many purchased .41 Magnums and after using them a few years found they were effective as a general-purpose handgun.

Some have claimed the .41 offers just as much power as the .44 Magnum, which is something I must take issue with. While I have taken big (and small) game with both cartridges, in fairness I must admit my hunting experiences with the .44 Magnum is many times that of the .41. Nonetheless the .44 uses a bullet that weighs about 15 percent more and is of larger caliber with more frontal area, which simply translates into a larger wound



Left, the .41 Magnum is more versatile if handloaded with cast and jacketed bullets. Below, cast bullets should be sized to .410 inch.



channel and greater ability to deliver shock and to break heavy bones.

Some ambitious advocates of the .41 Magnum claim the 210-grain bullet offers a flatter trajectory and higher velocity than a comparable designed 240-grain .44 Magnum bullet. This may be true, but it is so slight that it is unimportant in the real world of hunting or kicking around in the hills with an iron-sighted or even a scoped sixgun. For example the Remington catalog lists factory loaded .41 Magnum 210-grain JSP bullets at 1,300 fps and .44 Magnum 240-grain JSP bullets at 1,180 fps – both from a 4-inch vented barrel. (The .41 bullet has a sectional density of .178, while the .44's SD is .186, which also gives the .44 a slight BC edge.) In clocking various brands of ammunition in both calibers in guns with similar barrel lengths, the difference is not much with the .41 actually clocking around 50 or 60 fps faster. With the .44's better BC, the difference in drop at 100 yards is around $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, with the .41 having a slight edge.

The above is not presented to discredit the .41 Magnum but needed to be said just to set the record



Left, the throats of this Ruger Blackhawk .41 Magnum measure .4105 inch, nearly perfect for the Hornady .410-inch jacketed bullet. Above, the Hornady bullet fits snugly in the throats.

straight. Besides this cartridge has plenty of merit on its own.

The .41 Magnum has always had a reputation of offering superb accuracy. In working with several Smith & Wesson and Ruger revolvers and recently with the Freedom Arms Model 1997, in almost every instance they have been tack-drivers. The cartridge is no more accurate than any other modern revolver cartridge; the revolvers are largely responsible for this reputation. For example, all .41 revolvers I have worked with have featured throats that were cut

bly shoot better. Keep in mind that .44 revolvers produced during this era commonly had throats that were .003 to .005 inch larger than groove (or bullet) diameter. Today this picture has changed as most manufacturers produce guns with tighter throats for increased accuracy.

There is a good selection of jacketed expanding bullets for hand-loading the .41 Magnum, ranging from 170 to 210 grains, from Sierra, Speer, Nosler and Hornady. I have had the most experience with the 210-grain Hornady XTP and have taken several head of big game with it. When driven to 1,400 fps, it is a great bullet for taking whitetail deer as it always expands and destroys soft tissue (like lungs) and will usually completely penetrate on broadside shots. My standard load for the 210-grain Hornady bullet has consisted of 22.5 grains of Hodgdon H-110 ignited by a Federal 155 Large Pistol Magnum primer for 1,354 fps from a 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch Ruger Blackhawk or 1,302 fps from a 4-inch Smith & Wesson. Another load that has been discovered in the past couple years and is proving accurate, with higher velocity and less pressure, consists of 22.5 grains of Hodgdon Lil'Gun (with the same bullet and primer) for 1,399 fps from the Ruger or 1,352 fps from the Smith & Wesson.

If we turn the .41 Magnum on heavier game where deeper penetration or the ability to break

Some have claimed the .41 offers just as much power as the .44 Magnum.



to proper size of between .410 and .411 inch, and groove diameters usually run .410 inch. These tolerances, combined with .410-inch bullets, make a great combination for top-notch accuracy.

If I were a betting man and were going to compare a large quantity of .41 and .44 Magnum production revolvers manufactured from 1964 through 1990 (when most gun makers tightened the throats and overall dimensions) for accuracy, I would put my money on the .41. Please note that I didn't say the .44's were inaccurate, but just that the .41s, on average, would proba-

Brian believes the .41 Magnum is well suited to take deer.

.41 Magnum

heavy bone is needed, such as black bear or elk, a heavyweight cast bullet is a better choice. The Cast Performance 255-grain Wide Flat Nose (WFN) Gas Check is a favorite, as it seats out of the case with a nose length of .375 inch, which increases powder capacity and lowers pressures. The wide, flat nose delivers great shock and opens a permanent wound channel with penetration running about 3 feet. It can be driven 1,217 fps using a charge of 19.5 grains of Hodgdon H-110 in a Ruger Blackhawk with a 6½-inch barrel, and groups are usually within 2½ inches at 50 yards.

The old Keith design, weighing 215 to 220 grains (depending on mould maker) is a good general-purpose bullet and is suitable for light target loads at 800 fps or can



A variety of powders produces good results in the .41 Magnum.

be driven to exceed 1,400 fps. And it's capable of taking big game, as it penetrates about the same as the above 255-grain WFN, but it doesn't open as large a wound channel. Elmer Keith's original .41 Magnum load called for between 19 and 20 grains of Hercules (now Alliant) 2400 powder with a CCI 300 Large Pistol primer (non-magnum) behind a 220-grain Keith bullet. This

powder is faster burning today than it was in the 1960s, and 19.0 grains with this bullet should be considered maximum. This load travels 1,383 fps from the 6½-inch Ruger or 1,320 fps from the 4-inch Smith & Wesson and is still a good general-purpose combination for the .41 Magnum.

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.41 Remington Magnum Favorite Handloads

bullet (grains)	powder	charge (grains)	primer	Ruger Blackhawk velocity (fps)	S&W Model 657 velocity (fps)
170 Sierra JHP	H-110	25.5	Federal 155	1,522	1,447
200 Speer JHP-SWC	H-110	22.0		1,330	1,262
210 Hornady XTP-HP	Lil'Gun	22.5		1,399	1,321
	H-110	22.5		1,354	1,288
210 RCBS 41-SWC cast	Red Dot	5.5	Federal 150	970	923
220 Lyman 410459 cast	W-231	6.0		858	828
	Bullseye	5.0		812	795
	Unique	7.5		1,055	1,028
	HS-6	11.5		1,142	1,062
	2400	19.0		1,383	1,320
	H-110	21.0	Federal 155	1,320	1,253
255 Cast Performance WFNGC	H-110	19.5		1,217	1,145

Notes: Ruger Blackhawk has a barrel length of 6½ inches. The Smith & Wesson Model 657 Mountain Gun has a barrel length of 4 inches. Starline brass used in all loads. Temperature during range tests was 28 degrees Fahrenheit.

Be Alert - Publisher cannot accept responsibility for errors in published load data.

.41 Remington Magnum Factory Loads

bullet (grains)	advertised velocity (fps)	S&W velocity (fps)	Ruger velocity (fps)
170 Buffalo Bore JHP	1,650	1,541	1,640
175 Winchester Silvertip HP	1,250	1,207	1,271
210 Federal Classic JHP	1,300	1,251	1,328
210 PMC Truncated TCSP	1,290	1,253	1,344
210 Remington Jacketed SP	1,300	1,260	1,339
230 Buffalo Bore Keith	1,450	1,359	1,447
250 Federal Castcore	1,250	1,076	1,140
265 Buffalo Bore LWN	1,350	1,244	1,355

Notes: Ruger Blackhawk has a barrel length of 6½ inches. The Smith & Wesson Model 657 Mountain Gun has a barrel length of 4 inches.

load consists of the 220-grain Keith bullet (either Ballisti Cast 858 or Lyman 410459) backed by 6.0 grains of Winchester 231 for about 850 fps. This load is pleasant with minimal muzzle blast and can be mastered by practically anyone. If the bullets are of good quality and used in an accurate gun, it will often stay within 2 inches or less at 50 yards. If a little more velocity is desired, then 11.5 grains of Hodgdon HS-6 produces 1,142 fps, or 7.5 grains of Unique produces 1,055 fps, and both are almost equally as accurate. For full-power loads, either 21.0 grains of Hodgdon H-110 produces 1,320 fps from the 6½-inch Ruger or the previously mentioned 19.0 grains of Alliant 2400 at 1,383 fps are personal favorites.

Since the above Keith bullet is a plain base, it is imperative to cast it hard enough to prevent leading, especially when velocities exceed 950 or 1,000 fps. It's best to use metal with a BHN of 18 to 20 and

be certain to use a quality bullet lube. If these two rules are followed, barrel leading will not be an issue.

If I were limited to just three handloads in the .41 Magnum, I would settle on the 220-grain Keith cast bullet driven by 6.0 grains of Winchester 231 for 850 fps for general small game hunting and plinking. For hunting medium-sized game such as whitetail deer or for personal defense, the Hornady 210-grain XTP driven by 22.5 grains of Hodgdon Lil'Gun for 1,400 fps would be a first choice. If larger game were on the menu, the 255-grain Cast Performance WFN gas check design driven by 19.5 grains of H-110 for over 1,200 fps would be the load for this application.

Now, if I were limited to just one load for all purposes, then the 220-grain Keith bullet driven to almost 1,400 fps with a charge of 19.0 grains of Alliant 2400 would likely

be my one choice. It's accurate, penetrates well and is suitable for taking any game that would likely be hunted with this cartridge.

The .41 Magnum is a fine round and becomes even better through handloading. While I have no plans to replace my favorite .44 Magnums and .45 Colts with the .41 Magnum, I am fond of the .41 Magnum and there will always be room for it in my gun rack.

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