



.44 Magnum

.44 Remington Magnum			
			
.44 Remington Magnum cartridge			
Type	Handgun/Revolver/Rifle		
Place of origin	 United States		
Production history			
Designer	Elmer Keith/Smith and Wesson		
Designed	1950s		
Produced	1955–Present		
Specifications			
Parent case	.44 S&W Special		
Bullet diameter	.429 in (10.9 mm)		
Neck diameter	.457 in (11.6 mm)		
Base diameter	.457 in (11.6 mm)		
Rim diameter	.514 in (13.1 mm)		
Rim thickness	.060 in (1.5 mm)		
Case length	1.285 in (32.6 mm)		
Overall length	1.61 in (41 mm)		
Primer type	Large pistol		
Maximum pressure	36,000 psi (250 MPa)		
Ballistic performance			
Bullet weight/type	Velocity	Energy	
200 gr (13 g) JHP	1,282 ft/s (391 m/s)	760 ft·lbf (1,030 J)	
225 gr (15 g) XPB Lead Free	1,500 ft/s (460 m/s)	1,124 ft·lbf (1,524 J)	
240 gr (16 g) Bonded JSP*	1,500 ft/s (460 m/s)	1,200 ft·lbf (1,600 J)	
320 gr (21 g) WFNGC HC*	1,300 ft/s (400 m/s)	1,201 ft·lbf (1,628 J)	
340 gr (22 g) LFN +P+	1,325 ft/s (404 m/s)	1,533 ft·lbf (2,078 J)	

<i>Test barrel length: 7.5" (*6.5")</i> <i>Source(s): DoubleTap^[1] Buffalo Bore^[2]</i>	
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The **.44 Remington Magnum**, or simply **.44 Magnum**, is a large-bore cartridge originally designed for revolvers. After introduction, it was quickly adopted for carbines and rifles. Despite the ".44" designation, all guns chambered for the .44 Magnum case, and its parent case, the .44 Special, use bullets of approximately 0.429 in (10.9 mm) diameter.^[3]

The .44 Magnum is based on a lengthened .44 Special case, loaded to higher pressures for greater velocity (and thus, energy). The .44 Magnum has since been eclipsed in power by the .454 Casull, among others; nevertheless, it has remained one of the most popular commercial large-bore magnum cartridges.^[4] When loaded to its maximum and with heavy, deeply penetrating bullets, the .44 Magnum cartridge is suitable for short-range hunting of all North American game—though at the cost of much recoil and muzzle flash when fired in handguns. In carbines and rifles, these are non-issues.^[5]

Origin

The .44 Magnum cartridge was the end result of years of tuned handloading of the .44 Special.^[6] The .44 Special, and other large-bore handgun cartridges, were being loaded with heavy bullets, pushed at higher than normal velocities for better hunting performance. One of these handloaders was Elmer Keith, a writer and outdoorsman of the 20th Century.^[7]

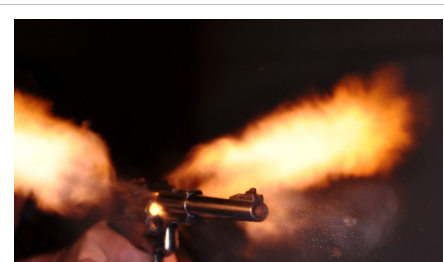
Elmer Keith settled on the .44 Special cartridge as the basis for his experimentation, rather than the larger .45 Colt. At the time, the selection of .44 caliber projectiles for handloaders was more varied, and .44 special brass was thicker and stronger than the dated .45 Colt case. Also, the .44 Special case was smaller in diameter than the .45 Colt case. In revolvers of the same cylinder size, this meant the .44 caliber revolvers had thicker, and thus stronger, cylinder walls than the .45. This allowed higher pressures to be used with less risk of a burst cylinder.^[8]

Keith encouraged Smith & Wesson and Remington to produce a commercial version of this new high pressure loading, and revolvers chambered for it. Smith & Wesson's first .44 Magnum revolver, the Model 29, was built on December 15, 1955 and the gun was announced to the public on January 19, 1956^[9] for a price of \$140. Julian Hatcher, (technical editor of American Rifleman) and Elmer Keith received two of the first production models. Hatcher's review of the new Smith & Wesson revolver and the .44 Magnum cartridge appeared in the March, 1956 issue of the magazine. Smith & Wesson produced 3,100 of these revolvers in 1956.^[10]

By the summer of 1956, Sturm, Ruger became aware of this project and began work on a single action Blackhawk revolver for the new .44 Magnum cartridge. Popular rumor says a Ruger employee found a cartridge case marked ".44 Remington Magnum" and took it to Bill Ruger, while another says a Remington employee provided Ruger with early samples of the ammunition.^[11] Ruger began shipping their new revolver in late November, 1956.

The .44 Magnum case is slightly longer than the .44 Special case, not because of the need for more room for propellant, but to prevent the far higher pressure cartridge from being chambered in older, weaker .44 Special firearms, thus preventing injuries and possible deaths.^[12]

The .44 Magnum was an immediate success, and the direct descendants of the S&W Model 29 and the .44 Magnum Ruger Blackhawks are still in production, and have been joined by numerous other makes and models of .44 Magnum revolvers and even a handful of semi-automatic models, the first being the .44 Automag, produced in the



.44 Magnum revolver photographed with a high-speed air-gap flash clearly showing the bullet.

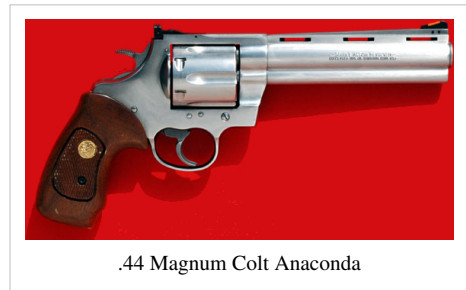
1960s.^[4] The debut of the Clint Eastwood star-vehicle film *Dirty Harry* (1971) prominently featuring the S&W M29 contributed to that model's popularity (as well as the cartridge itself).^[5]

Ruger introduced its first long gun, a semi-automatic carbine chambered for .44 Magnum, in 1959, and Marlin followed soon after with a lever action model 1894 in .44 Magnum.^[1] Having a carbine and a handgun chambered in the same caliber is an old tradition; the .44-40 Winchester was introduced by Winchester in a lever action in 1873, and Colt followed in 1878 with a revolver chambered in the same caliber. The .38-40 Winchester and .32-20 Winchester were also available chambered in both carbines and revolvers, allowing the shooter to use one type of ammunition for both firearms.^[1]

Although improved modern alloys and manufacturing techniques have allowed even stronger cylinders, leading to larger and more powerful cartridges such as the .454 Casull and .480 Ruger in revolvers the same size as a .44 Magnum, the .44 Magnum is still considered a top choice today.^[1] In 2006, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the .44 Magnum, Ruger introduced a special 50th anniversary Blackhawk revolver, in the "Flattop" style.^[1]

Technical specifications

The .44 Magnum delivers a large, heavy bullet with high velocity for a handgun. In its full-powered form, it produces so much recoil and muzzle blast that it is generally considered to be unsuitable for use as a police weapon. Rapid fire is difficult and strenuous on the users' hands, especially for shooters of smaller build or with small hands.^{[6][1]}



Although marketed as a .44 caliber, the .44 Magnum and its parent .44 Special are actually .429-.430 caliber. The .44 designation is a carryover from the early measurements of "heeled" bullets, used in the later 19th century. In those times, bullets were measured on the outside of the cartridge, not the inside of the cartridge. After the .44 S&W Russian was developed, the forefather of the .44 Special and thus the .44 Magnum, the measurement of bullet caliber, was taken from inside of the cartridge resulting in .429 caliber. Instead of confusing buyers who were used to .44 caliber revolvers, the original .44 designation was kept for market recognition.

Some gun styles are more comfortable to use when shooting this caliber. Many shooters find the rounded grip shape of the single action better for handling heavy recoil than the grip shape of double-action revolvers, which have a shoulder on top of the grip. Many shooters, consider the ideal type of grip for heavy recoiling guns to be the longer "Bisley" style single action grip, and it can be found on single actions from Ruger (models marked "Bisley") and Freedom Arms, as well as many custom makers.^[7]

Dual-purpose use

The concept of a dual-purpose handgun/rifle cartridge has been popular since the Old West, with cartridges like the .44-40 Winchester, whose "High-Speed" rifle loadings were precursor magnum loads. Other dual-use rounds were the .32-20 Winchester and the .38-40 Winchester.^{[1][1]}



Some past dual-purpose cartridges, like the .44-40 Winchester, gave their manufacturers trouble when people loaded the "High-Speed" versions designed for rifles into handguns.^[1] Since the .44 Magnum was designed from the start as a revolver cartridge, such issues are moot, and SAAMI-compliant ammunition should fire from any handguns or rifles chambered for the .44 Magnum.

As a rifle or carbine cartridge the .44 Magnum is sufficiently powerful for medium-sized game, yet fits easily into a compact, lightweight package. In 1969, Ruger introduced their .44 Carbine, the first .44 Magnum carbine. The

lever-action Marlin Model 1894, Ruger Deerfield, and many other firearms are currently available in this caliber. With significantly longer barrels than revolvers, carbines will generate a significantly higher velocity than a revolver loaded with the same ammunition.^[8] Tests with various ammunition in the Ruger Deerfield yielded a 100 yards (91 m) velocity of over 1,300 ft/s (400 m/s) with a 240-grain (16 g) bullet, comparable to the muzzle velocity out of a revolver.^[9] Loads using slow burning powders maximize performance in both short and long barrels, with one published load generating 1,500 ft/s (460 m/s) from a revolver, and 1,625 ft/s (495 m/s) from a carbine with a 240-grain (16 g) bullet.^[10]

Suitable game

The .44 Magnum is well-suited for game up to elk size. With precise shot placement and deep penetrating cartridges it has even been used to take the largest of game, including Cape Buffalo. Publisher Robert E. Petersen took a record setting polar bear with a .44 Magnum.^[11] It has even been used against elephants with success.^[11]

In addition to beating the ballistics of the old .44-40 rifle loads, long considered a top deer cartridge,^[1] the heavy, flat point bullets typically used in the .44 Magnum have an additional advantage. Tests performed where bullets are shot through light cover, intended to represent twigs and brush, have shown that the high velocity, light weight, thin jacketed, pointed bullets used by most hunting cartridges today are easily deflected by contact with the brush. The ideal bullets for penetrating brush with minimal deflection are heavy, flat point bullets at moderate velocities.^[1]

Range

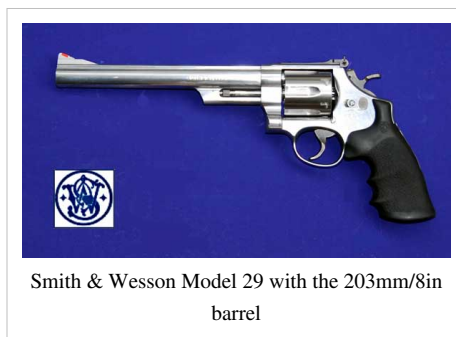
The accuracy of the .44 Magnum is very good, with models from Colt, Smith & Wesson, and Ruger producing bullet groups of 3 to 4 inches (7.6 to 10 centimetres) at 50 yards, with most ammunition.^{[12][13]} The limiting factor of the .44 Magnum cartridge is not terminal ballistics. When fired from a 6" revolver, a typically loaded .44 Magnum 240gr bullet, will have more impact energy at 150yds, than a 246gr .44 Special has at the muzzle, when fired from the same weapon. When loaded with a heavy, non-expanding bullet, the .44 Magnum will easily shoot through large game such as elk and even bison.^[1] The limiting factor is the bullet's trajectory; the best hunting bullets are heavy, thus, relatively slow, meaning a significant drop-out of trajectory at ranges beyond 100 yards (91 m); with a 50-yard zero, the point of which the "line of sight" and the "bullet trajectory" meet, drop-out at 100 yards is about 2 inches (5.1 centimetres), and drop-out at 150 yards (140 m) is more than 8 inches (20 centimetres); with a 100-yard zero, drop-out at 150 yards is more than 6 inches (15 centimetres).^[14] Experts recommend limiting hunting ranges to 100 yards (91 m) when shooting .44 Magnum cartridges, less if practical accuracy requires it.^[15]

In popular culture

While the .44 Magnum was very popular among shooters for many years after its introduction, it did not come to the attention of the general public until 1971, when it was prominently featured in the Clint Eastwood star-vehicle "Dirty Harry" (and its four sequels), which also used the Smith & Wesson Model 29.^[15]

In one of the classic lines in cinema, Eastwood's character "Dirty" Harry Callahan describes his M29 as "the most powerful handgun in the world" in the 1971 film *Dirty Harry*. Although not strictly true (the more powerful wildcat .454 Casull was announced in 1959^[1]), the .44 Magnum was the most powerful then in production. Demand for the M29 skyrocketed, so much that the guns were selling for up to three times suggested retail price.

The .44 Magnum has continued to be associated with Callahan, including the line "Go ahead, make my day" in the 1983 film *Sudden Impact*.^[16]



Smith & Wesson Model 29 with the 203mm/8in barrel

References

- [3] *Lyman Reloading Handbook*, 48th edition, 2002
- [4] Dougherty, Martin J., *Small Arms: From the Civil War to the Present Day* Fall River: 2005, page 61, ISBN 978-0-7607-6329-2
- [5] Dougherty, Martin J., *Small Arms: From the Civil War to the Present Day* Fall River: 2005, page 46, ISBN 978-0-7607-6329-2
- [8] Ballistics By The Inch .44magnum results. (<http://www.ballisticsbytheinch.com/44mag.html>)
- [10] Accurate Arms, 21.3 grains of #9 and an IMI 240 grain JHP bullet; see rifle ([http://www accuratepowder.com/data/PerCaliber2Guide/Rifle/Standarddata\(Rifle\)/432Cal\(10.97mm\)/44 Remington Magnum 20inch page 330.pdf](http://www accuratepowder.com/data/PerCaliber2Guide/Rifle/Standarddata(Rifle)/432Cal(10.97mm)/44 Remington Magnum 20inch page 330.pdf)) and handgun ([http://www accuratepowder.com/data/PerCaliber2Guide/Handgun/Standarddata/44Cal\(10.97mm\)/44 Remington Magnum pages 133 to 135.pdf](http://www accuratepowder.com/data/PerCaliber2Guide/Handgun/Standarddata/44Cal(10.97mm)/44 Remington Magnum pages 133 to 135.pdf)) data.
- [15] "Dirty Harry" Callahan character filmography (<http://www.imdb.com/character/ch0007342/>).

External links

- Ballistics By The Inch .44magnum results (<http://www.ballisticsbytheinch.com/44mag.html>)

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