

THE .44 MAGNUM'S HISTORY

The story of the .44 Magnum is a familiar one. Elmer Keith, the late dean of the big-bore gun writers, once experimented with hot-loaded .44 Special cases in single-action Colts, blowing up more than a few wheelguns in the process. In 1955, Keith convinced Remington to make the ammo and Smith & Wesson the guns. However, because bullets shot out of high-pressure .44 Special loads often turned into shrapnel, the .44 Magnum case was lengthened to 1.285 inches from the .44 Special's 1.160-inch OAL. This would prevent the hotter loads from chambering in older guns—a prudent policy since the current industry standard for the .44 S&W Special is 15,500 psi while the .44 Remington Magnum's is more than double that at 36,000 psi.

Smith & Wesson created the Model 29 revolver for the .44 Remington Magnum using the same N-frame that it had developed for the Model 27 .357 Magnum single action, and the .44 Remington Magnum never looked back. It wasn't long before enterprising gunsmiths realized that this caliber could make a handy woods carbine—one that was much more powerful than the .44-40—and they started converting Winchester Model 1892 carbines to the .44 Magnum.

Bill Ruger also realized the cartridge's potential. In 1961 he introduced a semi-auto, gas-operated carbine based loosely on the M-1 action. This little carbine had an 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch barrel with a 1-in-38 inch twist. The tubular magazine held four cartridges. The gun found a niche with deep-woods deer hunters, but its popularity eventually faded, and it was dropped from the Ruger line. In 1996 Ruger decided to reenter the market with a .44 Remington Magnum carbine, but this time as a lever action. Because introductions are often made long before any guns actually come off the production line, it was only recently that we were able to procure one for testing.

In 1962 Marlin chambered its 336 lever-action rifle in .44 Remington Magnum. The design was dropped after two years, but Marlin later began chambering the lighter, trimmer Model 1894 carbine in the caliber.