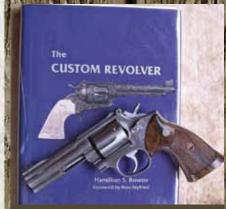
# Bowen Classic Arms -327 Federal Magnum Custom Sixguns.

## **John Taffin**

Looking back over my 50-plus years of shooting sixguns, I saw a long list of heavy-duty cartridges introduced: the .44 Magnum, .41 Magnum, .454 Casull, .475 Linebaugh, .500 Linebaugh, .480 Ruger, .500 S&W Magnum, .460 S&W Magnum, .500 Wyoming Express and various other wildcat cartridges of the same type. All of these have been designed basically with the handgun hunter in mind and virtually any animal can be taken cleanly with these cartridges properly loaded in the proper sixgun. But how often do we really need the power these cartridges provide?

When I first started reloading for the .44 Magnum in the late 1950s, I thought it would be some kind of blasphemy if I used anything except the Keith Load consisting of a hardcast 250- or 260-grain Keith bullet over the Keith recommended charge of 22 grains of 2400. I did the same thing when the .454 arrived; everything had to be loaded full-bore. As I grew older, and perhaps wiser, I finally realized I was missing a lot of sixgunning pleasure by loading everything pedal to the metal. I still have boxes of full-house ammunition on hand for every one of these cartridges, however I have much more loaded to more pleasant duty. A 260-grain cast bullet

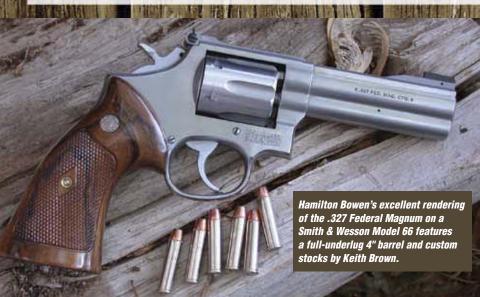


Hamilton Bowen literally wrote the book on The Custom Revolver.

at 850 to 1,000 fps loaded in an easy-to-carry .44 Special, .44 Magnum, .45 Colt or .454 is likely to do anything I really need done for the rest of my life.

Just recently we had one of the most truly useful cartridges arrive when Federal Ammunition teamed up with Ruger to introduce a superb smallbore cartridge in the .327 Federal Magnum. No, it is not for biggame hunting, however a very small, actually less than 1 percent of my shooting is ever used in this manner. Every year I fire thousands upon thousands of rounds, but at the most take two to three big-game animals. Most of us shoot a lot of paper, roll a lot of tin cans, bust many rocks and, if we live in the right area, take many varmints with our sixguns. For these duties the new .327 is about as good as a cartridge can be.

Originally introduced as a selfdefense cartridge chambered in the Ruger SP101, the .327, at least in my





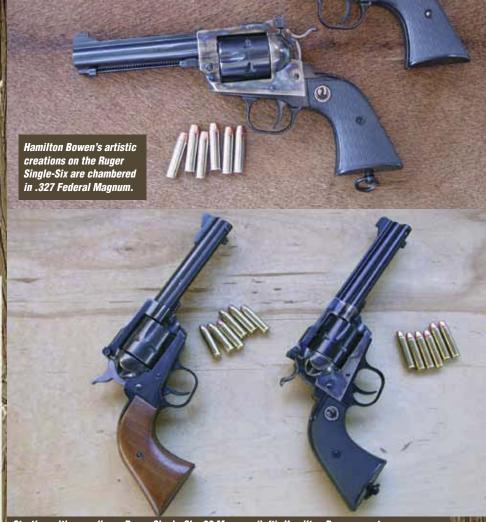
Taffin used Hornady and Speer 100-grain JHPs in assembling .327 Federal Magnum reloads in Starline brass.

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mind, takes the place of the .32-20, .30 Carbine and .32 H&R Magnum. The .32-20 was first chambered in sixguns in the last quarter of the 19th century, the .30 Carbine became a standard offering from Ruger in the last quarter of the 20th century, and the .32 H&R Magnum arrived in the 1980s. The .327 Federal Magnum is what the .32 H&R Magnum should've been originally. The latter is still an excellent cartridge, however the .327 is simply better. It combines the power of the .32-20 and .30 Carbine with the straight-walled, rimmed case of the .32 Magnum. It is in fact nothing more than a longer .32 Magnum with slightly thicker brass at the base of the inner walls.

The .327 may have been introduced as a self-defense cartridge, however it is certainly useful, perhaps more so, as a varmint and small-game cartridge or even chambered in a relatively light, adjustable-sighted sixgun for use as a trail gun. In the right sixguns it will drive a 100- or 115-grain bullet at 1,500 to 1,600 fps. Hamilton Bowen also says it will do so while shooting as flat as a banjo string. As most of you know, Hamilton Bowen is one of the premier sixgunsmiths of this or any other time. He has built some of the biggest and baddest sixguns imaginable. However, his heart belongs to the more pleasant shooting sixguns and cartridges with the .32-20 being one of his favorites. With the coming of the .327 the .32-20 has been pushed into second place. In fact Hamilton says the .327 is the best thing to come along since the .44 Magnum.

Hamilton is now building custom sixguns chambered in .327 Federal Magnum and I have had the good



Starting with an ordinary Ruger Single-Six .32 Magnum (left), Hamilton Bowen creates a magnificent .327 sixgun complete with Bisley hammer and Turnbull case coloring. Note the lanyard ring on the butt of the custom Single-Six.

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fortune of testing and evaluating four of his sixgunning works of art. All four were made for customers of Bowen Classic Arms and they allowed me the pure pleasure of shooting them first. Normally when testing a newly manufactured sixgun I push it with both factory and reloaded cartridges, but since these sixguns actually belong to other shooters I did not see how much I could get from the .327 Federal Magnum by reloading, but rather just going with loads slightly under the Federal factory ammunition level. Even so, these handloads are definitely in the useful category.

Years ago Hamilton did a beautiful .32-20 on a Ruger Old Model .357 Blackhawk. In this case he removed the adjustable sights, welded and recontoured the topstrap to come up with an easy handling sixgun, which

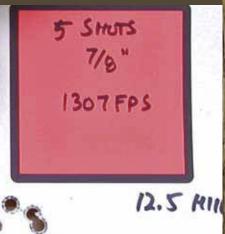
basically looked and felt like a Colt Single Action. Now Hamilton has the Ruger 50th Anniversary New Model .357 Blackhawk to use as a platform for custom sixguns. The first gun up is one of these with two cylinders, one in the always useful and desired .32-20 and the other in perhaps the even better .327 Federal Magnum.

### **The Ruger Blackhawk**

The 50th Anniversary Ruger .357 is the same size as the original Ruger .357 Blackhawk, has the same Colt Single Action-sized XR3 grip frame, and, unlike the original, is all steel. It is the perfect platform for building a .44 Special or .45 Colt, or even a 5-shot .44 Magnum all of which Hamilton has done, however this time he has gone smallbore. To easily distinguish between the two chamberings the .32-



Results of firing .327 Federal factory loads in two bullet weights were just as pleasing.



Bowen's short-barreled 4-5/8" Single-Six .327 Federal Magnum (above) shot quite well. Typical .327 Federal Magnum group (below) with the 5-1/2" Bowen custom 50th Anniversary Blackhawk.



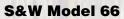
20 is fluted while the .327 cylinder is not, and both are expertly fitted to the frame which has a 5-1/2" Douglas

The front sight is a tapered post on a ramp and is matched up with

one of Hamilton's heavy-duty field rear sights. The hammer and frame are case colored by Turnbull, a large knurled-head locking base pin is fitted, the action is tightened and tuned, and the trigger pull set at 2-1/2 pounds. At 46 ounces this is a relatively heavy sixgun, which makes it even more pleasant when shooting either cartridge. Since this is basically a .327 project, I mainly concentrated my shooting with the .327

Federal. I did run two factory .32-20 loads, both in the 800+ fps range from, Black Hills and Winchester and they shot as easily and accurately as

a .22.



Hamilton's double-action .327 Federal Magnum is built on a mediumframed Smith & Wesson with the result being a most aesthetically pleasing, and superbly shooting double-action sixgun. This conversion starts with a stainless steel .357 Magnum Model 66. For the barrel Hamilton uses a stainless steel 4" Model 617 .22 barrel which is re-bored and marked ".327 FED. MAG. CTG." on the right side of the barrel. The full underlug is maintained on this barrel and it is fitted to a Model 66 frame which then receives a Model 617 cylinder. The two .327 Single-Sixes are chambered to .327 Federal Magnum. basically the same except for the

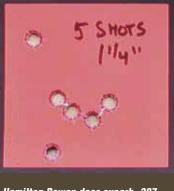
The action is tightened and tuned, the single-action trigger pull set at 3 pounds and an undercut front post of the proper height is fitted to the ramp on the Model 617 barrel.

The Model 66 is the stainless steel

version of the .357 Combat Magnum which became the Model 19 in 1958. The Combat Magnum came with K-framed diamondcheckered stocks, which are extremely difficult to find today and command very high prices. To finish off this package Hamilton used a pair of exquisite 'diamond" Smith & Wesson Target stocks; which are in fact perfect recreations of original S&W .357 Combat Magnum

stocks carried out in fancy walnut by stock maker Keith Brown, who not only duplicates early Smith & Wesson Target and Magna stocks, but classic Roper and Kearsarge pre-war stocks as well. This certainly must be one of the most exquisite double-action smallbore sixguns in existence.

The final two in this .327 quartet is a pair of custom Single-Sixes. Hamilton starts with the New Model Ruger Single-Six chambered in .32 Magnum. Hamilton considers this the natural home for the .327 in a single-action, as the original cylinder diameter is adequate for 6-shots and only has to be replaced by one, which is longer to accept the .327 cartridge. The new cylinder fills out the cylinder window without any modification to the frame.



Hamilton Bowen does superb .327 conversions on the Smith & Wesson Model 66 for those preferring a double-action sixgun.

# 327 FEDERAL MAGNUM FACTORY AMMO PERFORMANCE

GUNS:	RUGER SINGLE SIX 7-1/2"		RUGER SINGLE SIX 4-5/8"		
LOAD (BRAND, BULLET WEIGHT, TYPE)	VELOCITY (FPS)	GROUP SIZE (INCHES)	VELOCITY (FPS)	GROUP SIZE (INCHES)	
Federal Low Recoil 85 JHP	1,617	1-3/8	1,514	1-3/4	
Federal 115 Gold Dot HP	1,508	1-3/8	1,437	1	
American Eagle 100 JFP	1,681	1-3/8	1,584	1	

Notes: Groups the product of 5 of 6 shots at 20 yards. Chronograph screens set at 10' from muzzle.

# 327 FEDERAL MAGNUM ORY AMMO PERFORMA

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GUNS:	RUGER BLACK		ODEL 66 4"					
LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP SIZE	VELOCITY	GROUP SIZE				
Federal Low Recoil 85 JHP	1,591	1-3/8	1,474	1-1/4				
Federal 115 Gold Dot HP	1,412	1"	1,391	3/4				
American Eagle 100 JFP	1,669	1-3/8	1,485	1-3/4				

Notes: Groups the product of 5 of 6 shots at 20 yards. Chronograph screens set at 10' from muzzle.



### **FEDERAL MAGNUM DED AMMO** PERFORMANCE POWDER VELOCITY VELOCITY BULLET CHARGE GROUP GROUP (BRAND, BULLET WEIGHT, TYPE) (BRAND) (GRAINS WEIGHT) (INCHES) Hornady 100 XTP 12.5 L'il Gun 1.401 1,351 1-1/8 Hornady 100 XTP 1-1/2 12.5 H110 1,363 1,257 Speer 100 JHP 1,382 12.5 L'il Gun 7/8 1,312 1-5/8 Speer 100 JHP 12.5 7/8 1,342 H110

Notes: Groups the product of 5 of 6 Shots at 20 yards.
Chronograph screens set at 10' from muzzle. CCI 500 primers used in Starline brass.

	.321 FEDERAL MAGNUM						
HANDLOADED AMMO PERFORMANCE							
GUNS:				RUGER BLACKHAWK 5-1/2"		S&W MODEL 66 4"	
	BULLET	CHARGE		VELOCITY	GROUP	VELOCITY	
	(BRAND, BULLET WEIGHT, TYPE)	(BRAND)	(GRAINS WEIGHT)	(FPS)	(INCHES)	(FPS)	(INCHES)
	Hornady 100 XTP	12.5	Ľil Gun	1,410	1-1/4	1,352	1-3/8
	Hornady 100 XTP	12.5	H110	1,352	1-1/2	1,160	1-1/4
	Speer 100 JHP	12.5	Ľil Gun	1,412	1-5/8	1,326	1-5/8
	Speer 100 JHP	12.5	H110	1.307	7/8	1.161	1-3/8

Notes: Groups the product of 5 of 6 shots at 20 yards. Chronograph screens set at 10' from muzzle. CCI 500 primers used in Starline brass.

barrels. First comes the long-barreled version at 7-1/2"; for me single actions balance the best and are the easiest to shoot with this barrel length. A new cylinder chambered in .327 is line-bored, fluted and black powder chamfered. The action is totally tuned, trigger pull set at just a hair over 3 pounds, Bisley hammer and frame color cased by Turnbull, steel ejectorrod housing installed, oversized locking base pin fitted and a BCA heavy-duty rear field sight matched up with a serrated front ramp sight.

The second .327 Single-Six has a barrel which started life as Smith & Wesson ribbed K22 barrel. Hamilton machined off the underlug, re-bored it to .327, cut it to proper length of 4-5/8" and installed it along with a steel ejector-rod housing. The ribbed barrel matches up beautifully with the Single-Six frame. A Bisley hammer is installed, the front sight is an undercut post, and the frame and hammer are also case colored by Turnbull. Hamilton not only likes smallbore cartridges, he also is a promoter of lanyard rings, one of which has been installed on this little sixgun. A lanyard ring properly used can prevent the damage or even the loss of a beautiful sixgun while traveling by horseback, boat, or simply hiking in rough country.

Hamilton is at the top of the list when it comes to premiere sixgunsmiths and the .327 Federal is at the top of the list of truly useful cartridges; combining the two only seems natural. Contact Hamilton directly for custom sixgun work or for a copy of his book *The Custom Revolver.* It, too, is a masterpiece.

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