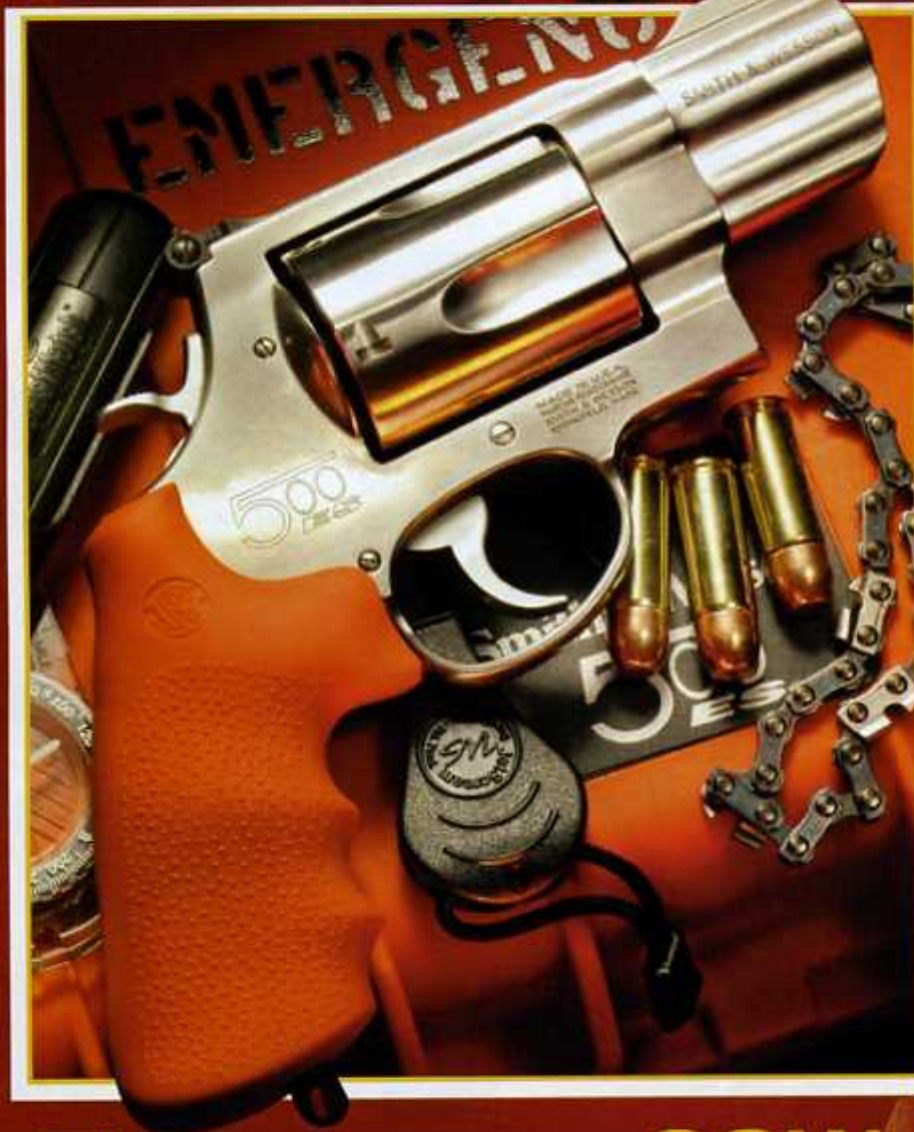


X-FITTED FOR



The chill morning air gives you a bit of the shivers, but the walk to the stream a quarter mile away will warm you up. Fly rod and daypack in hand, you start blundering through the thick brush towards the sound of the murmuring water. Soon, you can see snippets of silver ahead and know you're there. You step out onto the gravel bar and look for a likely spot to set your lunch and other gear.

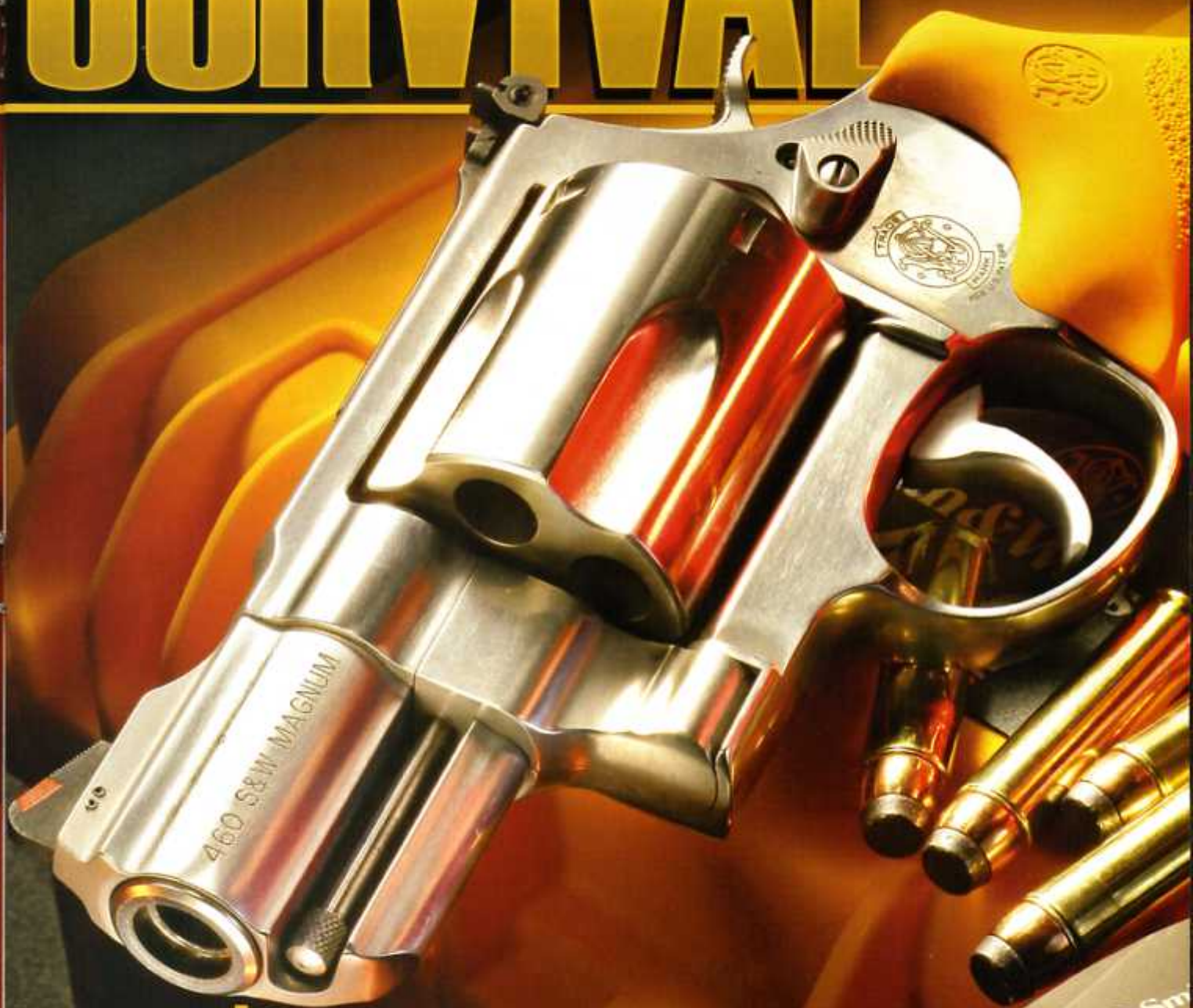
About 30 yards upstream, you see him poking around an old log. Cute little chap. Intent on rigging your rod, the light in your head comes on dimly and flickers a time or two before it brightens and you tell yourself "Hey, I sure hope he's an orphan." Vaguely uneasy, you look downstream and there she is, less than 50 yards away. Up on her hind legs glaring at you with those bleary, ursine eyes. Down she goes and here she comes. "Oh pooh," (or something) you yell to yourself.

Now what? You're on her turf. It's a long way back to the truck. You can run as fast as you want which is about half as fast as she can. Aren't many

These two S&W revolvers ultimate big-bore

HAMILTON BOWEN PHOTOS: ICHIRO NAGATA

SURVIVAL



are the
snubbies.



The .500 Smith & Wesson in full song (above). Acclimating to the recoil is simply a matter of starting with low power loads and working up to the serious ones. Minute-of-bitter-bear accuracy shot at 30' (below) as fast as the gun would go. This is harder than it looks with the .500 Magnum in double-action mode.



The massive X-Frame cylinders hold five rounds of bear-stopping cartridges.



promising trees around. If you are in the Smokey Mountains and this critter is black and weighs 200 pounds and wants to make a big deal out of this, you can brain her with a rock, whip her with your fishing rod or simply beat the crap out of her and she'll probably clear off with Teddy in tow. If you are on a coastal stream in Alaska and she is brown and weighs 700 pounds, you're in trouble. You can stand your ground, point to your lunch, make some racket, wave your arms and otherwise make brave. Maybe you'll be lucky and she'll make a beeline for her cub and they'll beat it. Less lucky, you'll get knocked around some, gnawed on a bit, nothing a couple hundred stitches and rehab can't fix and then they'll beat it. God help you if she is hungry or has a real chip on her shoulder

A Better Ending

You let fly a couple of warning shots into the dirt in front of her and she gets the picture and leaves with Junior. Worst case, she charges for real, head out, ears back, thoroughly unrestrained by the Geneva Convention and you start shooting and kill this thing 20' away. It isn't like we don't know this can happen. The Lewis and Clark expedition recorded perhaps the first description of an encounter with a grizzly bear on this continent more than 200 years ago. Relations between the various members of the bear clan and human interlopers have been strained ever since. Every year to this day terrifying and often deadly encounters occur. While the statistical risk is very low, it is still high enough to warrant preparedness. But how do you prepare for such a nerve-wracking eventuality?

There is no specific right answer, though it sure helps to bring a gun to the fight. While this treatise is not about the philosophy, skills and strategies of dealing with bears, gun choice can't be considered in a vacuum. The really dangerous bears are largely confined to Alaska (with a smattering in Wyoming and Montana), so conditions there govern the discussion.

Conditions vary from the open areas around water to impenetrable undergrowth where visibility is measured in feet. Bear encounters range from near

consensual to startlingly sudden and heart-stopping. In the unlikely event you encounter a bear intent on hurting you, your prospects are probably mixed at best and good luck may turn out to be your best friend no matter how well armed and prepared you are. But you sure can help make your own luck.

Aside from the obvious requirement of having a gun handy, you've got to be pretty handy with the gun you have and have a gun adequate to the job. My guess is most Alaskan guides and veteran residents hold handguns for protection against bears in low esteem, especially in the hands of outlanders. While both Alaskan guides I know and hunt with carry accessible heavy revolvers in belt holsters, they always seem to have a heavy rifle close to hand. Neither would be so foolish as to employ a handgun to back up a hunter, which ought to tell you a lot about handgun effectiveness.

Unfortunately, there are all too many situations sportsmen encounter where a rifle is as handy as an extra navel. Like in the middle of a salmon stream, for instance. Since, in my humble opinion, a heavy revolver beats a sharp stick, I'll take my chances with one. Besides staying home by the fire and reading about fishing and hunting is not one of the options.

Bruin Fodder

Bears of any stripe are extremely tough, hardy creatures and won't dependably succumb to trivial guns. Outdoorsmen have carried backup revolvers for a long time but only in the last couple of decades or so have there been truly effective choices. The .44 Magnum is probably the minimum caliber for the job and, while we've had the Smith & Wesson M29 and Ruger Blackhawk since the middle '50s, we've had useful, high-performance, heavy-bullet ammunition only for the last decade or so. Freedom Arms put the .454 Casull on the map, which was probably the first seriously effective cartridge available.

However, law-enforcement officers of the last century carried double-action revolvers for good reason — they could be loaded and fired much faster. Some advantages apply where bear defense is concerned. Custom

SPEED DRILL TABLE
MODEL / CALIBER AND BULLET WEIGHT / TIME TO EMPTY (SECONDS)

M1911	.40 S&W 180	.81
S&W M629 MOUNTAIN GUN	.44 Mag 240	2.04
S&W ES X500	.500 Special .275 CorBon	2.29
S&W ES X500	.500 Mag 500 Grizzly (4 shots)	3.65
S&W ES X460	.460 S&W 200 CorBon	5.79

Notes: Time was the product of firing 5 shots at 10 yards as rapidly as possible.

EX 460 AND EX 500

Maker: Smith & Wesson
 2100 Roosevelt Avenue
 Springfield, MA 01104

(800) 331-0852, www.smith-wesson.com

ACTION TYPE:	Double-action revolver
CALIBER:	.460 S&W, .500 S&W
CAPACITY:	5
BARREL LENGTH:	2 3/4"
OVERALL LENGTH:	9"
WEIGHT:	54.8 ounces
FINISH:	Stainless steel
SIGHTS:	Red ramp front, adjustable rear
GRIPS:	Hogue sorbothane rubber
PRICE:	\$1,399

revolver-makers have been building powerful backup double-action guns for a couple of decades now, but only in the last couple of years have we had the happy confluence of truly effective cartridges paired with production double-action revolvers. The new Smith & Wesson X-frame revolvers chambered for the .460 and .500 S&W cartridges have ushered in a new era in revolver performance.

No other repeating handgun has the raw horsepower of a full-size .500 S&W Magnum. A solid hit with heavy-bullet .500 will stop (kill very dead) a big bear, no question. But the first X500 revolvers were mammoth 5-pound guns, so the clamor for a more practical variation in the form of a 4" model started immediately. Even so, that gun was still too cumbersome for serious holster use. Enter the latest versions, the 460 and 500 ES (Emergency Survival) guns.

Based on the X-frame, these guns feature cylinders 1.920" in diameter and 2.300" long to handle the 1.800"-long cases of the high-pressure .460 and .500 S&W cartridges. Internally, the guns have the familiar S&W action. The receiver, aside from size, differs from the smaller family members with its unique front crane lock, which eliminates the weaker barrel-mounted front bolt, which ordinarily engages the ejector rod. Barrels on other models sport muzzlebrakes.

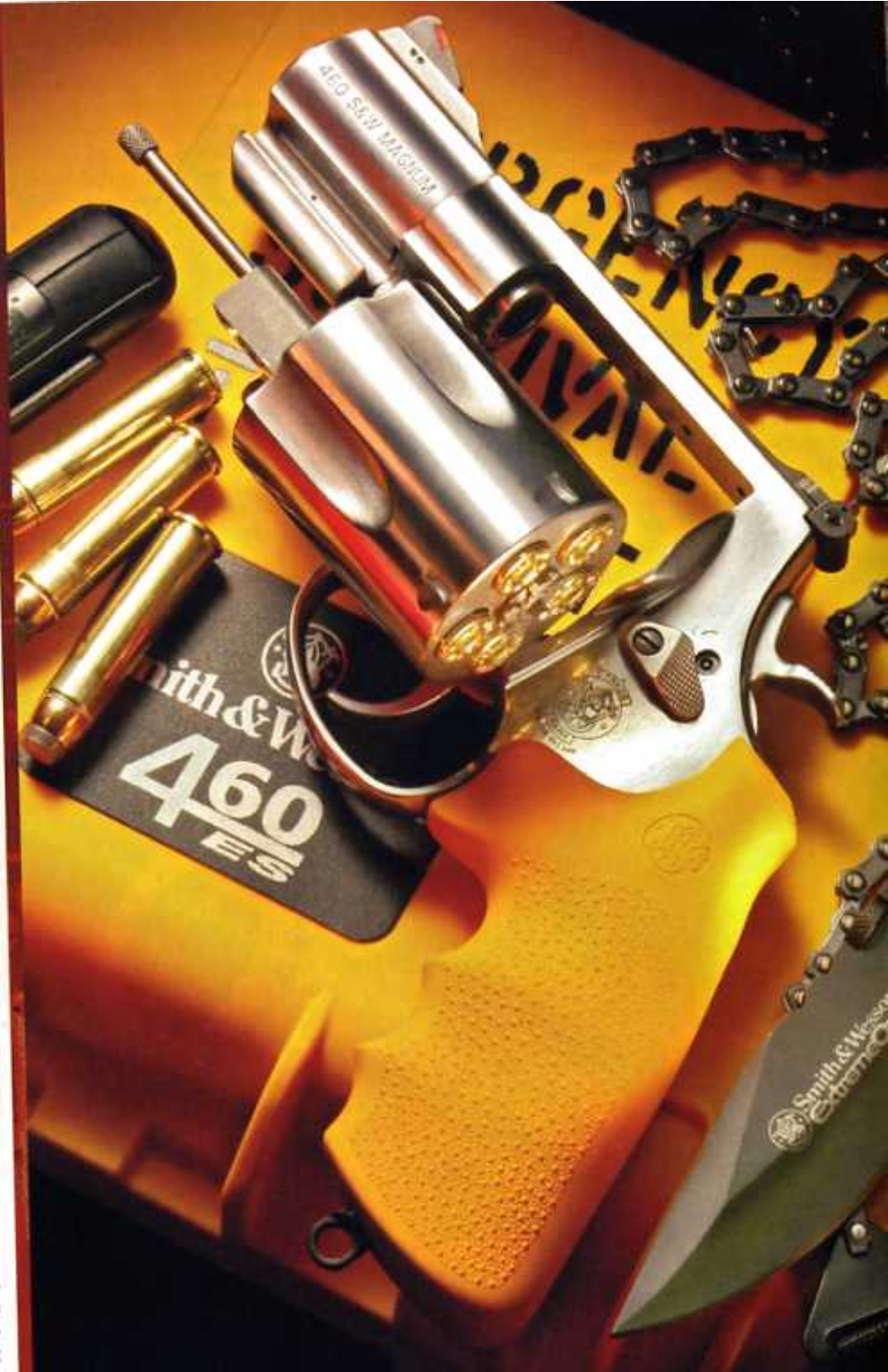
No Brakes

The new ES models, on the other hand, have 2 3/4" barrels without brakes. According to my handy RCBS scale, the .460 weighs 55 ounces, the .500 52 ounces. The orange Hogue grips are a clue these are not toys but serious working guns. More importantly, the grips have a giant swivel stud on the butt to accept snap-link style or homemade cord lanyards, vital to effective gun retention around water, ATVs and horses. Perhaps the most unique fea-

ture is the packaging, a giant, waterproof lunchbox filled with gun, assorted survival tools and a book on bear attacks well worth reading. Both guns proved to be wonderful revolvers.

I'll have to admit I wasn't prepared to like these guns, based on my first

encounter with the 8 3/4" .500 model. Weighty and ill balanced, it was as awkward and clumsy as any "handgun" I've ever encountered and made shots in field positions a dreary enterprise. The gun fairly leaped into the air and tried to take me with it



Both the .460 and .500 come in color-coded waterproof Storm Cases with a variety of survival tools including Blast Match Firestarter and WetFire tinder, Saber Cut saw, Smith & Wesson Extreme Ops Liner Lock Folding Knife, Star Flash signal mirror, Jet Scream whistle, Polaris compass, two MPI Mylar Space emergency blankets and Bear Attacks of the Century — True Stories of Courage and Survival book by Larry Mueller and Marguerite Reiss.

