

# Bowen Custom GP44 Redhawk



**Denis Prisbrey**

## Big Bad Bear Stopper



In the world of the heavy-duty .44 Magnum double-action revolver, Ruger's Redhawk family reigns supreme. Beginning with the original .44 Magnum Redhawk in 1979, and continuing on up through the various iterations of the Super Redhawk first introduced in 1988, the Ruger is the one to go to for a combination of strength, balance and durability unequalled elsewhere.

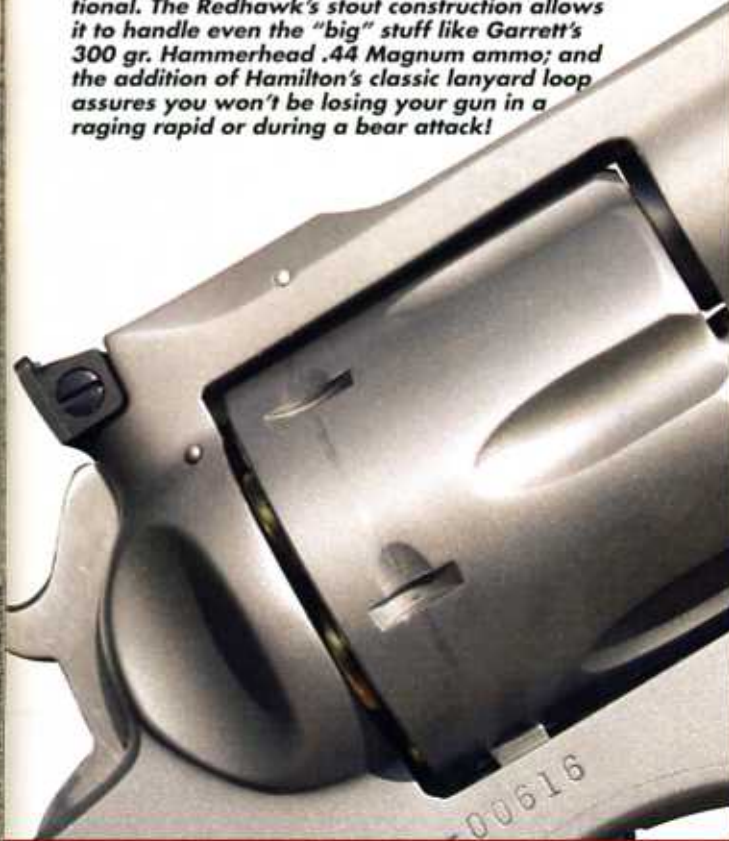
For those who want the ultimate Redhawk, the man to talk to is Hamilton Bowen. From his shop in Tennessee, Bowen turns out some of the finest custom revolver work you'll find in this day and age, and what he can do with a Redhawk needs to be seen and hefted to be truly appreciated.

Three years ago Bowen built me a custom Redhawk to meet certain specific criteria I had in mind, and the

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*Bowen's conversion is sublime, yet highly functional. The Redhawk's stout construction allows it to handle even the "big" stuff like Garrett's 300 gr. Hammerhead .44 Magnum ammo; and the addition of Hamilton's classic lanyard loop assures you won't be losing your gun in a raging rapid or during a bear attack!*



*Thick chamber walls built strong to handle Garrett Hammerheads.*

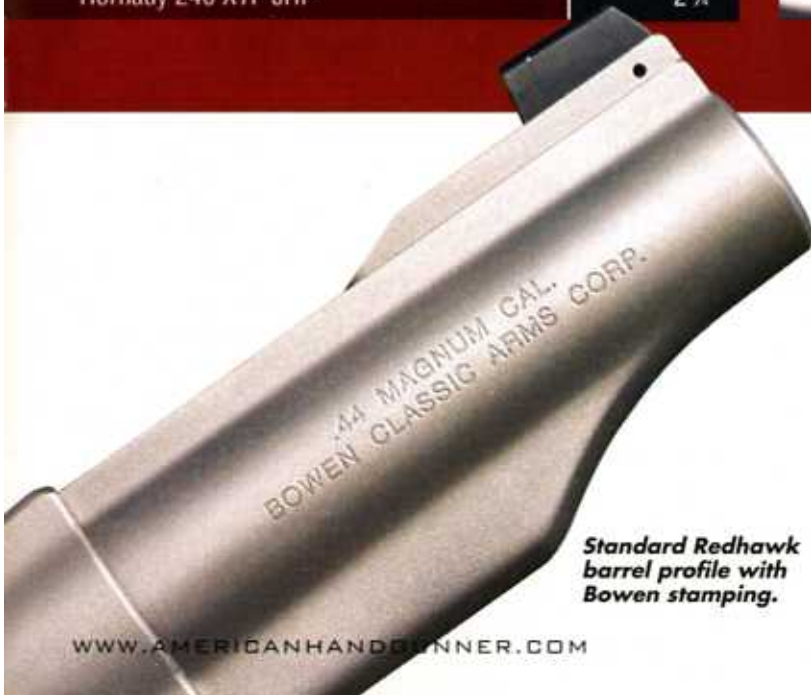
*Bowen's Rough Country all-steel rear sight.*



### Ammunition

### Group size (in inches)

Garrett 330 GC Hammerheads	2 3/8
Federal 300 CASTCORE	3 3/8
Winchester 250 Partition Gold JHP	2 3/8
Winchester 250 PTHP	3 3/8
Remington 250 JSP	2 1/8
Remington 275 Core-Lokt JHP	3 3/8
Speer 240 Gold Dot JHP	3
Hornady 240 XTP JHP	2 3/8



*Standard Redhawk barrel profile with Bowen stamping.*



*Top view of barrel showing XS big dot on Weigand base.*



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## BOWEN CUSTOM

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resulting blued four-incher engraved by Dan Love is one I'll always treasure. But, finding grips for it to shoot Randy Garrett's 330-grain full-house Hammerheads comfortably has been problematical for my medium-size hands, and the original Redhawk action with one spring that powers both the hammer and trigger return does not lend itself well to tuning.

### To The Drawing Board

This time, discussions with Hamilton started out based on the Super Redhawk, one of the buttugliest handguns on the market in my opinion, but also one of the strongest and most durable. The Super Redhawk uses essentially the same internal action as the GP100 revolvers and the same abbreviated grip frame as the GPs. The preliminary idea was to remove the Super barrel, cut the front frame extension back to where it normally is on a standard Redhawk, and give me a 4" barrel.

As Bowen says, "The original Super Redhawks introduced a couple of important features by way of a more tunable action and the spike-style grip frame which would afford a gripmaker more flexibility in making grips of different angles, reaches and diameters. Unfortunately, these advantages were overshadowed by the homely receiver with its weird snout and scope ring cuts on the topstrap. While we could deal with the snout, the ring cuts would have to be welded up for best appearance, an impractical solution given finish problems. The new 'Alaskan Model' gave us a clean topstrap that made useful custom work feasible."

Previous conversions of the Super had been done by using a regular Redhawk barrel because once you remove that snout, you need a slot to put the ejector rod in, and the Redhawk barrel has one. As Bowen notes, this leaves the rear scope mount cutouts in the frame's topstrap still there. Turns out, when I called him, he'd been itching to experiment with the new Super Redhawk Alaskan snubby. Phone calls and e-mails followed, so did a brand new Alaskan in .454 Casuliber. Once a method was devised to remove that little bit of enclosed snub barrel, it was full speed ahead.

The goal was an ultra-reliable, powerful and packable bear-buster, not a hunting gun. With that in mind, considering the .44 Mag is about my ceiling power-wise (with the right loads), the Alaskan was debarreled and desnouted,

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a standard Redhawk barrel was cut back to 4" and installed, and the .454 cylinder was replaced by a .44 Mag cylinder. (This was prior to Ruger offering the Alaskan in .44 Magnum, now available.)

Based on how well the combination's worked for me on two other Bowen guns, I asked him to install his rugged all-steel Rough Country adjustable rear sight and an XS Express standard white dot (no tritium) on a Jack Weigand front base on the Ruger. The rear comes with your choice of either a wide, shallow V or a deep, white-outlined square U notch, and the combo may not be the best for precision target accuracy, but it's highly visible for quick shots against fast-moving dark fur.

From there, Bowen replaced the factory firing pin with one of his extended pins for more reliable ignition (factory Redhawk pins can run a little short), rounded corners on the trigger and polished its face, dehorned the hammer, put a black-powder radius on the front of the cylinder, removed the barrel markings and stamped his own, bead blasted the Ruger for a darker nonreflective surface, and installed a lanyard swivel and ring to replace the usual slotted screw in the bottom of the soft rubber Hogue grips that came with the gun.

Well balanced, packable, reliable and powerful, the Super GP44 as Hamilton calls it, is also a perfect fit in my hand with those Hogues, and extended shooting sessions no longer tear skin and draw blood with the hot Garretts. A 3.25-pound SA trigger is just right, and the DA pull is no Smith, but it's doable.

Can it shoot? Well enough for what I need it to do. How's this for 25 yards?

This Super GP44 is an outstanding example of what a very talented shop can do with the right base material. Workmanship is exceptional, and if you didn't know the machining that was done to its front end to mate the Redhawk barrel to the Super Redhawk frame, you'd assume it was born this way. In fact, it should be. Cards and letters to Ruger may bring that about, but in the meantime Hamilton Bowen can build you one just like it, or one to your own personal specs, while we're waiting for Ruger to catch on. Call Hamilton for pricing. (Warning: It ain't cheap!)

Mine, chock full of Garrett's Hammerhead hostile-bear medicine, rides along in the high country where brush grows thick and bruises grow big, and it is one confidence-builder in hand should the bushes start rustling.

#### For More Info:

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