

Small Bore Sixguns

By Fermin C. "2 Dogs" Garza

I ignored the .32 H&R magnum for a long time. With my .357 Magnum sixguns I saw no reason to step down in power. That the .32 Magnum was available in a Single Six size sixgun also failed to impress me since I also had the .22 Magnum.

Boy, was I ever mistaken. I tried one that belonged to a friend and I was shocked at the power, accuracy and shootability the little sixgun displayed. The .32 H&R was more powerful than my .22 Magnum and a lighter package when compared to my .357 Magnum. A custom .32 H&R Single Six became available by Jim Stroh and I immediately bought it.

While waiting for my new .32 H&R to arrive I purchased brass, dies, and some commercial lead bullets. I took it along on a prairie dog hunting trip and had no problem making 50-60 yard offhand shots on prairie dogs and noted the .32 H&R was an efficient killer as well. When a Jackrabbit appeared the .32 H&R turned his lights out like he was hit by a lightning strike. It wasn't very long before my .32 Magnum replaced my .22 LR and .22 Magnum for all my "killing" chores. The 100 grain Hornady XTP hollow point was the most accurate bullet I tested. The 100 grain Rainier plated bullet had no crimp groove and I experimented with loading "long" in my .32 H&Rs and achieved excellent speed and very good accuracy as well. Going another step forward into the .32 caliber 120 grain GC LBT cast bullets brought even better results.

Then the .327 Federal was announced. That I didn't own the very first custom .327 Magnum Single Six was because sixgunsmith Alan Harton, ever cautious, built one for himself to make sure I wasn't going to blow myself up. Once it was clear the Single Six had ample strength Harton built me a 5 shot .327 Federal Magnum Single Six. Harton knew I had discovered heavy for caliber bullets in the .32 calibers and that I intended to lean on the .327 Federal Magnum. Using H110 powder my .327 Federal custom exited the 120 grain LBT GCFP at over 1500 fps. We were in low end .357 Magnum territory and killing power in a Single Six package that was both easier to carry and easier to shoot to boot.

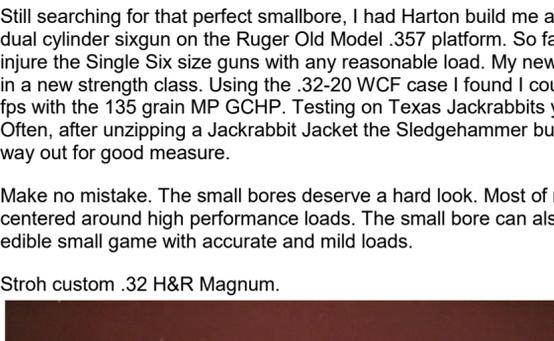
Still searching for the Ultimate Small Bore Sixgun I purchased a Freedom Arms 97 5 1/2" octagon in .32 H&R and 32-20 WCF. I sent the .32 H&R cylinder to be rechambered to .327 Federal. I had discovered that the .327 had ample capacity to push bullets heavier than 120 grains to meaningful velocities. I pushed hard for and helped develop a .32 caliber Cramer style mold that produced a 140 grain solid and a 135 grain GCHP bullet we nicknamed the Sledgehammer. In my FA 97 I was able to push the Sledgehammer bullet up to 1500 fps, but settled on a 1400 fps everyday load.

When the Ruger Single Seven was announced I immediately purchased both the short and long barrel versions. By this time, MP molds were available in 100 and 115 grain versions with or without gas checks in the Cramer style mold that allows a solid or HP bullet to be cast. I converted my Ruger Seven 7 1/2" to Bisley configuration and discovered that with the 115 grain GCHP I could achieve 1488 fps with H110 and all the accuracy I could hold. The 115/H110/S7 combination clobbered the big rangy Texas Jackrabbits. I felt the 135/140 grain MP bullet was a little too long for the S7 as it required deep seating to be used in the shorter cylinder.

Still searching for that perfect smallbore, I had Harton build me a Ruger Bisley .327/32-20 dual cylinder sixgun on the Ruger Old Model .357 platform. So far, I had been unable to injure the Single Six size guns with any reasonable load. My new mid frame model would be in a new strength class. Using the .32-20 WCF case I found I could easily reach 1500 plus fps with the 135 grain MP GCHP. Testing on Texas Jackrabbits yielded incredible wounds. Often, after unzipping a Jackrabbit Jacket the Sledgehammer bullet took a leg off on the way out for good measure.

Make no mistake. The small bores deserve a hard look. Most of my small bore work has centered around high performance loads. The small bore can also be loaded down for edible small game with accurate and mild loads.

Stroh custom .32 H&R Magnum.



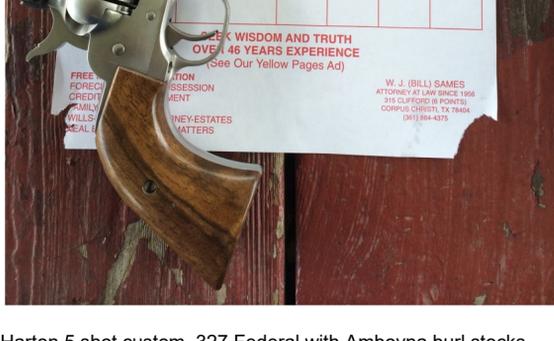
Harton custom .327 Federal on a stainless Ruger Single Six with a auxiliary cylinder in 32-20 WCF. 50 yard group.



Harton 5 shot custom .327 Federal with Amboyna burl stocks.



Freedom Arms 97 32-20 WCF with a .32 H&R cylinder rechambered to .327 Federal at 50 yards on a windy S. Texas day.



Ruger Single Seven .327 Federal converted to Bisley configuration. Group shot in high winds!



Detail photo of the Harton custom lightweight 32-20 WCF/.327 Federal with ivory stocks.



Some of my working .32 bores in Barranti Leather.

