

The 7 1/2" Single Action Sixgun

By Fermin C. "2 Dogs" Garza

A lifelong student of the Single Action Sixgun, I have studied everything possible. I have sought out and become friends with some of the world's greatest sixgunners. Friend John Taffin has written for many years that his favorite barrel length for a Single Action Sixgun was 7 1/2". It has taken me a long time to see things his way.

As a younger man, I pursued the custom sixgun with a fury. I sought out the best balance of power, portability, and proportion. My first custom, was inspired by another friend, Sheriff Jim Wilson. Jim wrote a piece on his one of seven Skeeter Skelton sixguns built to honor the legendary writer and storyteller. I had to participate and I sent Andy Horvath a Old Model Flattop 44 magnum to build into a "Skeeter Sixgun". Barrel length was 4 3/4"s and I was exceptionally happy. It balanced, shot, and carried perfectly.

Later, came the barrel band sixguns. I went through a number of them and was infatuated with the 5 1/2" length sixgun. A bit heavier than the Skeeter sixgun for sure, but with more power on tap, and above all, beauty in proportion. I discovered the full length ejector rod sixguns and ordered a pair of matched customs, one in .44 Magnum and in .45 Colt. These were built by David Clements and to keep proportion in balance, barrel length for the pair was 5 3/4". Alan Harton also cut back my first Ruger Old Model Super Blackhawk from 7 1/2" to 5 1/2" into another fine shooting sixgun.

There were the factory sixguns in the 6 1/2" length. Ruger Blackhawks in 357 and the Buckeye 32-20 as well as the Single Six models. These seemed a bit odd to me, and lacked that extra charm, that balance, that proportion. I enjoyed them all the same.

I honestly think it all changed for me when my good friend Jeff Hoover sent me a Ruger Super Blackhawk New Model 7 1/2" for my 50th Birthday. From the first it displayed astounding accuracy. A treasured gift I almost couldn't put it down. I converted it into Bisley configuration and shot some more and came to the realization that even though it was almost box stock, it shot right there with my high end customs. The only further modifications were a trigger job by Harton and a Belt Mountain base pin. I settled on a load of 23.0 grains of 2400 pushing the 429215 GC @1500 plus feet per second. My older brother was with me when a lone boar came to feed at 155 yards. He was shocked when the hit spun that pig around like a top and dropped him like a sack of hammers. I have to admit, that even though I have done my share of long range sixgunning, I was a bit surprised myself.

More custom sixguns were built to my specifications. My "go to" Sixgunsmith became Alan Harton of Houston, Texas. We are close friends and he has built me many sixguns over the years. The common denominator has become that the last several custom sixguns have been 7 1/2" in barrel length. Perhaps it was the wisdom my good friend John Taffin has tried to share with me all these years, or perhaps it was my aging 50 plus year old eyes. It's hard to say.

You might be thinking as I did for so long, that 7 1/2" sixguns are awfully long, hang up on things, and require clumsy extra long holsters or bulky chest rigs. That extra barrel length is really easily managed with a proper holster. My absolute favorite field holster is the Barranti Leather Longhorn Companion. It is a fantastic creation right up there with the discovery of fire. I consider it essential field gear with it's easy on and off characteristics and fine lines with a minimum of bulk. A 7 1/2" sixgun carries just as easily as any other length in the LHC.

Then there is the matter of shootability. At the request of John Taffin for his upcoming book I did considerable small bore sixgun study and have taken a good number of Jackrabbits in the Texas brush country at ranges up to 130 yards. The sixguns involved were the wildcat .257 Jackrabbit, the Ruger Single Seven .327 Federal Magnum, and a best quality 32-20 WCF/327 Federal Magnum Old Model all built for me by Alan Harton. I must say John Taffin was right all along. My latest project is a New Model flattop Bisley that will be converted from 44 Special to a 7 1/2" 357. Stay tuned as there is much more shooting to be done.

Caption 1. A Harton best quality and tank tough 32-20 WCF/327 Federal on a Ruger OM with 7 1/2" Douglas custom tapered octagon barrel. Ever present Barranti floral carved Longhorn Companion. Swarovski laser rangefinder binoculars. 32-20 ammunition with 135 grain GCHP Sledgehammer bullet @1500+ fps. Using the best gear will help you achieve the best field results.

Caption 2. Some field work in West Texas on the Hargrove Ranch. I am holding the 7 1/2" wildcat prototype .257 Jackrabbit built on a Ruger Single Six. On my side is my 7 1/2" .327 Federal Magnum in a Barranti LHC. Note how high, tight and out of the way it rides.

Caption 3. Ruger Single Seven 327 Federal converted to Bisley. Checking the zero on a windy day. Load is a 115 grain Miha GCHP on a stout charge of H110. WORK UP TO THIS LOAD! A ruthless combination for the toughest small game that you need to stop in its tracks.

Caption 4. A gift from my friend Jeff Hoover and my all time favorite 44 Magnum. Excellent 100 yard field accuracy from an nearly box stock sixgun. Again, a maximum load is listed and exceeds 1500 fps. Fast, flat and deadly.

