



BOWEN'S BLASTERS

These Mega-Bore Super Redhawks Are Tailor-Made for a Walk on the Wild Side.

Staff Report

Autos and single-shots aside, there's something about a big-bore revolver that causes sweaty palms and palpitations among serious handgunners. And when it comes to super-powerful wheelguns, we seriously doubt there's anything to compare with Hamilton Bowen's customized Ruger Super Redhawks. Bowen was kind enough to send us four to "play" with, and we're still a bit numb. The chamberings of this truly awesome quartet include .50 AE, .500 Linebaugh and .454 Casull. Two of them were cut-down (as in 4-inch barreled) items built with one purpose in mind—to stop very large, angry animals at what could only be called "last ditch distances."

Photo by Tom Proby



The massive Ruger Super Redhawk provides the basis for Hamilton Bowen's big-bore conversions. From top clockwise: .454 with full-length L-flame type barrel, .50 AE with Linscott M2 SX Compact nose, Alpine .500 Linebaugh and Alpine .50 AE.

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Essentially, they're as close as you're going to get to a present-day howdah pistol. They're designated as the "Alpine" models—one in .500 Linebaugh and the other in .50 AE. The other two are full-size guns—a Super Redhawk conversion with a custom barrel and sights chambered for the .50 AE and a full-lug L-frame-type barreled specimen chambered in .454 Casull.

If you're going to build a wheelgun to handle loads like this, even the mighty S&W N-frame is out of the question. Whatever drawbacks traditional Smith fans may find with the Ruger Super Redhawk, a lack of strength certainly isn't one of them. It is the very fact that the big Rugers are "overbuilt" that makes them the only feasible double-action candidates for this type of upgrade. And Bowen is a specialist in bringing out the best in what is—without a doubt—the strongest double-action revolver on earth.

But sheer bigness isn't merely an affectation. At least in this case. Bowen himself feels that his mega-bore blasters are, in fact, exceptionally efficient platforms:

"The .50s in particular are big enough to keep pressures low. They'll go forever. The way it works is you send us a Super Redhawk, we rebores it and fit it with a five-shot cylinder."

What else you get in terms of sights and tuning is based on an extensive menu of options that includes barrel shortening, round-butt conversions,



The face of heavy recoil: Hunting magazine's Dave Campbell touches off the Alpine .500.



The loads in question (left to right): .500 Linebaugh, .454 Casull, .50 AE.

tuning the action and trigger and installing an over-travel stop, Mag-Na-Porting, recutting the forcing cone and installing a variety of custom sights.

Bowen charges \$1,295 for an entry-level Alpine conversion once you supply him with the gun (it's \$100 more if you opt for stainless)—this includes a tune up with an overtravel stop. What you'll get—as we can attest—is a glassy double-action trigger pull and a whispery SA

release. The value of a good DA pull on a gun like this is fairly important when you consider that you'll be firing it as rapidly as your adrenaline level will allow if you're ever forced to use it for its intended purpose, namely to convince something big and hairy to let go of you in a hurry. Naturally, we're talking "minus point-blank" here. These guns—whether in .50 AE or .500 Linebaugh—do not lend themselves to PPC-type precision double-action work at, say, 50 yards.

Of the four guns, the .454 was probably the most useful (and conventional) all around specimen. First off, it'll also handle .45 Colt ammo if you're in a plinking mood. The second reason is that its 56-ounce weight and full-lug, ported, 5½-inch L-frame type barrel make it tractable, after a fashion. But the main reason as far as we're concerned is that it's without a doubt the most fantastically accurate .454 anyone had ever seen. The tuned, single-action trigger pull broke at a silky 4½ pounds (the DA pull, incidentally, was a buttery 12 pounds with nary a discernible hitch or glitch). At 25 yards, using Winchester's sizzling 260-grain Partition Gold loads, groups averaged around 1½ inches, with our best effort placing four of the five shots into a one-inch cluster. At 50 yards it was no trick to produce 3½- to 4-inch groups. Had the gun been scoped, we're pretty sure we could have exceeded that considerably, but as it was, those beefy, fully adjustable sights did well enough to handle any "real world" handgun task. Recoil, of course, was well beyond brisk, but all in all, this one would make an outstanding big (as in big deer and up) game revolver.

The next gun was—from a visual standpoint—the biggest and most



From a weight-to-power ratio, the five-shot Alpine .500—which can propel a one-ounce .50 caliber bullet at more than 1,300 fps from its 4-inch barrel—is the unquestioned heavyweight of the four. It features a lanyard ring on the butt (inset).



The chopped Alpine .50 AE scarcely qualifies as a "belly gun," yet those moon clips permit quick tactical reloads should the situation ever arise.

Both .50 AE guns require the use of factory-supplied five-round moon clips.



The full-size .50 AE conversion features a five-shot unfluted cylinder and a 6½ barrel. Although we fired it using the excellent fully adjustable sights, the gun features Ruger's integral scope bases.



The .50 AE (as in Action Express) Alpine weighs 3 ounces less than the .500 Alpine and features a rounded butt.

impressive of the lot—a 6½-inch barreled .50 AE which weighed in at 52 ounces empty. Of the four, it most closely resembled a stock Super Redhawk—although obviously, stock it ain't. Boasting excellent adjustable sights

highlighted by a thick ramp front with orange insert, the gun also sported Ruger's distinctive integral scope bases, which we did not elect to make use of. Although .50 AE ammo isn't all that easy to come by, we managed to round up some Speer Lawman 325-grain JHPs along with some Samson 300-grain JHPs.

25-yard groups. Although tactical reloads really don't fit into this gun's purpose, the fact that it requires the use of five-shot moon clips (remember, the rimless .50 AE was originally designed for the mammoth Desert Eagle Magnum auto) is kind of,



Although noticeably less violent than the .500 Linebaugh, the 43½-ounce Alpine in .50 AE bucked considerably.

The Samson stuff was relatively manageable, but the Speer loads—which clocked the advertised 1,400 fps from our gun, proved to be the most accurate, yielding consistently impressive five-shot



Besides the fluted cylinders and short barrels, the hallmarks of the Alpine conversions are the unique sights. The rear is a standard Ruger express sight. The front sight features a large tritium bead and was conceived by sight designer Ashley Emerson.

COMPARISON OF LOADS USED

	Muzzle Velocity
Buffalo Bore .500 Linebaugh 435-grain LFN	950 fps
Buffalo Bore .500 Linebaugh 435-grain LFN	1,250 fps
Buffalo Bore .500 Linebaugh 400-grain JHP	1,350 fps
Speer Lawman .50 AE 325-grain JHP	1,400 fps
Samson .50 AE 300-grain JHP	1,195 fps
Buffalo Bore .454 Casull 325-grain LFN	1,525 fps
Winchester Supreme .454 Casull 260-grain Partition Gold	1,800 fps
Freedom Arms .454 Casull 300-grain JFP	1,625 fps

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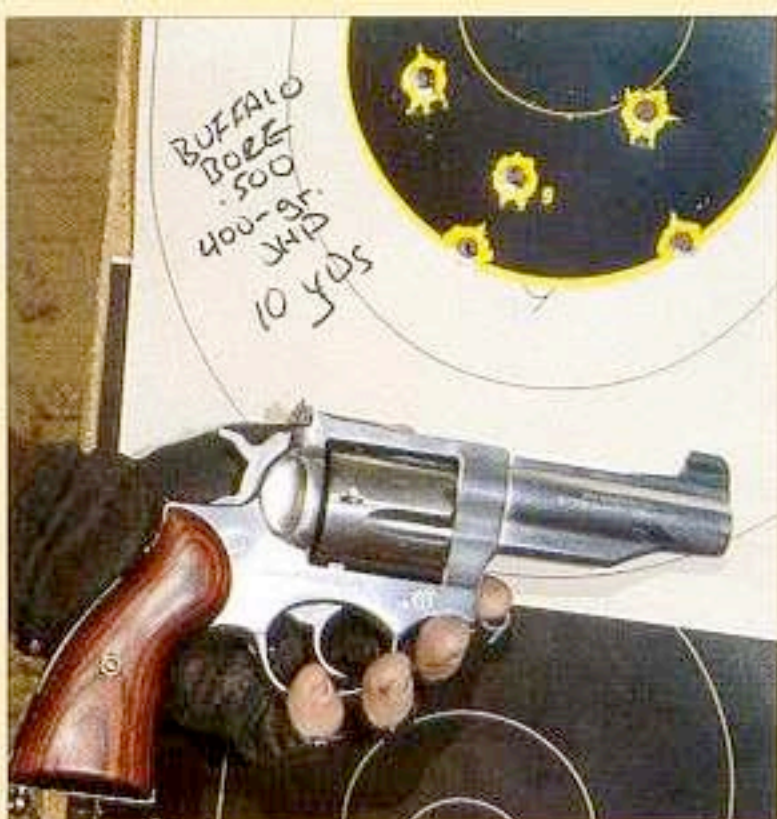
well, neat. Discounting an odd flyer (which definitely could have been flinch-induced), our best cluster measured 1 1/4 inches. Oddly enough, we noticed once we moved up to .50 caliber, recoil—although certainly stout—was noticeably less sharp than the similar-sized .454 Casull. And the .50 AE's single-action trigger pull—at 3 1/2 pounds—was even better than that of the Casull.

(Something else about the gun came to

light which really impressed us with Bowen's innovative bent—a terrifically sensible extraction tool for emptying out a moon clip, one you can use without cursing or mangling your fingertips. It looks like a very short

screwdriver-handled socket wrench with a slot that fits over the mouth of the empty case. Insert it into the case, give 'er a sharp twist and pop that brass right out of the clip. Now, why didn't somebody think of that before? Sometimes, it's the little things that mean a lot. . .)

The final two specimens



At 10 yards, the Alpine .500 performed well—considering its intended purpose—in the double-action mode with Buffalo Bore's 400-grain JHPs which, incidentally, depart its 4-inch barrel at 1,350 fps.



Caliber-wise, the .454 Casull was the "lightweight" member of the quartet, although it weighed the most at 56 ounces. The ported, 5 1/2-inch L-frame-type barrel (inset), excellent sights and slicked-up action contributed to this gun's outstanding accuracy.

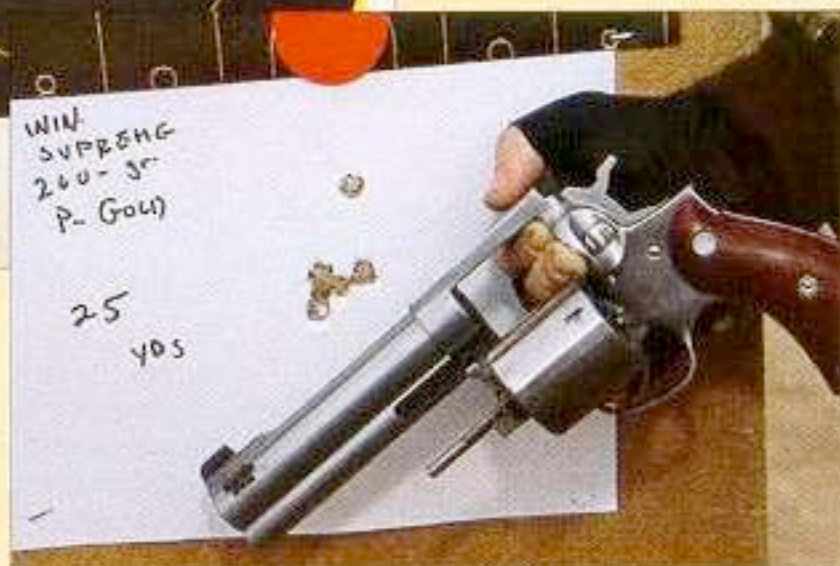


and then some. From its 4-inch barrel, it can drive a one-ounce, .50 caliber bullet in excess of 1,300 fps. The gun perfectly fits Bowen's philosophy on the Alpine conversions—as described to us by Emerson:

"He explained that this gun—when chambered in one of the stompers—would be the gun to have on your hip when a large



The .454 Casull proved to be amazingly accurate at both 50 (above) and 25 yards (right) using Winchester Super-X Partition Gold 260-grain ammo.



were the "trail guns" of the mix—both Alpine conversions featuring 4-inch barrels, fluted cylinders and express sights designed in conjunction with Ashley Emerson (see sidebar). The one chambered in .500 Linebaugh—described by Emerson as "my personal blaster"—lives up to its billing

bitey/scratchy critter surprises you out in the wild."

What's unique about these guns—aside from the Holland Tunnel-sized charge holes and bores—are the sights themselves. The rear is a windage-adjustable Ruger express sight—a classic shallow V-notch with a white line. The front is an oversized white tritium bead in an exceptionally sturdy blade atop a dovetailed base.

We decided to shoot both Alpines at a distance that would most closely replicate the kind of yardage it was designed for—10 yards. With the .500 Linebaugh, we used Buffalo Bore's relatively sedate 435-grain LBT at 950 fps. In double-action fire, it was impossible to seriously control—to any significant extent—the muzzle upflip, but it was possible to time things so that we were able to fire again instantly when the gun came out of recoil. The express sights contributed to quick target reacquisition in no small way. Put the big white dot on the target and fire. When we switched to Buffalo Bore's 400-grain JHP at 1,350 fps,

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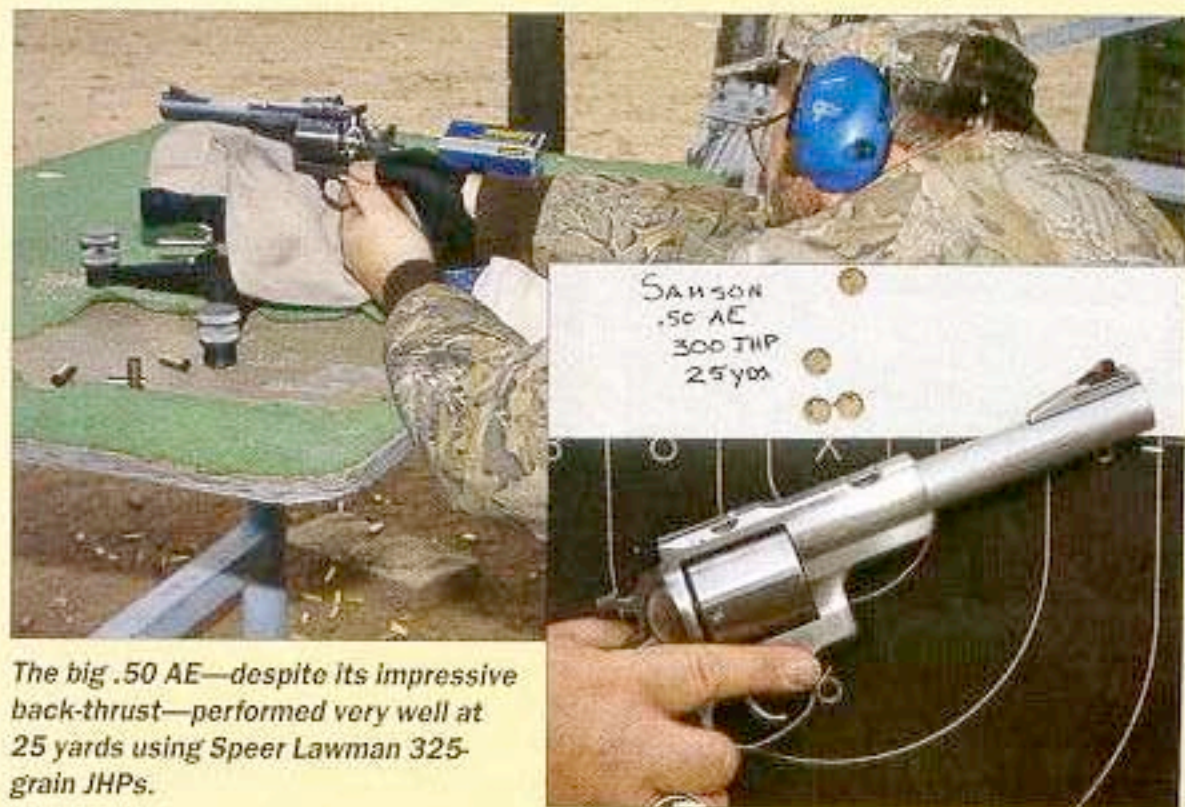
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the honeymoon was over. Suffice it to say that every round we fired was considerably better than "minute of bear."

The mate of the .500 was a .50 AE which, unlike the .500 version, sported a rounded butt and—at an unloaded weight of 43½ ounces—3 less ounces of ballast. The .50 AE was slightly more pleasant to shoot than the .500 which, in part, can be attributable to its lighter-weight menu of .50-caliber bullets—although the Speer Lawman 325-grain JHP at around 1,300 fps was hair-raising in its own right. The .50 AE Alpine also functions on Bowen's moon clips—which raises some interesting possibilities in the



For the .50 AE, Hamilton Bowen's moon clip extraction tool proved to be the best device of its type we've ever used.



The big .50 AE—despite its impressive back-thrust—performed very well at 25 yards using Speer Lawman 325-grain JHPs.

areas of tactical reloads and the age-old question of what constitutes the ideal "belly gun" for personal protection.

All in all, however, the .50-caliber Alpines are highly specialized tools for those in need of last-ditch personal protection against non-human aggressors. They are, without a doubt, the howdah pistols of the 21st century.

For further information, contact Bowen Classic Arms Corp., Dept. GA, P.O. Box 67, Louisville, TN 37777.

FOR CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE NASTIEST KIND

The sights on my .500 Linebaugh Bowen Alpine are a combination of a Ruger factory express rear and a new front sight and base arrangement developed by Hamilton and me. It all started when we were sittin' around hunting camp late one night down on the Baggett ranch near Ozona, Texas. I was describing the reasons and advantages of the Ashley Express sight system and why I recommend tritium only on the front and not the rear. About that time Hamilton said "I don't get it." I asked him to come outside where all we had for light was stars and moonlight. You could see well enough to walk, but not enough to see standard revolver sights. I asked him to imagine that a smoker about 20 feet away was a bear. I handed him my Colt Commander with its big dot Ashley Express sights with the tritium front and told him to pretend to engage the "bear." He aimed the .45 at the smoker and then at several other gloomy objects then handed the gun back, saying "now I get it." I told him that this sight arrangement wasn't intended for driving nails at 100 yards, it was—as Finn Aggaard once said—for "sorting out close encounters of the nastiest kind." At this point Hamilton told me about his Redhawk Alpine conversion. We decided that the Alpine—with my express sights—would be ideal for anyone who intended to fish, hunt, hike or camp in country with scratchy/bitey critters runnin' loose. It didn't take long for me to see that this was the ultimate heavy-duty trail gun, and I had to have one. Of course, a .44 Mag Alpine stoked with maxed-out loads from Buffalo Bore or Garrett is damn formidable, but Buffalo Bore has been making factory .500 Linebaugh ammo for some time. And that was all the excuse I needed to have one.

The main problem was how to get the Ashley Express front sight on it. Then Hamilton suggested a sight base that could also be retrofitted to guns that already had a "Power Custom" front sight. We decided that this base would have a standard ⅜-inch dovetail and be secured by a No. 8 screw under the dovetail to provide a clean look. With a standard dovetail to work with, I designed sights in different heights to work with the new base. These front sight and bases that were designed in conjunction with Hamilton Bowen were among the last sights I designed for Ashley Outdoors before the differences between me and the money guy found me no longer involved with the company's day-to-day operations.

The sight arrangement on my .500 Alpine is designed for defense, however I have fired enough rounds on the range and at back country "attack rocks" with it to know that it'll serve as a 50-yard deer or hog gun or a 75-yard elk gun in the hands of a recoil-proof handgunner. I have only shot two game animals with it so far—both a doe at 41 lasered yards and a nervous spike trotting by at approximately 25 yards. The spike—hit through both shoulders—didn't even kick. Both shots were fired double action; that's the way I train with this gun. The load was a 435-grain JHP at 1,335 fps from my gun.

The Alpine .500 is the ultimate trail gun for defense against dangerous critters.

—Ashley Emerson

Ashley Emerson is well-known in shooting circles for his innovative ghost ring and express sights as well as his total lack of sensitivity to recoil. His areas of expertise also include big-bore lever-action rifles, bigger-bore revolvers and hog hunting in his native Texas.