

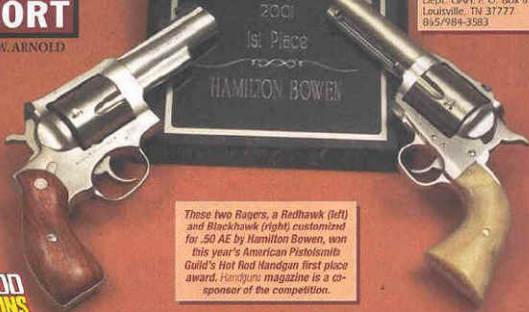
FIRING LINE REPORT

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SOURCE

**Bowen Classic Arms
Corporation**

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These two Rugers, a Redhawk (left) and Blackhawk (right), customized for .50 AE by Hamilton Bowen, won this year's American Pistoletsmith Guild's Hot Rod Handgun first place award. Handguns magazine is a co-sponsor of the competition.

**HOT ROD
HANDGUNS**

Hamilton Bowen's 50 AE Custom Revolvers— First Place Winners Of Hot Rod Handgun Award

Hamilton Bowen is a highly respected custom pistoletsmith who specializes in creating high performance revolvers in exotic calibers like .475 Linebaugh. The two revolvers reviewed here are excellent examples of his expertise and craftsmanship. The base guns are Rugers that have been hot rodded by upgrading them to handle the potent .50 action Express cartridge.

Both revolvers were submitted in the American Pistoletsmith Guild's HOT ROD HANDGUN COMPETITION and were on display at the National Rifle Association Convention at Kansas City this year. *Handguns* magazine is proud to be the co-sponsor of this competition.

The purpose of the custom work is to provide to carry handguns that can be used as back up guns for protection against dangerous animals.

THE .50 AE "ALPINE" REDHAWK

Hamilton describes this revolver as "...our shameless rip-off of the Smith & Wesson 'Mountain Gun' concept." He goes on to say that it is one of his most popular conversions regardless of caliber. Custom work includes making a new five-shot cylinder bored to accept the .50 AE cartridge. The original gun barrel is rebored and rifled for the same caliber. The Alpine part of the conversion consists of round-

butting the grip frame, shortening the barrel to a length of four inches and applying a black powder chamfer to the cylinder. The action is tuned, which is a standard feature on all Bowen guns. The revolver sent for review has an over-travel trigger stop and is fitted with Ashley Emerson big dot express sights. Both of these are optional features. The Package also includes several full-moon clips and a stripper to remove spent cases from the clips.

The Alpine is designed for the serious outdoorsman, fisherman, hiker, hunter and guide who need a handgun powerful enough for close range against bears and other dangerous beasts.

THE .50 AE BLACKHAWK

This revolver began as an adjustable sighted Blackhawk. The topstrap is welded and remachined to a single-six contour and a drift adjustable rear sight is fitted. The recoil shield and loading gate have been scalloped to reduce weight. The real weight savings are obtained from a barrel, cylinder, base pin as well as screws and pins, all made from strong lightweight titanium metal. Since titanium is a metal that is difficult to weld or silver solder, the front sight base and the hidden ejector tube stud are all machined integral to the barrel.

Additional weight savings are achieved by using a grip frame, ejector housing and rod made of aluminum, which is



The Bowen "Alpine" started as a Redhawk. Custom work includes fitting a new five-shot .50 AE cylinder; shortening the barrel to 4 inches and boring it out for .50 AE; rounding the bottom of the grip frame. Internal work includes tuning the action. The Alpine is fitted with Ashley Express sights for fast target acquisition.



SHOOTING PERFORMANCE

even lighter than titanium and suited for low stress components. The revolver has grips carved from sheep horn by Roy Fishpaw.

Hamilton comments that creating this revolver was really a technical exercise and he is not sure that he will build any more like it because the recoil is terrifying. At 26 ounces it is far too light for use with hot cartridges like the .50 AE. His final comments to me were, "I don't expect that you will be doing very much shooting with the gun!" How right he was, as we shall see later.

FIT AND FINISH

Both the revolvers are beautifully made exhibiting the superb quality of workmanship that has made Hamilton Bowen famous. Trigger actions were excellent. The Alpine has a crisp single action pull of four pounds and a glass smooth double-action of just under 11 pounds. In a like manner the hammer of the lightweight Single Action Blackhawk cocked smoothly and easily. Trigger pull is set at an excellent crisp 3½ pounds. I found the grips of both revolvers to be comfortable and the sights easy to pick up when bringing the guns quickly into the aim. I must confess, however, that I am not a great fan of express sights.

Both revolvers display an excellent smooth brush type of finish that is in keeping with the overall excellence of all the other work that has gone into them. They are truly classic examples of a master craftsman.

I shot the revolvers on a hot, still bright sunny day late in July of this year at the Petersen ranch range. I am not ashamed to admit that I was apprehensive about what to expect in terms of recoil and controllability. I therefore started by firing a few shots one-hand-



The other revolver is a Blackhawk that has been lightened by fitting a titanium .50 AE barrel and 5-shot cylinder. Other titanium parts include the base pin, screws and pins. Other lightening features include an aluminum grip frame and ejector rod housing. The revolver also has a tuned action.

ed at some steel plates set at 25 and 50 yards, beginning with Alpine and then the Lightweight Blackhawk to see what the recoil was like.

Shooting the Alpine in the single action mode, I succeeded in hitting the plates. Recoil was very heavy yet, surprisingly, not painful and still controllable. Encouraged by this, I repeated the exercise with the Blackhawk. Recoil was not just heavy, it was simply horrendous. Although I did manage to hit the plates the recoil lifted my hand high above my head to a point where I felt I would become airborne. Hamilton Bowen's words, "I don't think you will want to do much shooting with the gun!" rang in my

ears and I decided to terminate any more shooting with that revolver, concentrating my efforts on the Alpine. Apart from proving that it does recoil, the revolver's ability to hit the plates convinces me that it has the accuracy needed to hit what you aim at.

I fired five shots at a bullseye target a 25 yards with the Alpine and succeeded in getting a three inch group that was pretty much at my point of aim.

Recoil from the bench was even stiffer and I decided to quit while I was still ahead. I have no doubt that closer groups are possible from a machine rest but not from me.

In all honesty the revolver is not intended as a long range-hunting arm, but for defense against wild animals at close range. With this in mind, I loaded up a full cylinder and engaged a combat target at five yards shooting double-action as fast as I could recover from the recoil.

I shot one-handed because this is probably all you will be able to do against a charging bear at this distance. To my surprise I was able to put all my shots within ten ring of the target quite quickly. I think a lot had to do with the very good double action trigger and the rounded grips.

As far as reliability is concerned both revolvers performed flawlessly. Extraction of spent cases was positive and easy, there being no signs of excessive pressure. In evaluating both revolvers both are works of art in terms of workmanship design and finish. Just this alone makes the Lightweight Blackhawk attractive, but for practical purposes the Alpine gets my nod as being about the best for dangerous animal defense. In terms of Hod rod performance they are justifiable winners of the first place award. ■