

FACTORY CUSTOM

F R O M

MAGNUM RESEARCH



HAVE IT YOUR
WAY WITH A
CUSTOM BFR
REVOLVER.

BY MAX PRASAC | PHOTOS BY VINCENT RICARDEL AND MAX PRASAC

Custom revolvers have been a staple of my handgun life, a clear obsession and, well, an expensive habit.

I justify the practice of commissioning revolvers being built by gunsmiths (who charge more by the hour than plumbers) by convincing myself that I want the revolver the way I want it, plain and simple. It's clearly a form of rationalization, but I'm okay with it ... my wife, not so much.

What if I told you there's another way of getting what amounts to a full-blown custom without the steep price tag and lengthy waits associated with a custom single-action revolver build?



Would it pique your interest?

It should. It shifted my focus entirely.

The custom revolver world is an underground subset of hardcore revolver geeks who live and breathe custom-tailored, single-action revolvers from such legendary builders as John Linebaugh, Hamilton Bowen, Jack Huntington, Jim Stroh, Dave Clements, John Gallagher and Alan Harton, to name a few. With these coveted names come long waiting lists, high price tags—and artwork in blued steel and walnut.

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

I'm a handgun hunter, and I make no bones about it. Even those pretty

custom revolvers of mine get carried in the field and dragged through the mud and inclement weather. That's why I have them. If they can't tolerate field conditions, however they are defined, they don't deserve space in my safe. So, form follows function for me.

Enter Magnum Research and the BFR—the “Biggest, Finest Revolver.”

Established in 1999, Magnum Research entered the revolver-building business with the introduction of the BFR, chambered in the old warhorse .45-70 Government. Magnum Research has since redesigned its revolvers; and today, the company produces both long- and short-framed revolvers in a range of calibers to suit just about everyone's needs. There is no wider assortment of hunting calibers and configurations offered under one roof than that of Magnum Research. There is literally something for everyone and every game animal to walk this earth.

A subsidiary of Kahr Arms, Magnum Research of Minneapolis, Minnesota, offers a whole line of long-framed and short-framed stainless steel, single-action revolvers in both standard caliber/configurations and a plethora of custom Precision Center offerings.

MR PRECISION CENTER: BUILD YOUR OWN

The big news out of Magnum Research's Precision Center is the Custom BFR website (CustomBFRrevolver.com). This is where the consumer can build his or her very own custom-configured BFR revolver from a host of options from standard catalog calibers, as well as a number of Precision Center-only calibers. This also includes barrel length, barrel type (round or octagonal), fluted or unfluted cylinders, and a number of cool finishes—such as color case hardening and the new-for-this-year black nitride finish.

Everything is headed up by production and BFR supervisor and master gun builder Brett Pikula, who takes excessive pride in turning out truly fine revolvers for the discriminating consumer. Granted, some of the more eclectic custom features requiring specialized machine work aren't available from the Precision Center; there is a long enough list of options to make your revolver uniquely yours. Many more options do exist, so we recommend you head over to the website and look for yourself. I am sure you will be able to find something there that will appeal to you.

The Precision Center is busy taking custom customer orders for unique BFR revolvers on a daily basis, and the current wait time is right around four months.

OUTFITTING THE LONG-FRAMED BFR

When the Custom BFR website was launched, I saw my opportunity to outfit a long-framed BFR the way I wanted it.

Using the site is a piece of cake. Simply go down the list of options, choose them with a click, and watch the revolver come together. Even someone as computer illiterate as I am had no trouble negotiating the new website. The beauty of it is that not long after submitting my order, I received a call from my FFL! It's that simple. This site is so easy to use, I fear it's going to cost me a lot of money in the very near future.

This revolver is to be my do-everything wonder revolver. For that reason, I felt the .460 Smith & Wesson Magnum personifies the term, "Jack of all trades." I was reluctant to embrace this cartridge when it was first released to the public, because it was saddled with less-than-ideal bullets for big game, with an emphasis on velocity and longer ranges. I was not impressed.

Then, a good friend and hunting partner purchased a BFR in .460 S&W and proceeded to knock down virtually all game—ranging from smallish Texas whitetail up through Cape buffalo and a whole lot in between—with *one* load. I took notice. When I shot it, the abuse level, when loaded to maximum big-game-wreaking levels, was negligible, to say the very least. Hmm ...



The long-framed BFR is equipped with an oversized, counterbored, five-shot cylinder. Originally designed to encapsulate the .45/70 Government, the extra-long cylinder features enough free bore to ramp speeds up to impressive levels.

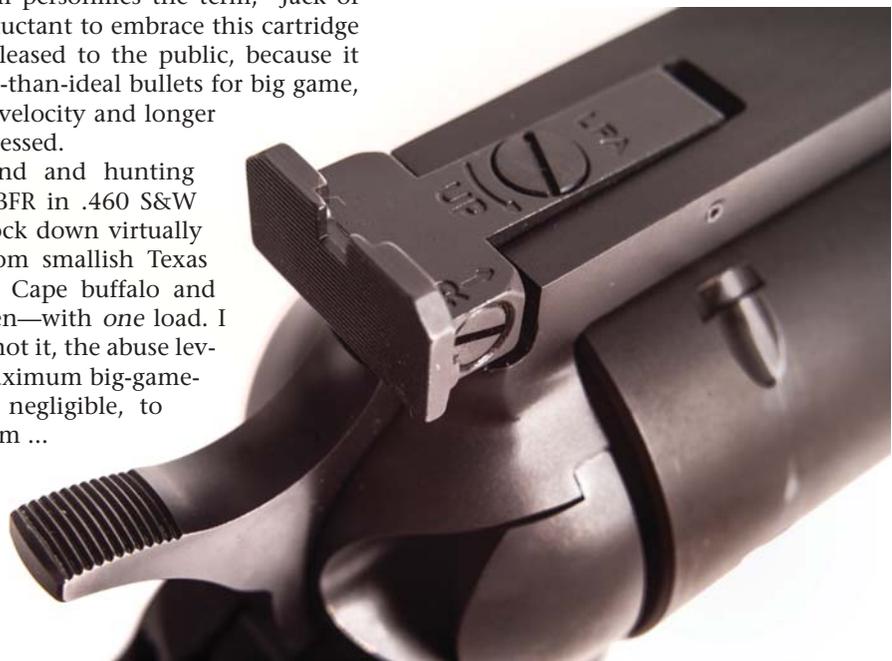
Magnum Research outfits all its revolvers (custom and production) with LPA's excellent, fully adjustable rear sight. This feature is moot, because the author equipped his BFR with an optic mounted via the supplied sight base.



The author's favorite production grip frame by far is Magnum Research's interpretation of the Bisley grip. His was fitted with black Micarta—one of the most durable grip materials available to mortal man.

maybe there's something to this.

Let me note that many justify the purchase of a .460 (of either variant) by citing the flexibility of being able to shoot .45 Colt, .454 Casull and .460 Smith & Wesson through the same firearm without ill effects. It sounds great on paper, but I will say that in my experience, the shorter .45-caliber cartridges tend not to deliver accuracy to their inherent potential. That same free bore that is so useful to the .460 and its long case (1.8 inches) seems to work to the detriment of the shorter-cased .45s. It's just too long a jump for the bullet. I'm not saying you won't get acceptable accuracy from shooting



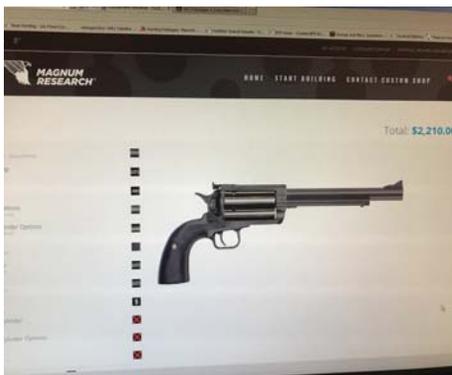
cowboy-action-level .45 Colt loads through your BFR or Smith & Wesson; and I didn't order this large chunk of steel to shoot powder puff loads through it with *okay* accuracy. These revolvers are capable of amazing accuracy, and they deliver an impressive payload at rather high speeds.

MORE DETAILS

So, my new custom BFR would be a .460 built on MR's stretch-framed revolver. I've spent time with the 10-inch variant of the stretch-frame, and the balance was poor for anything outside of a situation where a solid rest is available. Any revolver I take to the field absolutely must be able to be shot while standing on my "hind" legs. However, with the 7½-inch barrel, shootability increases exponentially, and it can be shot comfortably offhand. I specified a 7½-inch barrel.

MR's excellent Bisley grip frame got the nod, because there was nothing commercially available that is better for controlling recoil and mitigating its negative effects. It looks odd—sort of like a banana in shape—but it flat-out works.

Like all BFRs, this one was equipped with an oversized, counterbored, unfluted, five-shot cylinder. Keep in mind that the length of the cylinder was originally designed to encapsulate the massive (by revolver standards) .45/70 Government. While it seems that a shorter cylinder would be beneficial, the longer free bore of the too-long cylinder seems to work in the .460's favor, delivering consistently higher velocities than the equivalent X-frame by Smith & Wesson, even when equipped with a longer barrel.



The new website is a snap to negotiate (CustomBFRrevolver.com). Seen here is the options list from which you build out your custom BFR.

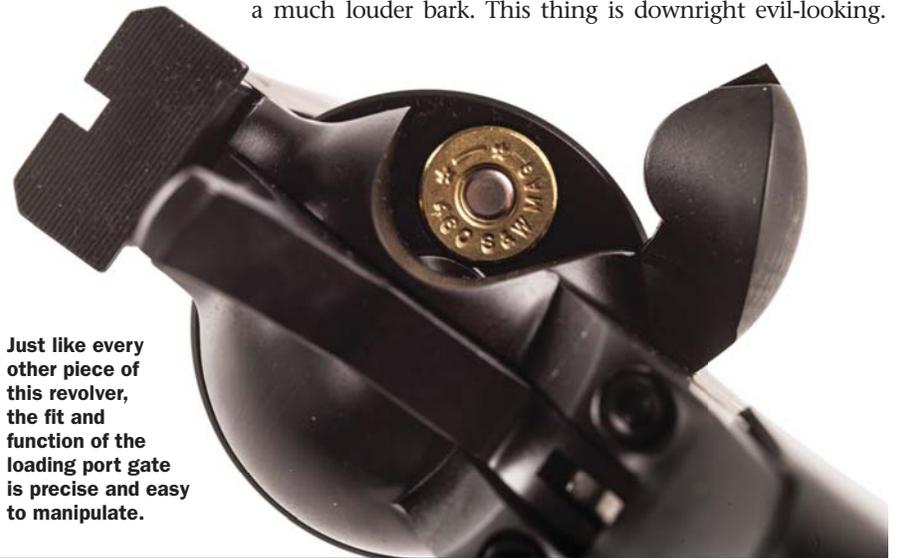
Also like all BFRs, this one has a free-wheeling pawl, making loading and unloading a stress-free exercise: The cylinder will rotate in either direction when the loading gate is open. A locking base pin keeps the cylinder supported in the frame.

The excellent LPA adjustable rear sight was mounted on my custom BFR; it was of no consequence, because I would be taking advantage of the .460 Smith & Wesson Magnum's long-range prowess by mounting an optic.

'DARTH VADER' ... PLUS

As you've been able to surmise from the photos, I chose an all-black theme with black nitride covering all of the revolver's metal, rounded out with black Micarta grips.

Think "Darth Vader"—but with a whole lot more attitude and a much louder bark. This thing is downright evil-looking.



Just like every other piece of this revolver, the fit and function of the loading port gate is precise and easy to manipulate.



Back from getting the black nitride finish applied, the custom .460 BFR is ready to reassemble.

Black nitride is one tough finish that is nearly impervious to scratching and mishandling. It will make for a great field revolver in virtually all weather conditions.

I intend to drag this piece around the world on a variety of big-game hunts.

It's a big revolver, but with its 7½-inch barrel, it is surprisingly balanced. I would equip it with a red-dot and scope with Leupold quick-detach rings on the supplied optic base and then switch between them, depending on the hunt and the terrain. The trigger breaks at a creep-less 3 pounds and is as good as any custom I have handled/shot from the top dogs of the custom-revolver-building world.



Brett Pikula personally fits, assembles and builds these custom offerings.

ACCURACY RESULTS

Load	Advertised Velocity (fps)	Actual Velocity (fps)	50 Yards (inches/best)
Hornady 200-grain FTX	2,200	2,371	1.822
Buffalo Bore 275-grain Barnes	1,900	2,076	1.354
Buffalo Bore 300-grain JFN	2,060	2,100	1.521
Buffalo Bore 300-grain DG	2,140	2,141	1.247
Buffalo Bore 360-grain LFN	1,900	1,984	2.342
Federal 275-grain Barnes	1,670	1,984	1.254
Federal 300-grain A-frame	1,750	1,853	1.013
Swift 300-grain A-frame	1,907	1,996	0.985
Underwood 220-grain Xtreme Hunter	2,135	2,241	1.630
Underwood 250-grain Xtreme Penetrator	2,000	2,104	1.750
Underwood 300-grain XTP	1,750	1,859	1.985

Notes: LFN = Long flat-nose (hard cast); JFN = Jacketed flat-nose; DG = Dangerous Game line. Velocity was measured with an Oehler 35P chronograph and three-shot averages. All groups comprised five shots.



The finished product, reassembled and ready to test-fire, will then get boxed and shipped to the anxious person who ordered it. Turn-around time is quick.

TESTING THE BFR

I gathered myriad factory ammunition from Hornady, Buffalo Bore, Federal Premium, Swift and Underwood to test through this beast.

Let me say that you will not go unnoticed at your local range. This thing is loud, necessitating doubling up on hearing protection in an attempt to hang on to what hearing I have left (my hearing isn't nearly as bad as I let on. Don't tell my wife). The high SAAMI-specified maximum pressure is 65,000 psi, so, like its older sibling, the .454 Casull, it creates a very loud report.

The big BFR delivered laser-like accuracy from nearly every load I ran through it (see the accuracy table at the top of this page). It is rather remarkable—a testament to the quality of the loads that are produced for this high-speed .45-caliber cartridge.

Recoil, as I mentioned previously, wasn't all that bad. Okay; maybe I'm not the most sensitive fella on the recoil front. However, I can say with certainty that compared to some of my other staples, it really isn't all that bad. The weight of the BFR absorbs much of the abuse, making it, dare I say, rather pleasant to shoot—except, of course, for the ear-splitting noise levels.

My relationship with my .460 BFR is still in its infancy, but I really like what I have seen thus far. The finish should prove to be tough in the field. The efficacy of the round has already been proven, and the accuracy is undoubtedly promising.

Everything I wanted was obtained via a simple click on the online order form—and I didn't have to wait years to make noise on my range. So, what's next? Well, I'll keep you posted! **GDTM**