

Beautiful BRUTE

▶ To handle higher-pressure rounds, the Desert Eagle uses a multi-lugged rotating bolt similar to an AR-15's with matching cutouts at the back of the 6-inch barrel.



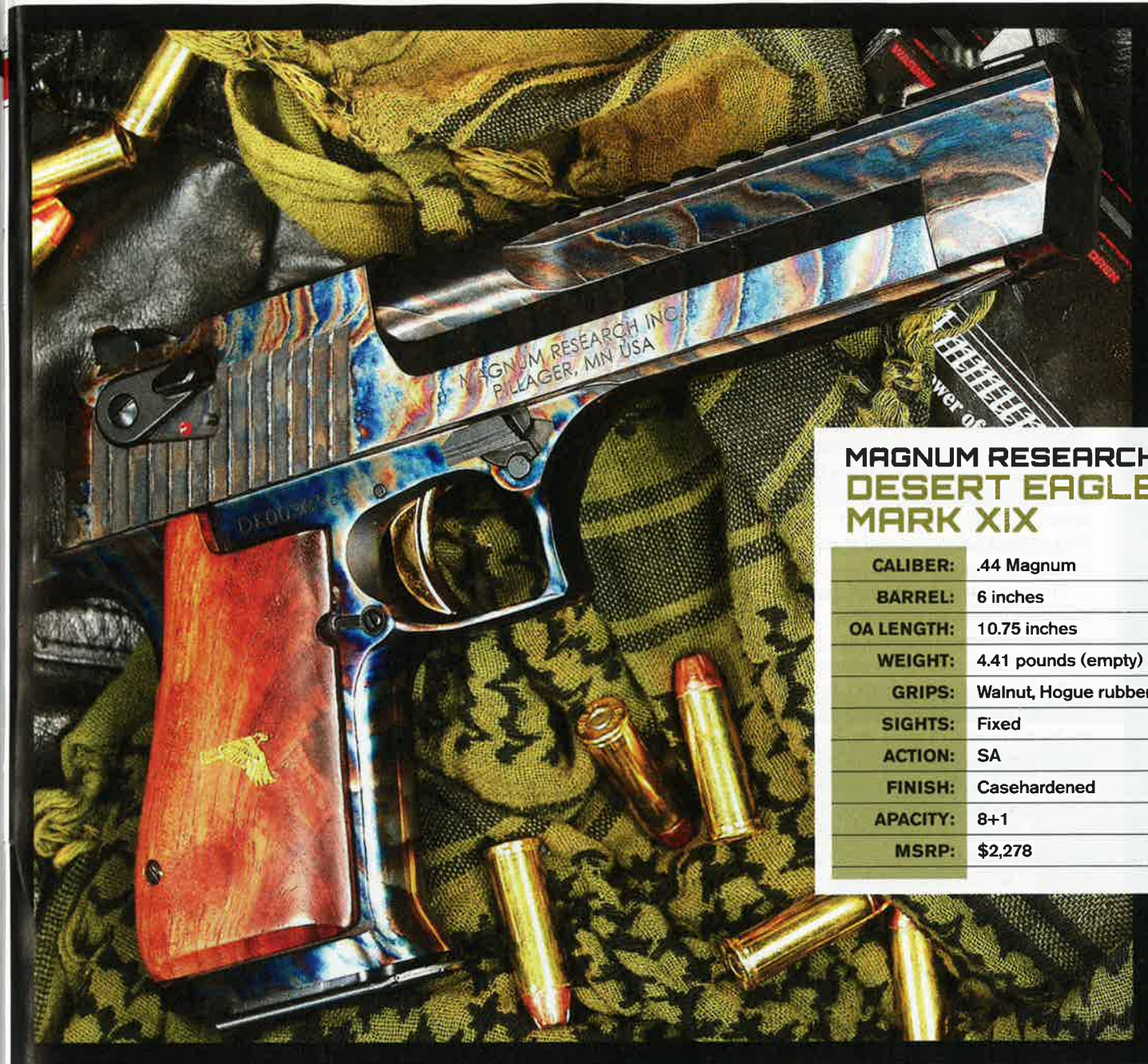
Along with beautiful case-hardening, the Desert Eagle boasts a rail for optics and a non-serrated ramp front sight.

Magnum Research's dressed-up Desert Eagle combines first-in-class power and looks

BY DENIS PRISBREY

The old saying “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” is pretty much rule No. 1 in the case of .44 Magnum autopistols. A revolver can be trimmed down quite a bit to shoot the .44 Magnum—if you’re sufficiently resistant to pain and have access to a good carpal tunnel surgeon—but there’s no way to hold back on either size or weight in a reliable .44 Magnum pistol, and regardless of the maker, usually you’ve got to be a hardcore admirer to find any beauty in what has to be a big and chunky steel blaster. There’s no room for plastic in this particular section of the gun world, and svelte does not apply.

Over the years, there have been a few attempts to produce .44 Magnum semi-autos for what is undeniably a very niche market, but the Magnum Research Desert Eagle is the only one in (mostly) continuous production since its introduction over 30 years ago, and it’s arguably the most famous.



MAGNUM RESEARCH DESERT EAGLE MARK XIX

| | |
|------------|----------------------|
| CALIBER: | .44 Magnum |
| BARREL: | 6 inches |
| OA LENGTH: | 10.75 inches |
| WEIGHT: | 4.41 pounds (empty) |
| GRIPS: | Walnut, Hogue rubber |
| SIGHTS: | Fixed |
| ACTION: | SA |
| FINISH: | Casehardened |
| APACITY: | 8+1 |
| MSRP: | \$2,278 |

While production has been moved back and forth between the U.S. and Israel, the gun that has nearly 500 large- and small-screen credits has achieved legendary status, and it’s currently being made back in the U.S. at the Magnum Research facility in Minnesota.

There have been three major iterations of the Desert Eagle: the Mark I in .357 and .44 Magnum in 1983; the Mark VII in 1989 with slight redesigns; and the current Mark XIX developed in the 1990s to allow users to switch between

.357 Magnum, .44 Magnum and .50 Action Express barrels. The Mark XIX comes in a wide range of finishes that run from stainless through black oxide, tiger striped, burnt bronze, titanium gold, tiger striped, burnt bronze, titanium gold, chrome, satin nickel, polished nickel and 24-karat gold. And now there’s a color-casehardened Desert Eagle.

THE PLATFORM

This particular .44 Magnum Desert Eagle Mark XIX is a gas-operated, 4.41-pound assembly of CNC-machined steel with

a 6-inch barrel; a 3-inch Picatinny rail on top; a long slide release on the left side; a sizable ambidextrous thumb safety; a relatively small magazine release on the left side; a serrated gold-plated trigger; a serrated hammer spur; a long beavertail; an 8-round steel magazine; fixed, all-black, steel sights; and walnut grip panels.

If you’ve never seen one in person, go back to that 4.41-pound line. The gun is huge. The first time I shot a .44 Magnum Desert Eagle was 20 years ago, and the experience hasn’t changed. I own .44

Magnum revolvers, and they're pretty simple affairs, but the Desert Eagle's slide is a beefy chunk of steel, and when you touch a round off, it slams back and forth while the gun recoils sharply in the middle of whatever blast and flash your load creates. As you can see, it's a whole other situation if you're used to wheelguns.

In terms of finishes, you can go from very subdued to extremely eye-grabbing on these Desert Eagles depending on your tastes and wallet, but the new casehardened model splits the difference between basic black and gaudy gold, giving you the chance to impress your buddies with some nice "Hey, look what I got!" bling without being accused of going too far in the ego spectrum.

These colors are quite well done, and while they're produced with a modern chemical process, as opposed to the older bone-charcoal method of true casehardening, they're close enough to sell the idea and justify the hefty \$2,278 price tag. Blues and browns dominate, at least on my sample, and sunlight really helps them pop. Coverage extends over 100 percent of the slide and frame, with other small parts done in a dark oxide. Nosing it around here and there brought a universal response—"Beautiful!"—and it certainly is.

CAN IT SHOOT?

Let's be honest here. In my hands—much more used to working with polymer-framed pistols nowadays than it used to be—the Desert Eagle feels very awkward. The grip is just a hair on the side of too big for true comfort, and, not surprisingly, it's very muzzle heavy. It won't ever be a boot gun, so to speak, or a serious carry contender. But it is undeniably a serious shooter.

During testing at an indoor range, firing at my usual black bullseyes at 25 yards off a rest, the new pistol stood up and got my attention with every shot fired—at both ends of the bullet path. Four jacketed loads (naked lead is verboten in the Desert Eagle's gas operating system) in



"this...standout choice... goes well beyond its pretty colors at the range and on the hunt."



The fixed, all-black sights are made of steel. Also note the extended beavertail and serrated hammer spur.

three bullet weights bucked and blasted at my end, and made very nice five-shot groups on paper at the other end, right at the point of aim.

Winchester's "White Box" 240-grain JSPs started the show as a lower-priced mid-range performer in the "classic" .44 Magnum bullet weight, and Black Hills followed with its 240-grain JHPs to up the ante. Both surprised me with what they printed, and so did the Winchester 250-grain Platinum Tip HPs that put us up into a higher-performance bullet bracket. All three held under 2 inches, and considering the all-black sights on the pistol that no longer work well with my eyes, I had no gripes at all.

The Desert Eagle unexpectedly choked on the premium 225-grain Barnes VOR-TX XPB rounds. But these light bullets, while light on recoil, created feed-ramp stoppages



The slide release is a large paddle within easy reach on the left side, and the slide is fitted with an ambidextrous safety.

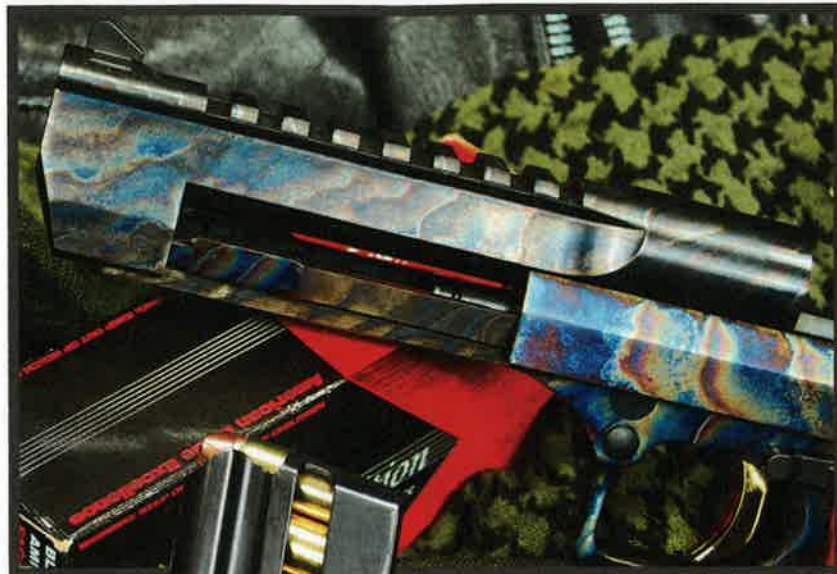
that indicated they weren't cycling the slide fully. Apparently there just isn't enough steam in these round to cycle the gun's gas system. This load's accuracy was also OK, though

the group was over 3 inches wide. The first three loads would make fine choices for a good range of hunting scenarios, whether you need deeper penetration with a soft point or

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↑ The pistol comes with a steel, eight-round magazine. Also note the gold-plated trigger inside the large, squared triggerguard.

→ The author tested his first .44 Magnum Desert Eagle in 1998, and his friend, Kirk Allen, was so impressed with it that he bought the test sample, which his daughter later used on an elk hunt.



← As a Mark XIX model, the fully casehardened .44 Magnum barrel assembly can be quickly switched out for one in another caliber.

→ Magnum Research includes a set of attractive walnut grip panels (shown) as well as Hogue rubber grips that take things up a notch in terms of handling.

wider expansion with a hollow point, and we'll just reserve the Barnes ammo for revolvers, which is what they're primarily designed for in the first place. Also note that the Black Hills rounds will light up a good section of the surrounding countryside at night, if that matters.

The pistol uses a multi-lugged rotating bolt head very similar to the AR-15's, with matching locking cutouts at the back of the barrel, to contain .44 Magnum pressures. The test pistol showed tight machining tolerances, and before hitting the range I thoroughly lubed those lugs on both the bolt head and barrel, and the frame and slide rails, to give the gun a fair chance. It's a more complicated system than your average autopistol—it needs more attention—and as the test session showed, it can be a tad ammo sensitive, even with the best-quality stuff. But that's not a comment on either the gun or ammo; just a notation on the realities of life. Do some functional analysis with a projected load before fielding it and remember to keep the pistol lubed.

At the bench, I used the walnut

PERFORMANCE

MAGNUM RESEARCH
DESERT EAGLE MARK XIX

| LOAD | ACCURACY |
|--------------------------------|----------|
| Barnes 225 VOR-TX XPB | 3.25 |
| Black Hills 240 JSP | 1.38 |
| Winchester 240 JSP | 1.94 |
| Winchester 250 Platinum Tip HP | 1.88 |

Bullet weight measured in grains and accuracy in inches for best five-shot groups at 25 yards.



grips that came on the gun, because they look classier, and in a shadow box on the wall, there's absolutely no contest. But for field use I'd go with the Hogue rubber grips that Magnum Research includes. Light checkering would be a different ball game, but those smooth walnut grips tend to move around in the palm, and the rubber grips don't. The trigger, incidentally, was far from target grade and could be much better. The single-action pull weighed more than my 8-pound scale, with marked travel before the break. Apparently Magnum Research wants you to be very sure you truly want to fire the gun when you put your finger inside the triggerguard.

TWENTY YEARS LATER

While manufacturing techniques and design evolution have changed a bit since my 1998 introduction to the Desert Eagle, the basic pistol and function are the same. It hasn't shrunk any, and neither has its performance. Magnum Research has done a very nice job on this color-casehardened version, and if you've been dithering on adding a Desert Eagle to the family, this would be a standout choice that goes well beyond its pretty colors at the range and on the hunt. For more information, visit magnumresearch.com.

PELTOR PROTECTION

→ I've flirted with electronic earmuffs ever since the 1980s, when the original Wolf Ears were new and exciting. I first heard about Peltor's new Sport Tactical 500 model right before I received the Desert Eagle for testing, and since I normally shoot at an indoor range, I thought it'd be a great chance to test these muffs' capabilities. And it certainly was. The .44 Magnum Desert Eagle's sound signature matches its size, and then some, in enclosed spaces.

Powered by AA batteries, the Sport Tactical 500 headset is designed to suppress gunshots with a noise-reduction rating of 26 decibels while amplifying background sounds. There are numerous other alterna-



tives on the market, but the Bluetooth connectivity is one feature that sets these apart from most, and I like that the mics are recessed to cut down on wind noise outdoors. Electronic muffs have come a long way, and the Sport Tactical 500 is quite sophisticated, with push-button activation and internal prompts for functions. The cups are not quite as thin as non-electric

muffs can be, but they do have small cutouts so you can maintain a cheekweld with a rifle. Sound suppression behind the Desert Eagle was excellent, and good ear protection is a critical piece of equipment in not just avoiding hearing damage, but in avoiding flinching. If your ears bleed on every shot, the distraction factor is high, and that'll show up on paper. Thankfully, there were no sound distractions here. The only downside is the un-padded headband that some users find uncomfortable. My head isn't that sensitive, but yours might be. The Bluetooth function is simple to pair up with a cell phone and has excellent sound quality in both directions. I'm keeping my test sample. (3m.com)
—Denis Prisbrey

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