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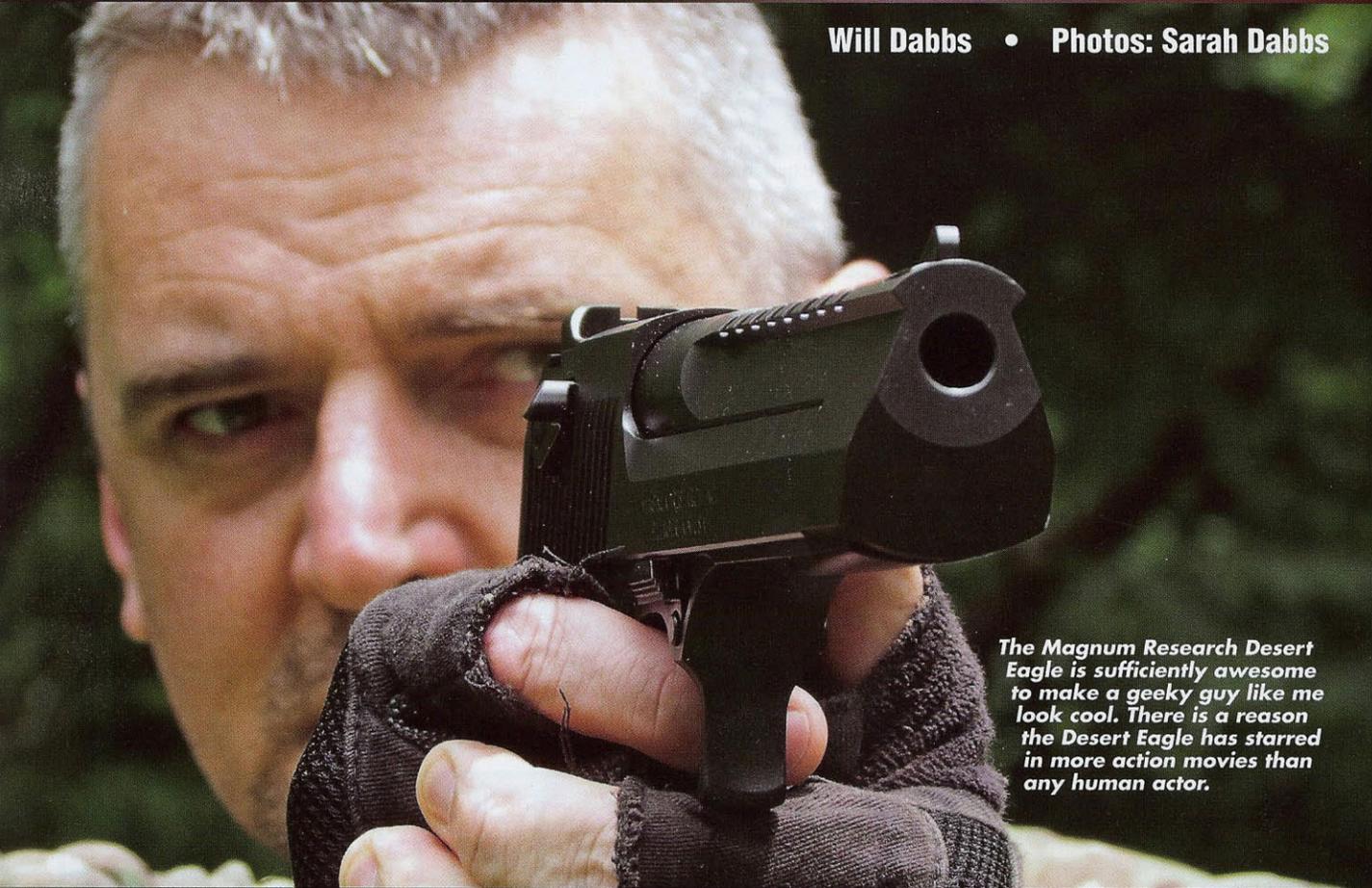
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.44 MAGNUM DESERT EAGLE

Will Dabbs • Photos: Sarah Dabbs



The Magnum Research Desert Eagle is sufficiently awesome to make a geeky guy like me look cool. There is a reason the Desert Eagle has starred in more action movies than any human actor.

THE ULTIMATE CREW-SERVED HANDGUN

Despite the fact most of us would dismiss *People* magazine as the fodder of weak minds, truth be known we are all influenced by exogenous cultural forces. Want proof? H&K sold thousands of MP-5 submachine

guns worldwide after the televised storming of the Iranian Embassy in London by SAS troops armed with these weapons in 1980. It seems us grizzled armed professionals are not so different from your typical teenage girl.

Despite its massive proportions, the Desert Eagle in .44 Magnum is still manageable for petite shooters.



In 1971, Dirty Harry introduced the American male to the Magnum handgun cartridge. Elmer Keith might have given birth to the .44 Magnum, but Clint Eastwood launched its show business career. While the fickle eye of fame has since landed upon plastic handguns and AR rifles, there is still a spark in the heart of most American gun owners, drawing us toward big-bore handguns like a moth to a muzzle flash.

Origin Of The Species

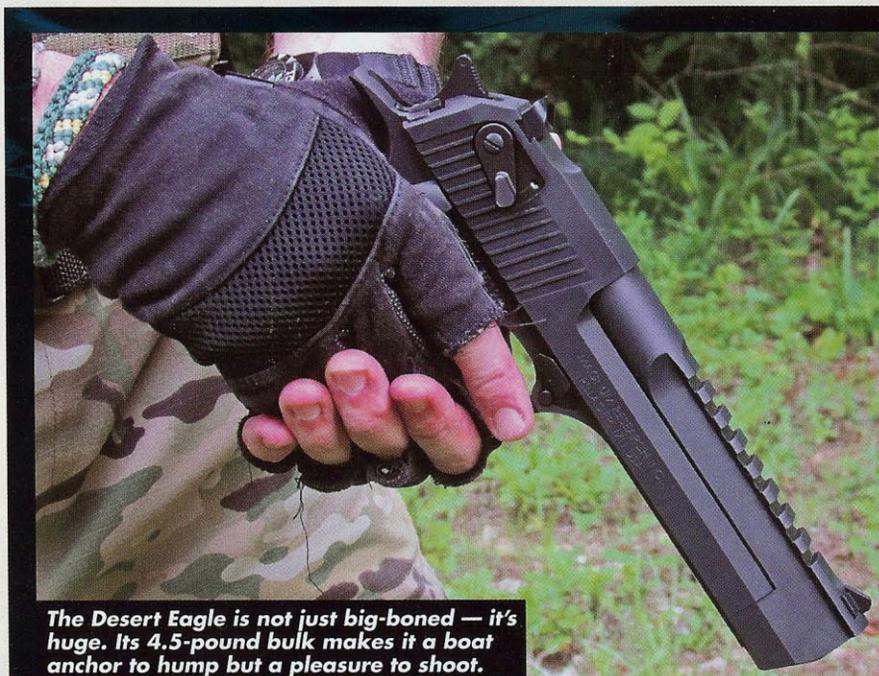
Elmer Keith designed the .44 Magnum cartridge in the mid-1950s in response to the need for a powerful handgun cartridge for hunting and target shooting. The resulting rimmed design typically pushes a 240-grain bullet at around 1,500 fps. While it will not quite “blow a man’s head clean off,” to quote Dirty Harry Callahan, it’s more than adequate for any reasonable social applications.

When I lived in Alaska, the .44 Magnum revolver was the standard sidearm for most bush pilots and similar manly men who lived and worked among Alpha predators weighing as much as a Volkswagen Bug. While the only truly reliable firepower solution when faced with an agitated mature Alaskan brown bear would

sport an impact fuse and a tripod, these magnum handguns are the next best thing.

The iconic Desert Eagle was originally an American design, moved to Israel in 1983 for perfection and production. Various offered in .357

Magnum, .41 Magnum, .44 Magnum and .50 Action Express, the Desert Eagle has been a staple of American shooters for three decades. Now after countless appearances on the big screen, the venerable Israeli Desert Eagle has finally come home to roost



The Desert Eagle is not just big-boned — it’s huge. Its 4.5-pound bulk makes it a boat anchor to hump but a pleasure to shoot.

The bore is polygonally rifled with a 1:18" twist. The classic muscular lines are what define the Desert Eagle.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Mk XIX Magnum Research
Desert Eagle

Caliber (As Tested)	.44 Magnum
Barrel Length	6"
Overall Length	10.75"
Sight Radius	8.5"
Weight (Empty)	4 pounds, 6.2 ounces
Barrel Rifling	Polygonal 1:18" RH
Magazine Capacity	8 rounds
MSRP	\$1,594

and is being produced in, and I'm not making this up, a place called Pillager, Minn.

The Desert Eagle finishes range from dull to bizarre and have a variety of barrel lengths. The newest Mk XIX version incorporates a Picatinny rail for mounting optics. I tried it out with my EOTech EXPS3 Holo-sight and, while the resulting package

carries about as comfortably as a live weasel duct-taped to a brick, it ran like a champ.

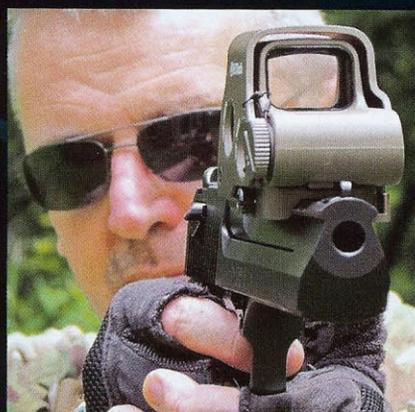
The .50 AE version has all the sex appeal and rightfully so. The timeless reference to a .50 caliber Desert Eagle in the Guy Ritchie movie *Snatch* ranks as one of the coolest gun scenes in Hollywood history. If you haven't seen it before, put down the magazine and go watch the movie — it will change your life.

However, the .50 AE version out here in the real world jumps all over the place, spews a fireball visible from outer space and eats ammunition that is both tough to find and costs about as much per round as a Happy Meal. For the big-bore enthusiast who at least pays lip service to the constraints of reality, the .44 Magnum is

the better option. It strikes a nice balance between firepower — whatever that really means in this application — and comfort.

Aside from its classic muscular lines, the unique nature of the Desert Eagle is best personified by its gas-operated design. Gas is tapped from the bottom of the barrel to impinge upon a piston attached to a fairly behemoth steel slide. The astute observer watching one of these guns fired rapidly at dusk may pick out a small fireball shooting out of the bottom of the gun to compliment the retina-scorching version belching out of the muzzle. The bolt rotates and at least esoterically favors that of the M16.

The single-action trigger is nice and crisp as well as adjustable, and



The contemporary American-made version of the Desert Eagle sports a standard Picatinny rail milled into the top of the barrel. When combined with an EOTech EXPS3 Holo-sight it makes for a heavy but remarkably effective package on the range.



The Desert Eagle is a gas-operated handgun employing a fairly massive rotating bolt. It's this attribute allowing it to manage such a massive cartridge in an autoloading platform.

the ambidextrous, slide-mounted safety must be pushed up to make the weapon ready to fire. Given the prodigious mechanical energy the weapon must harness, it's still surprisingly comfortable.

The magazine release is in the American position and is not reversible. The strength of the operating spring, combined with the mass of the reciprocating parts, makes the slide release fairly tight. The overall package weighs nearly 4.5 pounds.

Making Noise

On the range, the Desert Eagle in .44 Magnum is simply a hoot to shoot. Recoil is almost enjoyable, follow-up shots are fairly comfortable, and the muzzleblast will leave you giddy. In a semi-automatic platform the dark side remains the prodigious appetite for expensive ammunition.

The manual makes a point of specifying certain loads and a rigid firing stance, but I found the gun to be reliable among several shooters and several commercial loads. Sights are large and drift adjustable but the gun shot to point-of-aim out to 30 meters straight from the box.

So, why would anybody want a 4.5-pound handgun that shoots ammo costing a dollar a round? Are you kidding? Why would anybody want to own a Corvette, a football team or an island? This is America and we are loud, inefficient and cool. You add a Desert Eagle to the collection because it's fun to shoot, looks utterly bad, and because Neo faced them in The Matrix. That, plus pride in the new made-in-America moniker was more than enough reason for me to trade into one at a recent gun show. It's simply that in the case of a handgun that weighs half as much as an M1 Garand, you can't get too wrapped around the axle about practicalities. 🔫

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