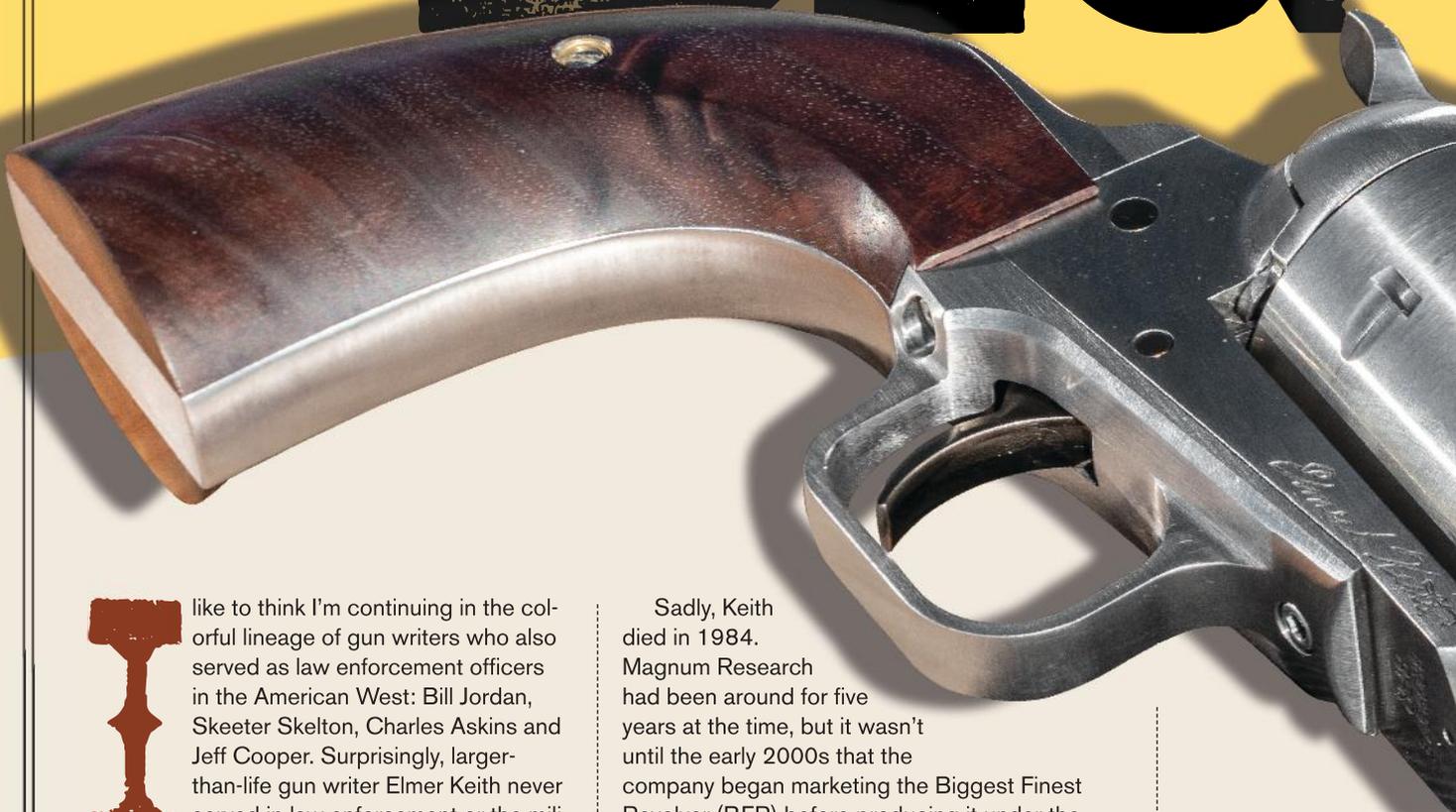




BIG



I like to think I'm continuing in the colorful lineage of gun writers who also served as law enforcement officers in the American West: Bill Jordan, Skeeter Skelton, Charles Askins and Jeff Cooper. Surprisingly, larger-than-life gun writer Elmer Keith never served in law enforcement or the military. However, his influence was every bit as great. Before World War II, he developed the .357 Magnum by lengthening a .38 Special case. Then, in the 1950s, he did the same thing with a .44 Special, creating the .44 Magnum. In the debate over small, fast bullets versus larger, slower bullets, Keith always wanted to make large bullets go fast, too. Consequently, "Elmer Keith" and "big bore" became synonymous, and his influence is still felt today.

Keith's influence didn't end with cartridges, either. He designed bullets, holsters and shooting positions while being a prolific gun writer. When he voiced an opinion, shooters and manufacturers listened. He was a crack shot with pistols, rifles and shotguns, an avid hunter and was renowned for his love of big-bore revolvers.

Sadly, Keith died in 1984. Magnum Research had been around for five years at the time, but it wasn't until the early 2000s that the company began marketing the Biggest Finest Revolver (BFR) before producing it under the guidance of gunsmith Jim Tertin, who was instrumental in its design. Now the BFR is available in several different configurations, with short cylinders for normal pistol calibers and long cylinders for traditional rifle calibers. You read that right. Want a .30-30 revolver to go with your lever action on your next deer hunt? Yep, that's a standard option for the BFR.

THE RENDEZVOUS

When I met Magnum Research's Joby Goerges at the Athlon Outdoors Rendezvous in Driggs, Idaho, last year, he showed me the company's first Elmer Keith commemorative BFR. Beautifully manufactured, the stainless steel gun was a work of art. Every piece fit together perfectly without any gaps or tool marks.

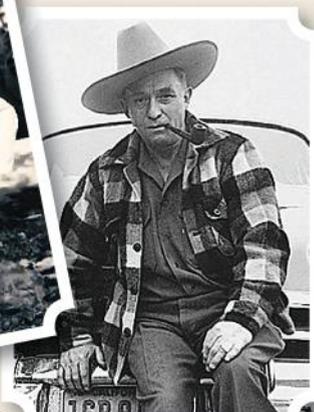
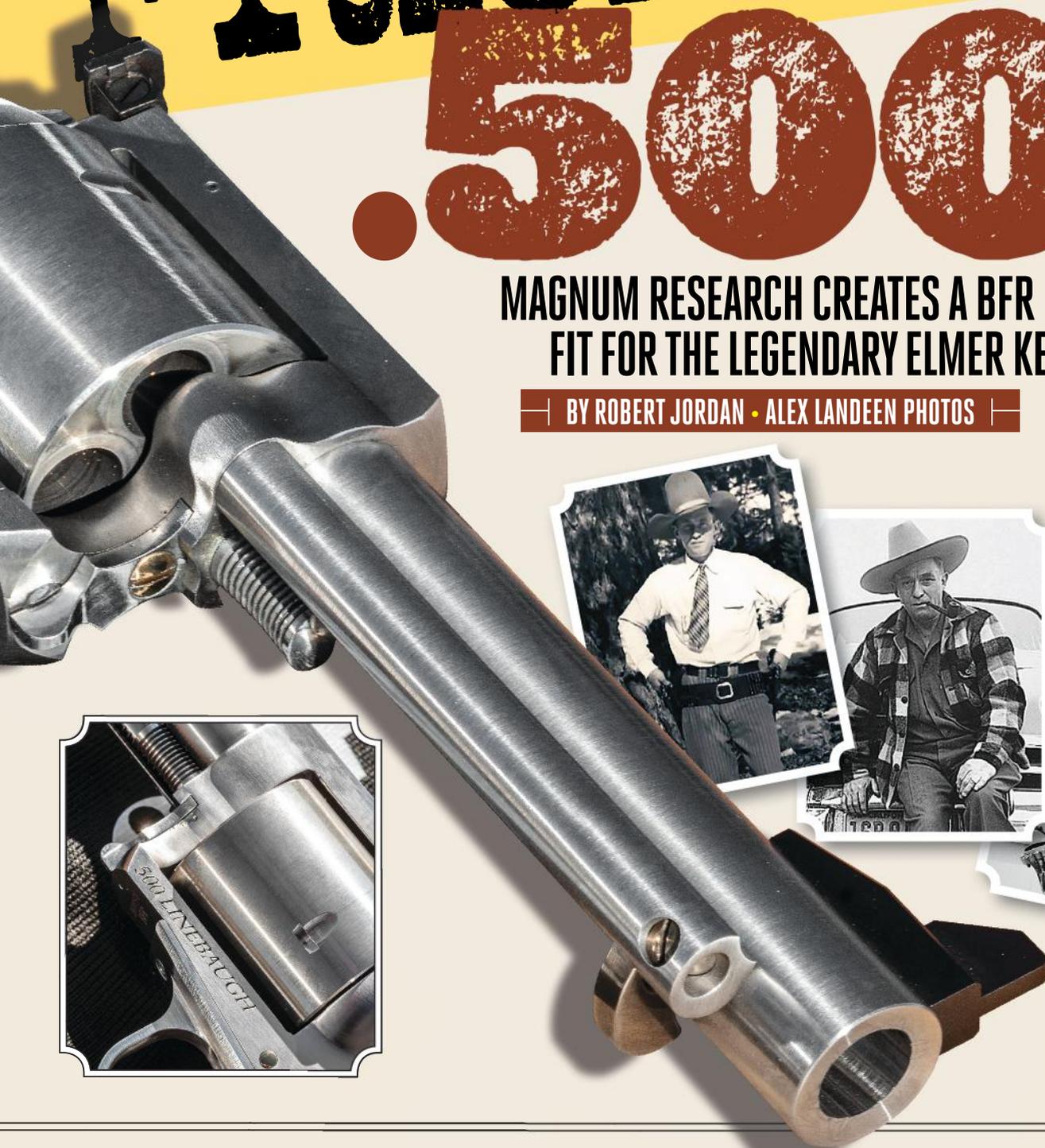
 The Magnum Research Custom Shop chambered its first Elmer Keith commemorative BFR for the .500 Linebaugh, a cartridge Keith would've loved for its raw power.

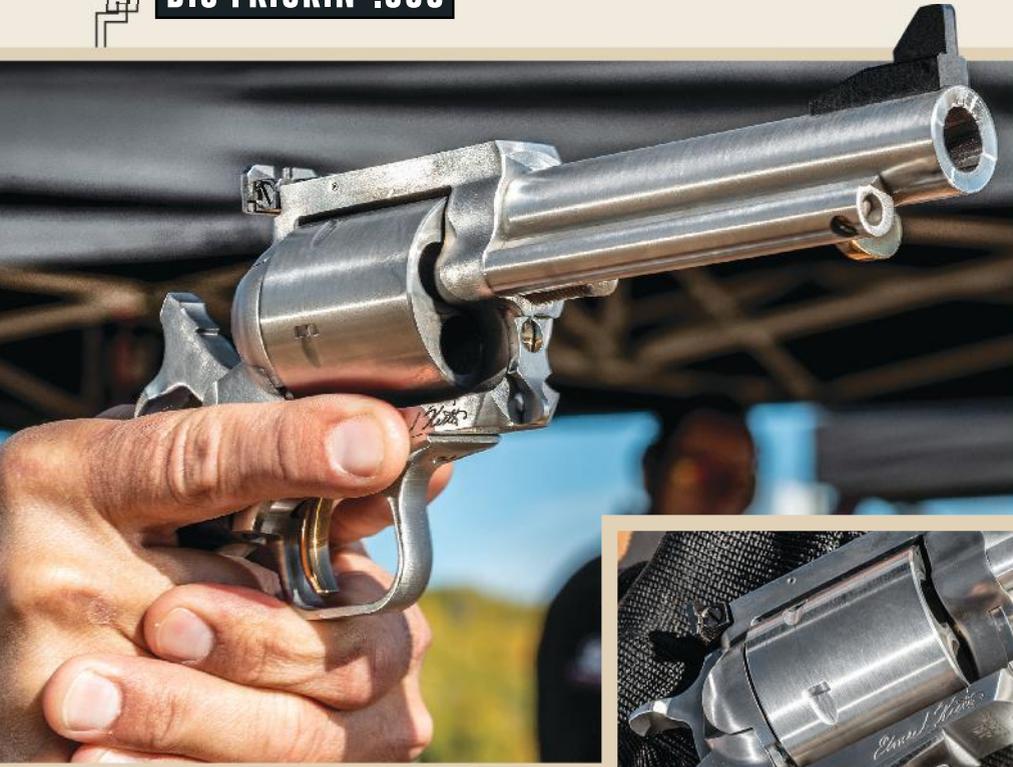
FRICKIN'

.500

MAGNUM RESEARCH CREATES A BFR FIT FOR THE LEGENDARY ELMER KEITH

BY ROBERT JORDAN • ALEX LANDEEN PHOTOS





thumb to easily cock the hammer for the next shot. Elmer's design still allows the gun to rotate in your hand, but to a smaller degree.

According to Joby, the Elmer Keith revolver also has a standard BFR trigger, but it's brass colored to match the head of the ejector rod. Then there's the front sight, which is extra tall and made from aluminum. It's paired with an LPA adjustable rear sight. The frame is deeply engraved with Elmer Keith's signature on one side and the caliber on the other. In this case, it said ".500 LINEBAUGH," but since it's a true custom gun, it can be made in virtually any caliber.

The rest of the gun is all BFR. Magnum Research uses 416 stainless steel for the barrel and 17-4 stainless steel for the cylinder and frame. The higher-quality steel manufactured and used today allows for much more powerful cartridges than back in Elmer's day.

It's also worth noting that you don't need to thumb the hammer back to the half-cock position



to release the cylinder and allow it to rotate. Instead, you simply open the loading gate, and the cylinder is freed for loading and unloading. Close the gate and the cylinder locks back up. By the way, the cylinder rotates clockwise, like it should. I say that tongue in cheek because I've owned a fair number of Smith & Wesson revolvers through the years that continue to serve me well, despite their cylinders rotating the "wrong way."

POWER TRIP

After the Rendezvous, Joby agreed to let me test the same Elmer Keith BFR back at my home range in Montana. But they definitely don't stock .500 Linebaugh rounds at Walmart, even with all the grizzlies in the state, so I turned to the good folks at Buffalo Bore, who sent me two 435-grain loads and one

The custom BFR has Elmer Keith's signature along the frame as well as a cylinder-release system of his design.

SPEC BOX

MAGNUM RESEARCH ELMER KEITH BFR

CALIBER:	.500 Linebaugh
BARREL:	5 inches
OA LENGTH:	11 inches
WEIGHT:	3.13 pounds (empty)
GRIPS:	Micarta
SIGHTS:	Blade front, adjustable rear
ACTION:	SA
FINISH:	Stainless
CAPACITY:	5
MSRP:	\$2,875

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VELOCITY	ACCURACY
Buffalo Bore 435 Hard-Cast LBT-LFN	1,011	3.25
Buffalo Bore 435 LBT-LFN	1,059	3.31
Buffalo Bore 525 Hard-Cast LBT-LFN	1,049	3.15

Bullet weight measured in grains, velocity in fps by chronograph and accuracy in inches for best five-shot groups at 25 yards.

Magnum Research also delved into the Keith mystique to design the gun. First, the base pin lever and lever release bar are of Elmer's design. They work great, and no tools are needed. The lever is also held in place by a spring-loaded catch. Swing it out 90 degrees to the side and the base pin springs forward, allowing the cylinder to be removed for cleaning. The enlarged head on the base pin is also grooved to make it easier to pull forward. The base pin comes forward until it hits the brass-colored head of the ejector rod. This is a fantastic feature because it keeps the ejector rod from being removed from the gun and lost.

Joby explained that the new BFR's Bisley-style grip—originally called the "Keith No. 5" style—was another favorite of his. This grip style originally debuted on the Colt Bisley, a target-grade Peacemaker, in 1894. It allows the gun to slide and rotate in the hand as it recoils, aligning your



While the BFR was quite a handful at the range thanks to the mighty .500 Linebaugh recoil, the author was still able to produce tight groups.



525-grain load. And I'll just say that you can forget the bears! Having fired all three loads now, I feel 100-percent confident that they could take down a charging rhino...behind an elephant... behind a cement wall.

I decided to test the BFR's accuracy at 25 yards. I set up my DOA Shooting Bench, pistol rest, LabRadar and targets and settled in. And I should mention that I try to let every round I fire surprise me to maximize my accuracy, with a hard focus on the front sight and a slow, smooth trigger press to the rear. I also hold the gun lightly to negate any human wobble. But that's obviously incredibly hard to do when you're holding a gun that kicks sig-

nificantly harder than a 12 gauge shooting 3 1/2-inch magnum shells.

Nonetheless, the gun was very accurate. I'm sure I could get smaller groups if I had (a) used a scope instead of iron sights, and (b) not been wondering each time I fired the gun if it was going to hurt so badly my unborn grandchildren would feel it. I began to wonder if the .500 Linebaugh rounds would be able to pierce an armored truck or hurl it down the street. I also made a mental note to drive to Cody, Wyoming, find John Linebaugh and kick his butt.

Normally, after testing a gun's accuracy, I'll run some tactical drills with it to see how it operated in the real world, under stress and in adverse conditions. But I didn't with the BFR. I made notes on my range sheet

as I tested its accuracy: "Sharp recoil," "Don't put your elbows on the table" and "This is soul-crushingly painful!" I kept a running log of the number of times the barrel came back and smacked my forehead (four) despite knowing what was coming.

Is the Elmer Keith BFR amazing? Absolutely! Even more than words can describe. Is it for everyone? No. This gun is for the aficionado, the history buff, the meat-eater alpha who wants to hunt American bison or Cape buffalo on their turf with nothing but sheer will and the finest piece of steel Americans have ever produced. That said, I must admit that the .500 Linebaugh simply isn't for me. I'm sending the Elmer Keith BFR back to Magnum Research. But there is something about it that makes me go back to my writing room every day and pick it up and hold it and cock it and aim it again and again. This is a gun that intertwines with your soul. I always thought magnum revolver guys were a crazy lot of old masochists. But today, I get it. I just think I might prefer it in .44 Magnum. For more information, visit custombfrrevolver.com. 



Want to change up the caliber or grips? Those are just two of the many options at custombfrrevolver.com.