

The Los Angeles Silhouette Club

This article also submitted to J.D. Jones
and Handgun Hunters International

This one's for you, Lyle...

By Glen E. Fryxell

Lyle Eckman was a good man, and a good friend. He was also one of the finest teachers I have ever had the pleasure of watching in action (and learning from). He ran our local chapter of the NRA Junior Marksmanship program for almost 25 years, and I had the pleasure of working with him as a part of that effort for over 15 of those years. Lyle died last fall after a long, protracted, and tough-willed fight with cancer, one month shy of his 60th birthday.

He was a rifleman at heart (especially high-power and indoor small-bore), but all aspects of the shooting sports held interest for him -- bullseye pistol, silhouette, PPC, skeet, sporting clays, cowboy action, etc. -- they all brought a twinkle to his eye, and he could speak knowledgeably on many aspects of each discipline. The same was true for handloading and bullet casting.

In his younger days, Lyle had been an avid hunter. From the Northwood's of Minnesota, the plains of North Dakota, or the black timber of the Pacific Northwest, Lyle had hunting stories that involved everything from squirrels to Sasquatch, mud-hens to mallards, and whitetails to wolverines. As a boy, he loved to hunt pheasants with his Dad, and after he graduated from high school, true to his cowboy roots, he got a Winchester 94 .30-30 to hunt deer with. He still had that .30-30 over forty years later, the receiver peep sight still properly zeroed for his favorite load.

I started helping Lyle in the late '80s, about the same time I got serious about handgun hunting. My interest in handgun hunting piqued his interest in the subject and he liked to pepper me with questions about wildcat cartridges, bullet performance, hunting strategies, etc. He was quietly taking mental notes about what worked, and what I liked to hunt with (he was very cagey that way).

In the late '90s, I bought a 7 ½" Ruger Bisley Blackhawk in .45 Colt at a local gun show. I soon learned that it shot OK, but not as well as I had come to expect a good Ruger to shoot, so I set about to do some work on it. I reamed the undersized throats to .4515" then polished them lightly. I set the barrel back a thread and set the cylinder gap at .003", and re-cut the forcing cone to 11 degrees. I cut a 15 degree crown and added a set of handsome Hogue walnut grips. I took the gun down to the pistol range so that I could shoot it after the Juniors were done with their shooting, and learned that the gun now shot very nicely indeed.

Brad (one of the other instructors working with the Juniors) took interest in this project, and mentioned that several years earlier he had bought a similar Ruger Bisley Blackhawk with the intent of sending it off to Hamilton Bowen to get one of his 5-shot

.45 Colt conversions. The price-tag of the conversion had kept him following through on this project though. Brad had test-fired his Bisley and it had shoot very poorly, so it sat untouched in the back of his gun safe for years. I asked him what he wanted to hunt with such a gun, and his response was "Deer." I asked him what sort of loads he wanted to shoot in it, and he said, "250s to 300s at about 1200 fps." I told him that the standard Ruger 6-shot cylinder would handle that easily, and that what was probably limiting the gun's grouping ability was the cylinder's throat dimensions. I offered to ream them to .4515" for him, then polish them lightly, and he agreed to let me do the work. When I returned the gun, he offered to let me be the first to test-fire it. I had a handful of different loads on hand and proceeded to run a couple of known performers through it. 5-shot groups with both loads cut one ragged hole at 50 feet (shooting from sandbags). Previously (with a mix of .449" and .450" throats) this gun hadn't been able to stay inside of 3" at 50 feet. Brad was pleased.



Lyle's .45 Colt Bisley Blackhawk

A little while later Lyle showed up at the range one Tuesday night with a similar 7 1/2" .45 Colt Bisley Blackhawk, that he had just bought (brand new). He handed me the box and said, "Whatever you did to Brad's, do to this one.". I reamed the throats to .4515" then polished them lightly (they were all between .450" and .451", so I wasn't taking out as much metal this time). Test-firing revealed that this gun shot very nicely after

reaming the throats. Lyle was pleased.

I don't know that Lyle ever intended to hunt with the Bisley (by this point in his life he didn't do much hunting anymore), but I am pretty sure that he intended to work up some good cast bullet hunting loads so that he *could* take it hunting, if he ever decided to go. I don't know if it was a by-product of his cancer, a side-effect of his chemotherapy, or just part of the natural aging process (he was about 50 at this point), but the bottom line is that he just could not focus on a handgun's front sight anymore, and his ability to shoot an iron-sighted handgun suffered significantly as a result. That frustration must have put a damper on this project because when we were going through his reloading gear after he died, there were boxes of brand new .45 Colt brass and many boxes of commercial hard-cast .45 Colt bullets, and not a single round of handloaded .45 Colt ammo. Lyle was a hard worker, and he hated to see a job sit around unfinished, so I decided to finish this job for my friend. I bought the Bisley from his estate. This Bisley was one hunting handgun that was going to go hunting!



MP Molds Cramer style
45 Cal 270 SAA.

Over the years, I have managed to amass a pretty fair selection of bullet moulds suitable for the .45 Colt. A new design that really intrigued me, and one that I had not yet had a chance to hunt with, was the hollow-point (HP) version of the 45-270-SAA made by Miha Prevac (<http://www.mp-molds.com/>). I had worked with this superb 275 grain bullet recently and knew that it was capable of excellent accuracy at hunting speeds. My fondness for hunting with cast HP's loads is no secret, and I had

a couple of boxes of one of my preferred loads with this bullet already loaded up (cast to a BHN of ~9, sized .452", lubed with my home-made Moly lube and loaded over 13.0 grains of HS-6 and sparked with a Winchester Large Pistol primer, for about 1150 fps). Test-firing this load through Lyle's Bisley revealed good accuracy and no need to adjust the sights -- this Ruger was ready to rock-n-roll.

I had reservations at Clover Creek Ranch in central Oregon for a spring hog hunt (<http://clovercreekranch.net/>; (541) 489-3344; email: info@clovercreekranch.net). Clover Creek just changed hands this spring (2011), and I got a chance to talk things over with Shon Webb (the new owner), and I'm excited about the plans he outlined for me about the ranch. They are going through the ranch and grooming the roads (much needed) and have gone in and moved a bunch of dirt to strengthen the dams and expand the various ponds. Shon has an aggressive plan for bringing in LOTS of animals to the ranch this year, and he's even going to be stocking the ponds with fish (trout in the colder spring-fed ponds, and bass and catfish for the warmer water catch basins). To say that John and I were enthusiastic when we headed down to Oregon would be an understatement!

The weather had been topsy-turvy, in the 70s one day, snowing the next, and raining for extended periods of time, so the ranch was pretty muddy and we knew that we wouldn't be driving around the ranch much, and this hunt would be carried out entirely on foot. We parked just inside the main gate and hiked over the finger-ridge into the lower basin and looked around. We found a group of big yak bulls, but no hogs. We explored the main road, and worked our way down to the newly fixed up pond, where we saw a couple of fallow deer (one chocolate and one spotted) and a couple of old merino rams. We side-hilled our way around to some of the known bedding areas that the hogs have used in the past, but there was nobody home. We worked our way back to the hillside above where the merinos were bedded down since that hillside was really rooted up and looked like it had seen a lot of hog activity recently, leading us to hope that they might come back. We glassed the area for a little over an hour with no luck, then packed it in to head back to camp for lunch after a fine morning of hiking in the hills.

After a quick lunch of sandwiches, chips and salsa, we headed back to the rocky canyon behind the ranch house. The ranch was drying out quickly, but the steep, rocky road up the canyon is quite rough, and was still too muddy and deeply rutted for us to even think about driving up. We hiked up to the saddle and found one huge blonde sow (about 600 lbs), bedded down with a little black shoat, and a very skittish Corsican ram and 3 Oregon Dahl rams (one of whom was most impressive!). There were a lot of pig tracks along this road, indicating that the herd of meat hogs we were looking for were in the area, but we couldn't find them. As we hiked down from the saddle, we had fun watching the Corsican and Dahl rams high up on their rocky crags as they looked down on us from the other side of the canyon.

It looked like inclement weather was moving into the area, so we decided to go back to the basin and see if the hogs had gone back to rooting around on that hillside we had watched over that morning. We got back to the truck and Bill (the ranch

manager) saw us and met us at the truck to chat for a bit. A few minutes later, while we were talking, the herd of meat hogs fed across the hillside above us and into the rocky canyon. After hiking all that time, we finally find the hogs while we're sitting in the truck with the engine idling! Mother Nature certainly has a sense of humor! From a distance, they looked to me like 100 pounders, and I was looking for something larger, so I lost interest pretty quickly, but John was pumped, so I went along with him and we went back into the canyon. As we worked our way up into the canyon and got closer to



John And his 200 lb black spotted sow.

the herd, it became apparent that my original estimate was off and these hogs were in the 175-200 lb range, more like what I was looking for, so my interest returned. It took John a while to decide which one he wanted to take, then he had to wait for an unimpeded shot opportunity, but eventually he got what he was looking for and the 200 lb black spotted sow he had picked out gave him a clear broadside presentation, with no hogs behind her. He put a 180 grain Partition through her lungs at 2600 fps and knocked her off her feet. She kicked for a bit and then all was quiet.

After the commotion was over, a 200 lb blonde sow walked out into the clearing and gave me a clear broadside presentation. Lyle's Bisley emerged from the leather and I drew a bead on her left shoulder. I must confess, I hurried the shot a bit. The white-rimmed .45 caliber hole in the front half of her left shoulder told me three things -- 1) I placed the shot farther forward than I had intended, 2) the wound wasn't bleeding at all, so I probably missed the lungs and major blood vessels, and 3) she was still on her feet and moving, so I needed to shoot again. She turned to head back uphill to join the rest of the herd, so I drew a bead just behind her right shoulder, slightly back into the ribs. My second shot dropped her immediately, and the wound bled profusely, and she was dead in seconds. Post-mortem inspection revealed that my first shot had gone in



Glen with the 200 pound blonde sow.



45 Colt and MP 270 Gr. SAA.

through the heavy bones of the hog's shoulder (I know better than to put a cast HP through a hog's shoulder, really I do...). Bullet fragments (and bone fragments) went through the chest and caught about the front 2" of one lung, and then blew through the far-side ribcage. These assorted fragments did not make it into the far-side shoulder, and ended up in a large bloodshot mass in between the ribs and shoulder. This was clearly a debilitating injury, but not one that would prove quickly fatal. The second shot entered just behind the right shoulder, about halfway up

and blew a silver dollar sized entry hole in the ribcage. The 45-270-SAA HP clearly expanded very well as both of the lungs were badly shredded and bloodshot. The bullet had hit a couple of ribs on the way in, causing it to turn aft slightly, and there was a nice round .45 caliber hole towards the rear of the far-side ribcage, suggesting that the nose of the bullet might have come off and the base of the HP was all that was left at this point (unfortunately, very few bullet fragments were recovered during the gutting and skinning process). There was very little bloodshot meat surrounding the ribcage wounds, consistent with the modest velocity of this load (one of the reasons I like hunting with a revolver). In any event, the bottom-line is that the 45-270-SAA HP is very accurate, expanded very well, and when placed properly is capable of killing animals this size (~200 lbs) very quickly. Once again, the importance of shot placement is made very, very clear.

Loren (the very helpful camp skinner) got the hogs loaded up in his 4-wheeler and hauled them down to the skinning shed and got them hung up for us. We had covered a lot of ground that day so we kicked back and let him skin our hogs for us while we built up the campfire and enjoyed a cold beverage, and watched the ominous clouds roll past.

There was a hot, steaming crock-pot waiting for us back in the bunkhouse and we enjoyed dinner heartily. It got down close to freezing that night, so our hogs chilled very nicely indeed. The next morning after a good breakfast we cut up the pork and got it loaded up into ice chests for the drive home.

Lyle, this one's for you buddy. Your Ruger Bisley project can now be considered completed. The back straps have been cut up into 2 lb roasts and the boned out shoulders, ribs, etc. have been run through the meat grinder and are in the freezer. There is a hindquarter in the oven right now that is slowly and magically being transformed into Carolina barbeque over the next 24 hours. For lunch today, I am going to take a little bit of the ground pork and make some carnitas Zacatecas with onions and garlic, and served with fresh limes and margaritas (your favorite). Salud!

Good teachers are a blessing indeed. Vaya con Dios, Kimosabe.

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