

The Los Angeles Silhouette Club

Handgun Mulie

By: Jim Taylor

It was the third day of Mule Deer season and I had drawn a blank so far. I had ridden my horse back into some of the favorite haunts of bucks seen earlier in the year and found nothing. It seemed as if all the deer had left Arizona and moved elsewhere. The evening of the second day I called my hunting partner Dale and he commiserated with me, having had no luck himself. Then he said, "Hey, why not hunt the boundary land to the north of the Game Preserve. I have a feeling the deer in there are slipping out north in that rough county. We just might get lucky!" I agreed to meet him early in the morning and now, here we were, working some really rough hills.

This particular Game Preserve was founded by a private individual and later was taken over by the State. Encompassing quite a large section of land, there was no hunting on it. But there were thousands of acres of public land outside of it's fences and the land to the north of it was HUGE, even if it was rougher than the moon. High rocky ridges with very steep sides and lots of cliff faces were the norm. You had to travel about 3 miles to cover 1 mile in a straight line. After the first hour of hunting on foot I was sorry I did not trailer the horses here.

About 9 in the morning found us standing in a sand wash looking at mountain in front of us. It had a long rising ridge that ran roughly north and south with a steep cliff on the eastern side. Dale said for me to give him half an hour and he would go around to the north of the mountain and work his way back toward me. I would go up the ridge in front of me and work my way toward him. Perhaps we could push something out between us? It sounded like a plan so I dropped my backpack and sat down while Dale hiked off to the other side of the mountain.

After waiting the allotted time I began my climb up the ridge. I worked slow, keeping the pistol in my hand as I made my way around cactus and boulders the size of small car. The gun I was carrying was an Old Model Ruger .45 that had been rebuilt by John Linebaugh. I had shot the gun until it was nearly wore out and then sent it to Linebaugh for a rebuild. I had him install a custom 8" barrel that had been hand-cut and hand-lapped by a barrel maker in Montrose, CO. The bore tapered from .454" at the breech to .450" at the muzzle. The barrel had been Taylor-Throated. Extensive testing proved that it would shoot accurately with just about any size bullet from .450" to .454" diameters. Since I used .452" in my other guns that's what this one had in it. The 6-shot cylinder was a non-fluted .44 Magnum cylinder that John had re-chambered to tight .45 Colt specs. Fired shells from this gun would work in my factory Ruger cylinder without resizing them! I had the grip frame re-anodized and the gun itself was Black

Chromed. It wore a set of elephant ivory grips made by my friend Sam Bass. Not only was the sixgun good looking, it was a shooter!

The load I used was with a cast bullet - mold #454629GC - the bullet developed and sold by Freedom Arms. This is a 300 gr. flat point bullet designed for use in the 454 Casull. It has proven to be a good game bullet, having a nice wide meplat. I had it loaded over top a healthy dose of H110 for about 1300 fps. The main reason I used this load was that it had proven so accurate in this gun. For hunting accuracy is the first criteria for me. Once that has been established then I look at the power question.

I worked my way up the ridge trying to be as quiet as possible, going slow and keeping my eyes moving, looking for any sign. The top of the ridge was fairly flat with no large boulders and only low scrub brush. I looked it over carefully and then began to move across it, angling toward the cliff on the east. Suddenly out of nowhere a large Mule Deer buck materialized to my left! I had looked the area over carefully (I thought! I could have sworn I did!) He just sort of appeared out of nothing about 40 yards away! He began to run across in front of me from my left to the right. The gun came up, the hammer was back and I fired. And missed. At the shot he ran on past me and disappeared over the cliff.

I ran to the edge of the cliff and looked down to see him scrambling for the bottom. I had the hammer back and the sights on him as he reached the dry wash below. He turned to my left and began running along the bottom of the cliff back across in front of me. I led him with the sights and fired and down he went! He thrashed around, then jumped up and I fired again and he went down again, thrashing around on the ground. He flopped himself over under a Palo Verde tree and lay still.

The first shot had been well over 80 yards... almost straight down. The second was a bit further. I still was not sure where I had hit him and could see that he still had his head up. I worked my way down the cliff meeting Dale who had heard the shooting. I put my binoculars on the buck and could see he was done for, though still breathing. I eased up and put a "for sure" in his head.

He was a big-bodied deer, one of the largest I have ever taken with a handgun. His rack was high but narrow. The first shot had taken him along side the spine, down through the right lung and shoulder. His right front leg was useless. It was a fatal shot though not a quick one. I have done better shooting and was not real happy with my performance. It took a long time and a lot of hard work to get him out to where I could get the 4WD in to pick him up, but it was worth it. He fed us all winter. For that I was grateful.

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