

By Jon R. Sundra

Safari-Fast WILDCATS

***B&M big bores matched with SSK shorties.
A deadly duo for dangerous game!***

As more and more new cartridges are introduced, the various rationales for creating a wildcat, let alone an entire line of wildcats, have become less and less compelling. But go tell that to Bill Bruton and Michael McCourry, two guys who founded B&M Rifles & Cartridges based in South Carolina, in 2005. In fact, these guys now offer 12 proprietary rounds, the smallest of which is a 9.3mm (.366), with the largest being a .50 caliber. These guys belong to the Elmer Keith rather than the Roy Weatherby school of thought!

SAFARI-BORN .50

The whole thing began when Michael McCourry returned from Africa, where

he had a dicey encounter with a hippo at extremely close range while using his 24-inch-barreled Model 70 chambered in .458 Lott. He felt it was enough cartridge, but in close quarters the rifle's long length and 10-pound weight were just not responsive enough handling-wise for a dangerous game rifle.

The development of their first cartridge, the .50 B&M, was somewhat unconventional in that they started by first choosing the rifle that would be chambered for it, then designing the cartridge, rather than the other way around. Being partial to the Model 70 but wanting an action that was shorter and lighter than the magnum-length version on which his .458 Lott was based, Michael

decided on the medium-length Model 70—the one designed around the WSM family of cartridges. This action is unique among so-called “short” actions in that it will digest cartridges loaded to an overall length of 3.1 inches

rather than most short action limits of 2.75 and 2.88 inches.

To absolutely maximize powder capacity, they chose to base the round on a shortened .300 Remington Ultra Magnum case. Why not just neck up the .325 WSM? Because, by using the .300 Ultra Mag., they were able to increase case length by 0.13 inches over that of the WSM hull, which measures 2.1 inches. Not a big difference, but the resultant 2.24-inch case has slightly more capacity than the .458 Winchester. As such, it can push a 500-grain bullet at 2,150 FPS (feet per second), generating 5,130 foot-pounds of muzzle energy. Not only does that match the nominal .458 Winchester Magnum factory loads on both counts, but it does it with an 18-inch barrel, whereas the SAAMI velocity specifications for the .458 were obtained with 24-inch test barrels! The 18-inch barrel was part of Bill and Mike's overall goal of a shorter, faster-handling rifle, yet one capable of taking on the world's largest game.

Because the .300 Ultra Mag. case measures roughly 0.53 inches in outside diameter when hack-sawed and trimmed just below the shoulder, the inside diameter of the now straight-walled case is very close to .50 caliber, so all that was required to arrive at a loadable case at that point was to run it through a sizing die (available through Hornady and RCBS). Being a rimless and beltless straight-walled case, the .50 B&M head-spaces on the mouth of the case.

WILDCAT RIFLES

Once the cartridge specs were finalized, someone had to build the rifle, so Bill and Michael went to a very old friend and colleague of mine, J.D. Jones, who heads up



Using a shortened .300 Remington Ultra Mag case as the basis for the B&M cartridge line, the maximum potential of the medium-length Model 70 action is realized.



Bullets specifically designed for the B&M line of cartridges are available from North Fork and Cutting Edge. All are designed for large or dangerous game.

The original .50 B&M at far left has since spawned the .475, .458, .416, .375 and 9.3mm versions (left to right). All are available in SSK Industries rifles.



PERFORMANCE: B&M CARTRIDGES

LOAD	VELOCITY/ENERGY				POINT OF IMPACT	
	AT MUZZLE	50 YDS	100 YDS	150 YDS	100 YDS	150 YDS
.50 B&M 450 North Fork	2,325/5,400	2,090/4,375	1,890/3,560	1,710/2,915	1.5	-0.4
.416 B&M 350 Barnes TSX	2,500/4,850	2,375/4,375	2,250/3,935	2,130/3,535	-0.1	-1.8

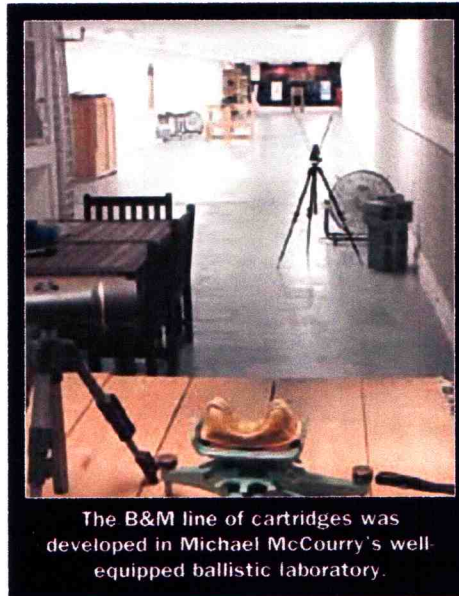
SSK Industries. J.D. has contributed more to handgun and rifle cartridge development in the sporting, competitive, and tactical/military areas than anyone I know. He developed the JDJ series of handgun cartridges for T/C Contender and Encore pistols, and the Whisper series of suppressed rifle cartridges, to name just a few.

One important point I'd like to make here is that the .50 B&M is not the result of your typical seat-of-the-pants trial and error process by which most wildcats are spawned. On the contrary, Michael McCourry has an extensive ballistic laboratory and an indoor range complete with pressure-testing equipment and chronography. The loading data available on the B&M website shows 52 handloads using bullets ranging from a 350-grain Hornady to a 515-grain SSK stoked with several different powders. Also shown are external ballistics for all loads, along with pressure data for nearly half of them.

Over the past seven years, both men have used SSK-built rifles based on medium-length Model 70 actions with great success in Africa and Alaska. Once word got out about the .50 B&M, McCourry followed with .475, 458, .416, .375 and 9.3mm versions, all based on the same shortened .300 Ultra Mag. case. SSK Industries has since built nearly 100 rifles in various B&M calibers that have been used very successfully in Africa and Alaska. All rifles are made to order, but barrels are furnished only in lengths of 18 to 21 inches; otherwise, they would not comply with the concept of a short, handy DGR that spawned the B&M line in the first place.

THE BIG SIX

Today, the company offers appropriately headstamped pre-formed brass for all six of its B&M calibers, and extensive reloading data for each can be downloaded from their website. Custom bullets by North Fork and Cutting Edge are also available from B&M, but customers are encouraged to order direct from the manufacturers. By maximizing the length and girth of the

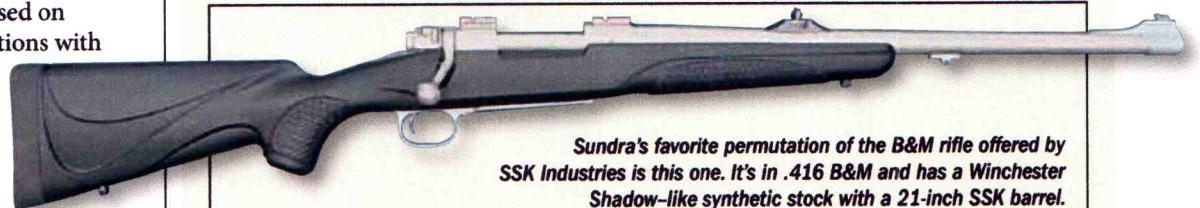


The B&M line of cartridges was developed in Michael McCourry's well-equipped ballistic laboratory.

NOTE: Bullet weight measured in grains, velocity in FPS, energy in foot-pounds, and point of impact in inches. .50 B&M given 25-yard zero. .416 B&M given 50-yard zero.

basic cartridge case that can be accommodated by the medium-length Model 70 action, B&M can claim to have the most powerful cartridges in the shortest rifles available anywhere. Actually, the same can be said of their other line of cartridges, the B&M Super Shorts. This line is based on the Model 70 Winchester action that was specifically designed around the .22, .243 and .25 WSSM cartridges, which are based on a shortened WSM case. For more information on B&M, fans of the big bores can visit b-mriflesandcartridges.com. For SSK Industries, visit sskindustries.com or call 740-264-0176. ☎

BACON-SAVING B&M



Sundra's favorite permutation of the B&M rifle offered by SSK Industries is this one. It's in .416 B&M and has a Winchester Shadow-like synthetic stock with a 21-inch SSK barrel.

The underlying concept of B&M cartridges is that they will be chambered in rifles specifically designed for fast handling. Said rifles must address the needs of professional hunters (PHs) more so than the needs of those hunters' clients. When a PH has no other option but to shoot, it is to save his and his client's bacon and is usually at close range at a fast-moving oncoming target. In these scenarios, a short and relatively light rifle chambered for a "stopping" cartridge is needed.

BEST ACTION

Aside from this, the best action should offer Mauser-type controlled-round feeding with inertia-type ejection like that found on the Winchester Model 70 Classic, which SSK Industries uses as a

base for building its B&M rifles. Other features DGRs should have include a non-folding, solid steel rear sight leaf, a barrel band front sight with a replaceable bead, a barrel band front sling swivel, and a stock with a high, straight comb (to minimize muzzle jump) and more open grip curve (to prevent the rear of the triggerguard bow from bruising the middle finger).

While most B&M rifles have highly figured walnut stocks in the classic express-rifle tradition, I prefer the more durable synthetic stock, which is also on Winchester's Ultimate Shadow. Though this stock has some shadow lines that are purely cosmetic, it is an attractive and highly functional stock with rubberized grip panels on the grip and forend.