



Short and Stout The .458 B&M

While most people have an epiphany during moments of relief and relaxation, such as jockeying the porcelain and serenading the shower-head, Michael McCourry's "flash of insight," as "Webster's New World Dictionary" eloquently defines it, occurred during a hippo charge.

"In 2005...I had a hippo that tried to bite me, but a Winchester M70 in .458 Lott and a 500-grain Barnes Solid at 2,250 fps sorted out the problem," said McCourry. "I won this exchange, but during that time, and afterward, I wished I had a Winchester that was shorter, faster on target, easy to handle and light to carry."

McCourry's desired "Winchester," which actually manifested into several rifles, came to fruition thanks to SSK Industries. To reduce overall length and weight, as well as to decrease bolt-cycle time, when designing the rifles McCourry selected Winchester Model 70 Classics with WSM-length actions to serve as platforms. SAAMI specifications set all WSM maximum cartridge overall lengths at 2.860 inches. With his affinity for 18- and 20-inch barrels, the rifles would shed, on average, 5 or more inches in overall length, not to mention several pounds when compared to his previous go-to Model 70 in .458 Lott. For added strength, as well as aesthetics, he replaced the factory stocks with versions from Accurate Innovations. SSK Industries tuned the rifles. Because the

Based on a shortened .300 RUM case, the .458 B&M wildcat provides big power in a small package. With a 500-grain Hornady InterBond, the cartridge produces more than 5,000 foot-pounds of energy from a 20-inch barrel.

WSM family of cartridges failed to encompass a dangerous-game round, wildcatting was mandatory.

McCourry, along with Brian Alberts of SSK Industries, created a series of wildcat cartridges based on shortened .300 RUM cases. Initially, the duo based the cartridges—known as the .416 B&M, .458 B&M and .50 B&M—on cases trimmed to 2.295 inches. However, issues arose when seating certain bullets to accommodate the WSM-length magazine, forcing the cases to be further shortened to 2.240 inches. Cut to size, the beltless, slightly rebated rim case easily accepts .50-caliber projectiles, and necking down and trimming results in the .416 and .458 versions. Of the group, the .458 B&M is particularly intriguing; it features a relatively short neck and 20-degree shoulder.

Design parameters for the .458 B&M called for a 450-grain bullet—specifically the Barnes Solid—at 2,200 to 2,250 fps and a 500-grain bullet at 2,150 fps. Depending on the projectile and the handloading recipe, it narrowly misses duplicating .458 Win. Mag. performance and is within 200 fps of .458 Lott loads. McCourry's first loads, which used a 450-grain Barnes Banded Solid, 65 grains of Reloder 10X and a Federal 215 primer, averaged 2,163 fps through a 20-inch-barreled Model 70. Switching to 78 grains of AA2520, McCourry achieved 2,238 fps for 5,004 foot-pounds of muzzle energy. Interestingly, an 18-inch-barreled-rifle attained 2,218 fps with the identical load. With Hornady's 500-grain InterBond bullet, the 20-inch-barreled rifle reached 2,161 fps, producing 5,184 foot-pounds of muzzle energy. Considering an average 500-grain .458 Win. Mag. factory load achieved 2,080 fps through McCourry's 24-inch-barreled Model 70, the .458 B&M's performance was commendable.

What about pressures? According to a report generated by McCourry's Recreational

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Software's PressureTrace System, loads he's developed for the .458 B&M range from 54,000 to 63,000 psi, depending on the bullet-and-load combination. Most heavy offerings linger around the 60,000-psi mark, which, considering the WSMs and RUMs have SAAMI pressure limits of 65,000 psi, isn't excessive. Additionally, he's observed no pressure issues with his loads.

Penetration tests of the 450-grain Barnes Banded Solid in the 20-inch-barreled Model 70 in .458 B&M were conducted in a lengthy box with magazines, catalogs and newspapers arranged in a row. After soaking overnight, the media was stacked in the box to create a total of 64 linear inches of print material. At 2,150 fps, the Barnes Solid consistently provided 57 to 58 inches of straight-line penetration—plenty for the Big Five.


I can attest to the .458 B&M's impressive performance. In fact, I got several five-shot groups—using the 450-grain Barnes Banded Solid—that averaged 7/8 inch at 50 yards. Considering the rifle/cartridge will likely be called upon at half that distance, combined with 2½ tons of muzzle energy, the on-game results should be immediate. As can be expected of a lightweight, big-bore rifle, recoil is very stiff, but tolerable.

How can you get a .458 B&M, or one of its siblings? Know up front it won't be inexpensive, but then again, neither are quality big-bore rifles in commercial chamberings adequate for dangerous game. SSK Industries has the B&M-series reamers and can re-barrel, but not re-chamber, an appropriate rifle. The company can also upgrade and customize other rifles' features, as well as make .458 B&M cases from factory .300 RUM cases. SSK Industries has load data. Properly headstamped cases can be purchased from Quality Cartridge, but it'll cost you about \$2.50 each. This is especially beneficial for those traveling abroad. Cases can also be made by shortening Remington factory .300 RUM cases. Reloading dies are available from RCBS.

McCourry's epiphany resulted in a practical, scaled-down rifle concept and an excellent series of wildcat cartridges with one standout, the .458 B&M. One always wonders where the next great flash of insight might come from. Now, if you'd excuse me... S

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