

Outdoors

A gunpowder party

The hunter gripped his rifle in sweaty hands, facing the crouching lion only 30 yards away. Suddenly the animal launched his charge in deadly silence. The man with the gun knew he had only four or five seconds to stop that yellow ball of fangs and claws ... (no, wait! an African lion in full charge covers 30 yards in only half that much time. Maybe it was a grizzly ... yeah, they're not quite as fast as a lion) ... to stop that half-ton of silvertip fury.

Sure, that's more like it.

The rifle butt slammed into his shoulder and his target filled the sights. The shot had to be good; there'd be no time for a second. Half his time was already gone. The rifle cracked, but the shooter didn't hear it. As if in slow motion, he watched the bullet hole appear in the paper plate that rushed toward him.

Paper plate? What happened to the grizzly?

It was all an ingenious target rigged to rush straight at the shooter, set up on Howard Dietz' rifle range on Texas Hwy. 46, just this side of New Braunfels.

If you've never tried to hit an animal running toward you, you'd probably find the challenge of a charging target disconcerting. Believe me, it isn't like hitting an incoming mourning dove with a shotgun. I have been forced to stop two or three real charges, in Africa and elsewhere, and I can testify that this moving target nearly duplicates all the mechanical and psychological problems of the real thing – provided the shooter has a little imagination.

I found this out last weekend, when a friend named John Linebaugh held his second annual shooters' spree at Dietz' place. If you're a handgunner, you may recall that this is the same Linebaugh who developed the .475 and .500 Linebaugh, a ferocious pair of hunting cartridges used in specially rebuilt Ruger Super Blackhawk single-action revolvers.

The guns have new, five-shot cylinders that have more steel around and between the chambers and other modifications. Converting one is not a do-it-yourself project for a garage tinkerer. Such hand-cannons make a .44 Magnum look and feel like almost like a cap pistol. The new Smith & Wesson .500 is the only other handgun that challenges Linebaugh's baby bull-bashers for the Most Powerful Handgun title, and it has the drawback, in my eyes, of being a double-action gun.

About this time of year, John Linebaugh gets tired of winter on the Wyoming prairies and heads south to New Braunfels, issuing the call to his customers and friends from all over. We show up, the springs of our Suburbans and pickups sagging under the weight of guns and ammo for a long weekend of powder-burning.

Paper-punching is not on the agenda. We gather on Dietz' Metallic Silhouettes range, and you'd be surprised at how many steel rams get rung with pistol bullets at the standard silhouette competition range of 542 yards.

It's not all big handguns, though. Rifles of all descrip-



John Wootters photo

Note the fireball surrounding the muzzle of this Smith & Wesson .500 pistol, being fired at the "charging lion."

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tions (up to elephant size) are welcome, as are pocket pistols and even muzzleloaders. One of the features of the event is a setup for testing bullet penetration in saturated newsprint. Last year, my favorite African dangerous-game rifle, a .416 Taylor, drove a 400-grain "solid" bullet through 54 inches of soggy paper and 3/4-inch of plywood – and kept on going. I very casually blew a whiff smoke out of the muzzle and remarked to the guy standing behind me, waiting to shoot his .458 Winchester Magnum, "Now that's what a real big-game rifle will do!" In two years, no other cartridge has duplicated that penetration performance on Linebaugh's equipment.

What's the point of all this? Pure recreation and fellowship. Your typical hardcore anti-gunner who keeps muttering that guns are made only for killing people and all gun-owners are psychopaths and potential mass murderers would hardly

know what to make of several dozen friendly, mature grown men and women having a harmless good time with an incredible variety of firearms – and especially of the ingenuity displayed in dreaming up targets like the charging lion!

John Wootters is a semi-retired outdoors writer with more than 30 years experience. He was editor of Peterson's "Hunting" magazine and author of the monthly column "Buck Sense" and has written the all-time best selling book on deer hunting, "Hunting Trophy Deer." He has served on the Board of Directors of the National Rifle Association, and written for "Shooting Times," "Rifle," "Handloader," "Guns & Ammo" and Peterson's "Hunting."