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Below the Rough Rider is an out-of-production Colt Frontier .22 from the author's collection and, as you can see, they could be twin brothers. Unlike the Colt, the Heritage .32 Magnum has a steel frame.

GUN TEST

ROUGH RIDER .32

Often disregarded today, the .32 caliber handgun was once quite popular, especially from the period of the mid-1870s until the middle of the 20th century. Men such as outlaw Cole Younger or lawman Pat Garrett oftentimes had a .32 revolver tucked away as a hideout or backup gun. Cartridges like the .32 rimfires, .32 S&W, .32 Colt New Police, .32 S&W Long, and the .32-20 were chambered in revolvers that would easily fit in a vest pocket, all the way up to large holster guns like the Colt Single Action Army. A more modern cartridge, the .32 H&R Magnum came along in 1983 and all currently produced American .32 revolvers are so chambered. Now, at the turn of the 21st century, the .32 caliber handgun is making a small comeback and most of the credit for this goes to the popular sport we know as Cowboy Action Shooting (CAS).

I think there's little doubt that the .45 Colt and .38 Special "Rule the Roost" as far as CAS handgun calibers are concerned. However, the .32 Magnum fits in a certain niche and is just the ticket for young or recoil sensitive shooters,

and those who want rapid recoil recovery to shave every "nth" of a second they can off their time. The list of .32 SA revolvers has never been very long, but now there is a new addition from Heritage Manufacturing, makers of the budget-priced Rough Rider .22 single-action revolvers.

Gun Details

At the 2004 SHOT Show, I met with Heritage owners Jay Bernkrant and his wife, Maria Diaz, longtime friends of mine, and I brought up the subject of chambering the Rough Rider for the .32 Magnum. The Rough Rider is about the same size as the Ruger .22 Single Six and I felt that Heritage could definitely capture the title of

By Bill "LaVista" Bell

the most economical .32 Magnum SA on the market. I continued to bring up the subject of the .32 Magnum any time

I talked with them and, sure enough, when I went by the Heritage booth at the 2005 SHOT Show, there was a .32 Magnum on the top of their display case!

I took a look at it and told Jay, if this was a six-gun that LaVista had inspired, that I wanted something a little more eye-appealing than a matte blue finish and wood grips. My favorite finish that Heritage produces is their silver-gray satin, a polymer coating that is bonded to the metal and imparts the look of matte finished stainless steel. I thought this would be attractive and then Jay suggested their simulated mother-of-pearl grips. Well, my opinion on those runs about parallel to that of the late, great General George S. Patton, so I said, "How about ivory?" Just so happened the vendor Heritage uses for their grips was also at the SHOT Show, so we took a walk over to their booth and I pointed out some nice simulated ivory with Old West scrimshaw designs. Jay gave them a "thumbs-up" and advised he would ship me a couple of the new .32 Magnums in a few weeks following the SHOT Show.

About three weeks later, I received two small Heritage SAs and gazed approvingly at what has been dubbed the "LaVista Bill Special" Rough Rider. The first .32 Magnum six-shooter had a 4.75-inch barrel and the second one had a 6.5-inch barrel. There was my satin silver-gray finish on both guns, and the screws, loading gate, front sight, trigger, and a couple of other parts were done in matte black for an attractive contrast. The hammer was left in the white and polished on the sides, not "dished out" like on most current production



Heritage chambers their Rough Rider revolver in .32 MAG, making it the most economical centerfire SA on the market. The "LaVista Bill Special" has a silver-gray finish and simulated ivory grips.

Looks good, handles good, shoots good and priced right!

MAG DYNAMIC DUO

Rough Rider .32 MAG Dynamic Duo

Rough Rider revolvers, plus its cylinder was unfluted for added strength. What really set both guns off, however, were the simulated ivory, two-piece grips, one scrimshawed with the Mexican National Eagle, the other with a cowboy on a galloping "cayuse" his "hog-leg" in hand, a Cowboy Mounted Shooting style.

An examination of both guns revealed admirable standards of fit and finish by Heritage, who uses a lot of investment cast and CNC machine-made parts, most done at their factory outside of Miami, Florida. Metal-to-metal fit was good, as was the faux-ivory coating to metal fit, and the satin silver-gray polymer coating was well done too. For the "LaVista Bill Special" Heritage uses their 4140 steel frame, 1215 steel barrel and 12L14 steel cylinder. The grip frame/triggereguard unit and ejector rod housing are produced from a tough aluminum alloy. The barrel is machined

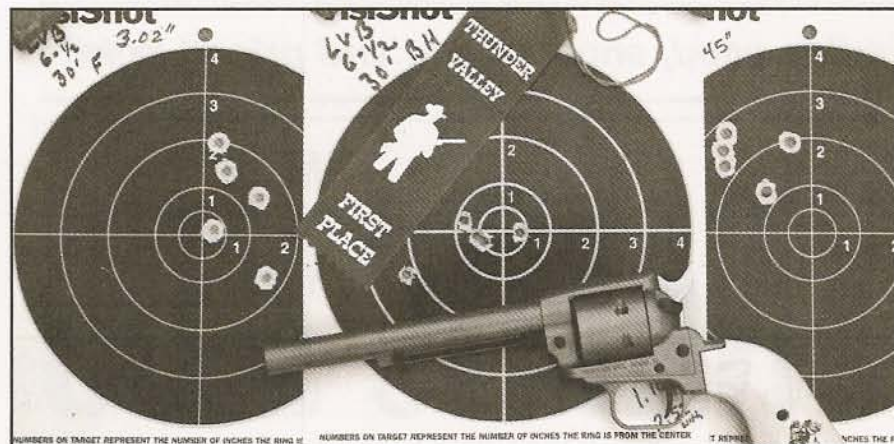


▲ The author used factory .32MAG loads from Black Hills and Federal during his T&E of the two Rough Rider revolvers, plus a .32 S&W Long handload, all using lead bullets from 90-115 grains.



▲ From a distance of 30 feet, the best 5-shot group from the 4.75" Rough Rider was produced using Black Hills Cowboy loads (center target). The best group with Federal cartridges and the author's handload are to the left and right.

▼ Black Hills also scored best with the 6.5" Heritage "LaVista Bill Special" and the sights were well centered with this load. Left and right again are the best groups with Federal ammo and the .32 Long handload.



Specifications Heritage LaVista Bill Special Rough Rider

Caliber: .32 Magnum, .32 Short/Long
Barrel: 3.5 inches, 4.75 inches, 6.5 inches
Weight: 35 ounces (6.5-inch barrel)
Grips: Simulated ivory, mother of pearl, wood
Sights: Fixed
Action: Single-action
Finish: Blue, satin
Safety: Manual hammer block
Capacity: 6-shot
Price: \$219 (blued), \$249 (silver-gray)

Performance
Heritage LaVista Bill Special Rough Rider .32

Load	4.75-inch Barrel			6.5-inch Barrel		
	Smallest	Largest	Average	Smallest	Largest	Average
.32 Magnum						
Black Hills 90 FPL	1.85	2.75	2.31	2.52	2.78	2.66
Federal 95 FPL	1.89	3.61	2.76	3.02	3.17	3.07
Handload .32 Long						
115 LSWC	2.15	2.33	2.23	1.47	3.33	2.36

Bullet weight measured in grains, accuracy in inches for three 5-shot groups from 30 feet in an indoor range off-hand.

like all good Single Action Shooting Society (SASS) competitors, leave an empty chamber under the hammer. There is a safety lever on the left side of the recoil shield, and in the engaged position it places a steel block between the hammer face and firing pin. When you open the loading gate, you will notice the rear of the cylinder is rebated like their rimfire cartridge models. I talked this over with Jay,

and Heritage will eliminate this feature in future production guns.

The 6.5-inch barrel "LaVista Bill" Rough Rider weighs in at 35 ounces, a couple of ounces less than the 4.75-inch barrel model. Both revolvers felt good in my medium-size hand with the shorter barrel model actually having a more "solid" feeling in my mitt, while I also liked the slightly muzzle-heavy balance of the 6.5-inch bar-

rel model. The black front sight blade is 0.13 of an inch in width with the typical "Colt Profile." The fixed rear sight is a simple square notch with a trough running the length of the top strap. They provide what one might call a "fine bead" like many handguns of the 19th century. I found that when the revolver is placed on "half-cock" and the loading gate opened the cylinder indexes in a positive manner when turned clockwise for loading or unloading. Another plus is the fact that these "mini centerfire single-

Shooting Impressions

actions" will fit in most holsters meant for reduced size .22 rimfire SAs.

For my shooting tests of the Heritage .32 Magnum revolvers, I went to the ammo closet and pulled out CAS loads from Black Hills, which have a 90-grain cast lead bullet with a rounded profile and flat



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Rough Rider .32 MAG Dynamic Duo

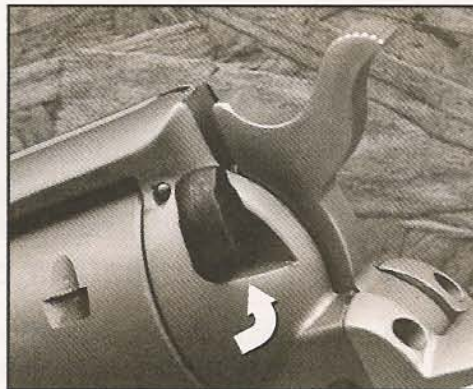
nose. I also included some Federal .32 Magnum cartridges that have a 95-grain bullet of essentially the same design as that of Black Hills, but at a higher velocity. I also included some .32 Long handloads I'd made up several months ago that consist of a 115-grain lead SWC, over a moderate charge of Bull's-eye powder and a CCI small pistol primer. A couple of boxes of each cartridge were thrown in my shooting bag and I headed off to an indoor range in Indianapolis to punch some paper and see where the sights were.

I tucked a pair of new Pro Aim shooting gloves from L&R Engineering into my shooting bag. They have a unique molded polyurethane brace running from the wrist area forward to the heel of the hand, acting almost like a "bench rest" for off-hand shooting. I have the Model 1002 "3/4 Finger" that leaves the trigger finder and thumb mostly exposed. A Velcro-fitted strap allows you to tighten the glove however you like to your wrist, and I can tell you it works. Using VisiShot targets sent down to a distance of 30 feet, I was able to shoot some surprisingly good groups, using a two-handed hold and a "turret" stance. Those "fine" sights, as I mentioned earlier, were a little hard on my 50-plus-years eyes, but I managed to keep all my shots in the black and pretty well centered.

These little guns will shoot! I had a little trouble with the "4+1 Syndrome" that expanded what would have been some really tight groups, but overall most were very good. My best group with the 6.5-inch Rough Rider would have measured 1.18 inches with Black Hills cartridges, until a flyer opened it up to 2.52 inches and the same thing happened to the 4.75-inch model with Black Hills CAS ammo. A nice 1.18-inch 4-shot cluster opened up to 1.85 inches, and this happened several times with Federal cartridges and my handloads. The Black Hills CAS loads shot to point-of-aim in both guns, while the Federal ammo and handloads wanted to shoot a little high and left. Everything, however, easily stayed in the black.

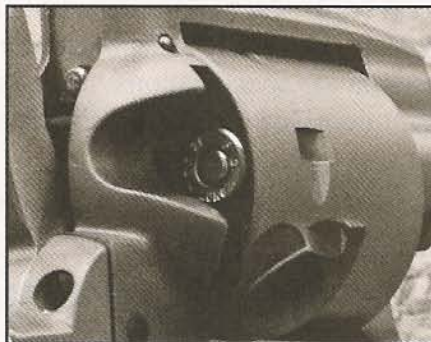
The next day, I awoke bright and early, and drove down to the first CAS match of the 2005 season at Thunder Valley, near Campbellsburg, in Southern Indiana. It was chilly and the early March wind was howling, but a number of brave Cowboys and Cowgirls showed up to lighten their load of ammunition they had been storing up all winter. This was a "fun shoot" and we played with .22 rimfires, derringers, pocket pistols and long-range rifles in side matches, then got down to business with five main match stages. I used the

Cowgirl "Rio O'Rorke" really liked the moderate weight of the Heritage Rough Rider and the light recoil afforded by the Black Hills Cowboy loads. This should prove to be a great handgun for beginners or smaller shooters.



▲ *A unique feature of the Heritage Rough Riders is the manual hammer block safety, the lever of which is located on the left recoil shield. When activated you can safely carry all 6-cylinder chambers loaded.*

▼ *With the loading gate open you can see the rear of the rebated cylinder.*

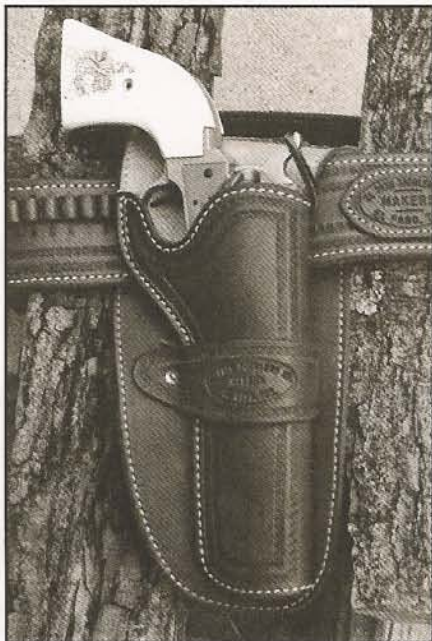


"LaVista Bill Specials" on each stage, firing a total of 50 shots, with only one miss. The sights didn't pose any problems when shooting at steel and the little guns were a delight to shoot, allowing a fast recovery between shots. I was shooting "49er" class and shooting in a "Traditional" mode, cocking the six-guns with the support hand thumb. There were no malfunctions all day, and I even came away with a blue ribbon.

Loading and unloading with the diminutive .32 Magnum and .32 Long cartridges took some getting used to for this .357 Magnum and .45 Colt fan. One of my digits would often hit the open loading gate of the Rough Rider and it would instantly close. This minor annoyance occurred several times and perhaps a stronger spring to keep it open is warranted. The deep serrations on the hammer spur made for positive cocking and I like the smooth, rounded, quarter-inch-wide trigger. There's also plenty of room in the triggerguard for gloved hands. The grips are well shaped and give you plenty to hang on to.

Final Notes

If you get the impression that I like the new .32 Magnum Rough Riders you'd be right. My "LaVista Bill Specials" looks good, handles good, shoots good and are the most economical centerfire



▲ The 4.75" Heritagé .32 Magnum Rough Rider fits handily in this El Paso Saddlery holster that the author had made up several years ago for one of his favorite .22 rimfire SAs.

SA revolvers you'll find anywhere. Ask for them at your local gun shop. For you "dyed in the wool" .45 Colt fans, Heritagé is busy at work on a SA in that venerable cartridge. You'll see its review first in GOW!

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