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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2019

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SUBLIME .44 SPECIAL/ .357 MAGNUMS



ROY HUNTINGTON

**PHOTOS: ROB JONES/
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I've known Marc Morganti, founder of this one-man show called Gemini Customs, for almost 20 years. After nearly two decades of association you learn much about a man's character. To me consistency is a benchmark. How someone acts and reacts tells you what to expect down the road. Predictability means reliability — begetting trustworthiness, steadiness and more.

Conduct at both ends of the drama spectrum may be good for spectacle-laced “unreality” TV shows. But in the real world the ability to count on someone is what's most important. At least to me. Marc has proven to me time

and time again to be kind, thoughtful, patient, positive and meticulous; having a genuine drive — and passion — for excellence. His shop is a textbook example of what a custom pistolsmith's dream shop might look like. Except his is real — and he maintains it that way.

In anyone's book, Marc is the sort of fellow you'd want to create a custom gun project for you. When you place your dreams in someone else's

hands, the word “reliable” suddenly carries significant weight.

I chatted at length with Marc over almost a year as we built toward this finished project — four remarkable Rugers. One of the things — actually one of many things — leaving an impression on me was when Marc said this:

“Every gun we build and send out is akin to sending your children into the world to contribute in a positive

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**.44 SPECIAL/
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Exotic wood revolver grips are handcrafted by Marc — something rare in any custom shop!



manner. Like the old saying goes, ‘Seek perfection — but demand excellence.’”

That is possibly at the core of what you get when you deal with Gemini Customs. This way of thinking is the mechanism making you confident your investment in time and energy and money is in good hands — the right hands. Simply put, Marc will not allow

something out of his shop which isn’t the very best he can make it.

Period.

Experience

Marc hung his shingle, as it were, in 1997 and has been at it full-time ever since. He’s been well known for “best quality” 1911 work and has appeared

in our pages before (“Practical Art from Gemini Customs,” Sept/Oct 2006), but decided to concentrate on revolver work some years ago. Now, concentrating on S&W and Ruger revolvers, Marc has developed a following of hard-core revolver devotees who appreciate and celebrate Marc’s distinctive take on what a custom



.44 SPECIAL/.357 MAGNUMS GEMINI CUSTOMS



revolver might, should — and can be.

By concentrating on a handful of models Marc has been able to develop a list of custom touches, even major re-builds, specific to both Rugers and S&W round guns. The more you do something the better you get at it, and the guns in front of you represent an apex of one man's thoughts on what a Ruger revolver can aspire to become.

True Custom

If you've never had a custom gun built, it might be intimidating, but it needn't be. Find a gunsmith you can trust. Look at their website to see what's offered. In Marc's case, the Gemini Customs website has some history, photos of completed projects, descriptions of work he can perform and outlines of "packages" for different models. These are sets of custom touches you can have done to your gun or to one Marc supplies. It's a great way to become familiar with the different options a gunsmith offers.

Guns can be used with or without clips.

But here's where it gets fun. Since this is custom work, you can usually pick and choose what you want done to your particular gun. Some mods can only be done to certain models, but the majority of custom features can be worked into most.

The .44 Special

If there could be such a thing as a "typical" custom package, the .44 Special here might be a good place to start. Marc machines off the Ruger barrel "warning" mark, skeletonizes the trigger guard, finish reams and hones the chambers, creates the V8 Hybra-Port porting, crowns the muzzle at 11 degrees, hones the forcing cone, faces and bevels the throat, installs Bowen

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GEMINI CUSTOMS

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adjustable sights and Tritium front (with custom machining done), polishes the cylinder, soft glass beads and does a hard chrome finish (Cobrachrome by Tripp Research). The barrel length is 3" and is a nice balance between concealability and shooting comfort.

Marc then custom crafts grips (in this case, Golden Desert Ironwood) in-house, fitting and bedding them to the gun. No other custom gunsmith makes this sort of high quality grip in-house.

But keep in mind, this is the work done on *this* particular revolver and you could have something different on yours. Your imagination and Marc's skills set both the tone and the limits.

SP101

The elegant "little" SP101 is, like the .44 Special, a "Pro Grade" custom gun from Marc's shop. In addition to many of the features listed for the .44, the SP101 has a fixed rear Novak and custom machined front sight (both with Tritium inserts), polished cylinder face (makes cleaning easier and looks snappy) and a moon clip conversion.

Those eye-popping grips are also Desert Ironwood done by Marc. You really do need to feel the grips to appreciate them. They are simply a perfect fit to the gun, with a seamless feel to the joints, and the "reverse" taper sits effortlessly in the hand.

Full power .357 loads are a piece of cake to shoot due to the smooth action and skillfully crafted grips. The barrel on the SP101 is 2.25" and contributes to the satisfying feel in your shooting hand.

GP100

Cast your eyes on the GP100 with flutes and unpolished cylinder with fixed sights. To call it a "basic" package is to understate things here. Most of the mentioned mods are done on this gun, along with the Novak fixed rear and the custom machined front — both are Tritium, of course. The grips are yet another example of Marc's in-shop work and showcase fancy Cocobolo, fitted and bedded to this particular gun.

The GP has been modified to use moon clips, but like the other .357/.38's here, can be fired just fine without clips too. Note the polished "bits" here and there. I should note, trigger pulls on all the guns averaged about 2.5-2.7 lbs. single action. Marc advertises about 10-11 lbs. DA, but according to my Wheeler electronic gauge these were more in the 8- to 9-lb. range and exceptionally smooth. It takes talent to get a DA pull down to this weight range and still be reliable.

When I first tried the DA triggers I guessed in that lighter range so was surprised to see the higher number in Marc's paperwork. I think this may be a case of promise one thing but deliver more than you promise! For reference, a stock GP100 I had showed 11.5 lbs. of sorta' gritty DA and 4.75 lbs. SA with plenty of creep.

Gold Standard

The "gold" gun is a stand-out. Also a GP100, Marc calls this a "Master-grade" gun, complete with 500-grit polish prior to the Cobrachrome finish — and it shows. Marc applies the real gold highlights in-shop and while not something I usually go for, I confess this gun really grew on all of us here at *Handgunner*, including Rob Jones, our ace photographer. The gold is comparable to what Elmer Keith said about ivory grips, "Like a bit of lipstick on a pretty gal." Indeed.

The guns in front of you represent an apex of one man's thoughts on what a Ruger revolver can aspire to become.

As is the case with the other guns, the Gold Model (my name) has virtually all of the custom features Marc offers. Note the custom ejector serrations at the tip of the ejector rod, and Bowen adjustable rear and custom machined gold dot front. You can draw the line wherever you like on your own project, and the line can go on and on and on.

In the grip department, Marc crafted a superb Macassar Ebony symphony here, fitted and bedded to this particular gun, then applied a hand-rubbed oil finish. You literally can't feel the seam where the grips join at the front and back. Cut for moon clips, I found shooting the brawny Ruger with full power .357 loads to be an experience in trepidation as your finger presses the trigger — followed by a grin and a need to do it again. And again, and again.

Options

Lest you run out of ideas, Marc also offers jewelry (triggers and hammers, for instance), slab-sided barrel work, de-horning, Weigand sights, bluing, bobbed hammers, action work and, being a custom shop, likely other things you might think up. You just need to ask.

Let's talk grips for a moment. In 2009 Marc approached Jim Badger of Badger Custom Grips — who had been supplying Marc with grips — to

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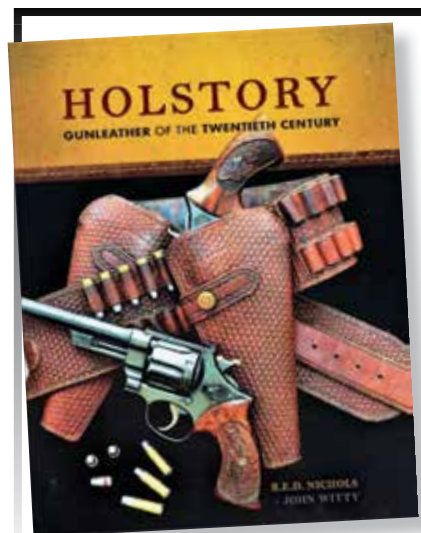


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make custom exotic wood grips for Marc's build. Jim begged off due to allergies, but sold Marc and his shopmate wife, Karen, an old 1950's Vintage, French Script machine tool Jim had used back in the beginnings of his own gripmaking business. Since then, Marc and Karen learned how to do the grips themselves and now, 10 years later, have no peers in making this sort of thing. Simply mind-blowing work at every level!

The hard chrome Marc uses happens because of his 20-year friendship with Virgil Tripp of Tripp Research. Justly famous for his superior 1911 magazines, Virgil is also a bit of a mad scientist when it comes to the hard chrome process. While not offering it to the general public, Virgil does do it for Marc and his "best quality" custom guns. So, the moral is if you want this impressive finish, there's only one way to get it — Gemini Customs!

Shooting Impressions

Yeah, I shot 'em. I even apologized to Marc for how much I shot 'em. I'm thinking, when the dust settled, I had about 200 rounds through the .44 Special, and another 275 or so spread between the three .357's. I simply couldn't help myself, they were so smooth. I had forgotten how the muscular Rugers tame .357 recoil, and turn any .38 Special load into a smile-a-shot experience.

I honestly hate to use this word, but "astonishing" is the only way to describe the DA actions on all of the guns. Normally Ruger DA revolvers are a bit — let's just say it here — lumpy, when you press the trigger in DA mode. "Take-up, creep, tug, pull, grind a tiny bit, clunk, tick then bang."

With Marc's guns, it's one long smooth journey with very tiny — but smooth — reminders of the steps. Other than trying the SA on each with the trigger pull gauge, I did all the shooting DA. When you get yours, I promise you'll want to walk up to strangers at the local range and say, "Hey, you really do need to try this DA trigger pull. No, really. Honest. Try it." Then you'll stand, arms folded, grinning in anticipation.

Some Specifics

I shot a bunch of factory loads, from Black Hills, Federal, Buffalo Bore, SIG, Winchester and a couple of others. Everything ran fine. The .44 Black Hills HoneyBadger (125-gr. solid copper fluted) ran 1,055 fps from that 3" barrel, their Cowboy Load (a 210 lead) did 680 fps and the Buffalo Bore "Manstopper" (a 200-gr. hard cast full wadcutter) clocked at 980 fps.

Groups at 25 yards hovered in the 1.5" to 2" range — with a memorable solid 1" once with five rounds of BH

cowboy ammo! The bold sights and great triggers really helped. Like any big bore revolver, this gun shot like hells-afire, only better. None of the loads were the least bit troublesome to shoot and even the hot HoneyBadger and Buffalo Bore were easy-peasy on the hands.

The two GP100 models conducted themselves as gentlemen. And like any gentleman were courteous, placing all their rounds in 2" or so at the same 25 yards. We chased 1.75" a time or three and with better eyes I'm thinking we could have done better. The ammo was a line-up from the same makers so we were shooting good quality loads, in top quality guns — and it showed.


The svelte SP101 could actually be a daily carry holster gun. If your pockets are big enough, it can also live in a pocket holster. Being heavier and a bit bigger than a J-Frame does lend a hand in shootability. It "feels" like a bigger revolver than it is, translating agreeably into handling recoil more easily and offering more reliable gun-handling. A bit of heft makes it easier to hold onto.

Firing some "Fire and Brimstone" .357 loads (even a 180 hunting load) was actually fun — once I doubled up on soft plugs and muffs. Velocities in the rarified air of 1,200 fps and a bit higher were stumbled upon, but the V8 Hybra-Ports do their work and I was impressed with how they modified muzzle flip and recoil impulse in general. But, they can be a bit flamboyant, if you get my drift.

Do You Need One?

Only you can know that, eh? But I've often told people to sell some of their "commodity" guns — how many polymer guns do you *really* need? — and buy one really "good" fun gun. Pull out the stops and get something you never thought you'd have. And make sure you engage the right person to help you with your dream, whatever it might be.

"These projects are more than just a service," Marc told me. "It's personal in nature when you build for a client. The guns I sent you are the guns I'd build for my parents if they were still alive."

That should tell you something about Marc — and something  about these guns.

For more info: Gemini Customs, www.gemicustoms.com, Ph: (502) 226-1230; BMT Equipped Inc. (moonclip), www.bmtequipped.com; Del Fatti Leather (holster), www.delfatti.com, Ph: (715) 267-6420

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