

Effects of Cast Bullets on Game

by Jim Taylor

While I cannot claim to be an authority on the subject (and there are those who can such as J.D. Jones, Doc "The Hit Man" Rogers, and others) I feel I can still speak to the subject having dropped a fair number of game with cast bullets from a handgun. I have nowhere near the experience of the two listed above or of many others. Yet from what I have seen and done I have formed some conclusions about cast bullets and game animals.

1. The game will probably not react to being shot like you figured it will.
2. With sixguns there is no magic bullet. Good bullet placement is what counts.
3. With sixguns, higher velocity only flattens your trajectory a little. It does not increase the "killing power".
4. Not only learn to shoot well enough to put the bullet where it should go, but learn to hunt well enough in order to get close enough so you can do that cleanly and efficiently.

Example #1 - .454 Casull & 260 gr. Keith #4554424

Using a 7 1/2" .454 Casull loaded with the Keith #454424 260 gr. SWC cast hard and loaded over 29 gr. H-110 (velocity = 1530 fps) I shot a young 2-point Mule Deer at about 75 yards. The shot was broadside into his left side. I aimed for just behind the shoulder. At the shot the deer flinched, looked around, then walked slowly away. I was getting ready to shoot again when I noticed it was wobbling. It walked about 60 feet, laid down under a mesquite tree, and in few moments its head fell over.

Upon examination the bullet had gone where I aimed. It got both lungs and the liver, coming in slightly from the rear. The entrance and exit wounds were both clean. Damage internally was about what I had seen from a rifle at 150 yards. This seems to be fairly typical of cast bullets. Not too much reaction unless you hit a major nerve center.

Example #2 - .45 Ruger & 260 gr. Keith #454424

I shot a Coues Whitetail buck from about 80 yards using the above gun and bullet. The load was 23 gr. WW-296. The shot was just at twilight. The deer did not seem to move at the shot. I waited for about 5 minutes but it was still staring at me. I got up and moved toward it and it did not move. The shot had taken it in the left front shoulder and exited the right rear ham. Full-length penetration. The deer had just sunk down on its "haunches" and sat there looking at me.

These are small deer typically dressing out less than 100 pounds. They are Whitetail though and tough to stop. However a full-length body shot seems to be a fairly instant stopper, what few I have seen.

Example #3 - .45 Ruger & 305 gr. #454629GC

Another Coues buck, this time shot with the 305 gr. bullet loaded over 23 gr. WW-296. The shot was about 20 feet and the hit was almost perfectly crossways through both shoulders. Later examination proved the heart had the top taken off. At the shot the deer whirled and ran as if I had missed. I found it down the trail about 50 yards completely bled out.

Again this seems typical. If they do not drop at the shot there usually is a short mad run. If the bullet is in the correct place that is. They will often break out running as if the shot missed. I have never had one go more than 50 yards.

Example #4 - .454 Casull & BRP 305 gr.

Using Roger Barnes' excellent improvement of #454629GC I shot a Corsican Ram with the .454 Casull. The slug was loaded over top of 31 gr. H-110. (1700+ fps) The shot was right at 95 yards. The ram was feeding, facing away from me. I shot it up through the left rear ham. The bullet broke the rear leg, went up through the stomach, took out a bunch of ribs, and up into the spine. It traveled down the spine quite a ways and ended up in the rams neck from whence I recovered it. At the shot the ram nosed over into the dirt and did not even kick. A full-length body shot that penetrated at least 17" of bone.

Example #5 - .45 Dakota & SSK 270-451

I shot a Corsican Ram using my 4 3/4" Dakota. The first shot was too far back and too high and it took off. It ran about 30 yards and laid down. From about 50 yards I fired and missed. It jumped up and I shot again. The slug took it in the left front quarter angling back toward the right rear quarter. It dropped immediately. The powder charge under the 270 gr. slug was 18.5 gr. 2400. My Dad was standing about 20 yards off to the side of the Ram when I hit it. He said the sound of the slug smacking it sounded like a baseball being hit by a bat.

Example #6 - 45 Ruger & #457191

I shot a large Javelina sow at about 30 yards with this gun and bullet. The load was my favorite - 18.5 gr. 2400. I hit the sow broadside and she commenced to back up, shaking her head, until she fell. After I cleaned her I was looking around and in the grass discovered a dead Javelina boar. The heavy slug had gone through the sow, then full-length through the boar. The slug had gone in his chest and out the left rear ham. The sow did not drop immediately but the boar did. When using heavy bullets realize- they do penetrate!

Finally

The 240 - 250 gr. bullets in the .44 Magnum will cleanly take anything in North America if the hunter does his part. I have an old letter in my files from Elmer Keith. He told me of a man he knew who killed 8 black bears with the .44 Magnum using the Keith #429421 SWC over 22 gr. 2400. All were broadside shots. All were one-shot kills. All exited the far side.

In the .45 Ruger sixguns the 260 gr. Keith #454424 with the proper loads will do the same. These bullets in these guns can be used safely and efficiently and you can trust them to do the job.

300 gr. or 305 gr. bullets in either caliber also work extremely well. They are usually very accurate, which is one reason I prefer them. On most game in this country the power level they provide is not needed. But the accuracy sure is nice. And if you happen to have to make that long raking shot from off to one side, they will do it.

PS - there ain't no such critter as a "brush busting" bullet or caliber - so make sure your shots are in the clear. That goes for rifles too.