

Sevilles & El Dorados - The History of United Sporting Arms Inc.

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ORIGINS

Over the past forty to fifty years, many gun manufacturers have offered Blackhawk/New Frontier style single-action revolvers; companies such as Herters, Hawes, North American Arms, Interarms Virginian Dragoon, Mossberg, etc. Most, if not all, were built to handle more modern chamberings such as the .44 Magnum and were priced to compete with the Ruger line. One of my favorites was the Seville & El Dorado series of single-actions as produced by United Sporting Arms and El Dorado Arms of New York and Arizona. As fine as these pistols were, little has been written about them and they're not often seen in the used market. To this point, the only source of information is J.C. Munnell's article from the Standard Catalog of Firearms (Mr. Munnell was once a part owner of United Sporting Arms and was kind enough to provide me with some history of these handguns).

The original Seville style revolver started as the "Abilene" and was designed by Forrest Smith and Sig Himmelmann. Their goal was simply to create a revolver that blended the lines of a Colt New Frontier with the strength and functionality of a Ruger Blackhawk (included below is a photo of the original un-blued prototype). In doing so, they founded the United States Arms Corporation of Riverhead, New York in 1972. Production lasted for a few years, and though the quality of the Abilene was outstanding, it was too small an entity

to gain widespread distribution. Around that same time Mossberg & Sons Inc. was interested in marketing a single-action so they purchased U.S. Arms in 1979. Operations quickly moved from Riverhead to the North Haven plant with little change to the gun itself. Though Riverhead is where the Abilene was born, the Seville came to be in Hauppauge, New York.

U.S. ARMS – RIVERHEAD, NEW YORK

By 1972 Sig Himmelmann and Forrest Smith had a working Abilene. The next step was to go into production, though it would take both of their backgrounds to make it work. Building the gun from scratch was only the first step. Now they had to build a manufacturing company around the gun.

Forrest Smith was a retired aircraft engineer, having worked for companies such as Northrop Grumman and Fairchild. During his time in the aeronautical business he was involved with the development of such classics as the F-14 and F-111. Sig Himmelmann had considerable knowledge of guns, having produced small 22 caliber revolvers in the 1960's. After the Gun Control Act of 1968, increased regulation prompted Sig to take a break from the firearms business. Coupling his skill as a machinist with Forrest's knowledge of engineering later spawned the Abilene. Sounds simple, doesn't it? Well, it wasn't. Remember, they built the Abilene prototype long before CNC machinery and computer design software. Sig spent hours on a Bridgeport to cut the moulds. Parts were made from scratch and trial and error must have been used to figure out what worked best. The end result however was a single-action that rivaled, if not exceeded, the fit and finish of their Ruger and Colt counterparts.

Forrest and Sig produced the Abilene for the next year out of Riverhead. The predominant chamberings were 357 and 44 Magnum, though 45 Colt and 41 Magnum were cataloged. I know 45 Colts were produced in limited numbers, but to the best of my knowledge, the 41 Magnum never materialized. Nickel plating was another option that never made it to production because all of the early Abilenes were blued. What is interesting is the U.S. Arms pricelist from 1973 noted stainless Abilenes would soon be available. None were ever built, but this may have laid the groundwork for the El Dorado which would follow.

My U.S. Arms 1973 dealer sheet shows the Abilene was priced to compete with the Ruger Blackhawk. The standard model was in 357 & 41 Magnum and 45 Colt retailed for \$149.95. Nickel finish raised the price to \$154.95 and barrel lengths were 4 5/8", 5 1/2", and 6 1/2". A 357 Magnum/9mm

convertible was offered in blue and nickel, retail prices being \$164.40 and \$169.50 respectively. The .44 Magnum Abilene could also be ordered in blue or nickel but the only available barrel length was 7 ½". Retail price was \$168.25 with nickel costing \$5 more.

While in Riverhead, Forrest and Sig met Fred Kart of Kart Arms. Fred was a long-time 45 ACP shooter at Camp Perry and sought a cheap alternative to hardball ammunition. His answer was a .22 LR slide conversion for the Model 1911. This wasn't the first attempt at a full-size Colt rimfire auto. Colt themselves released the Ace model back in 1931, but it was functionally unsound. The modest recoil of the 22 and the added weight of the conversion couldn't reliably cycle the slide. The "straight-Ace" was dropped and is now a big time collector piece. A few years later, David Marsh Williams converted the Ace to a floating chamber. The new design increased the recoil impulse enough to work the slide. Coined the Service Model Ace in 1935, it gave shooter a low cost way to practice with their 1911s. Sadly, the Service Model Ace was terribly inaccurate. Enter Fred Kart with the Kart conversion in the 1970s. Like the Ace, his part was a slide kit that fit the standard 1911. Unlike the Service Model Ace, the Kart version yielded tack-driving accuracy. Fred's only problem was production capability, or lack thereof. U.S. Arms was the answer and soon Sig Himmelman would mill the casting moulds for the slide. Previously, Fred had machined the part in his garage using square bar stock. I have a Kart Conversion ad from 1973 that's stamped with "by U.S. Arms Corp. Riverhead, New York". The unit retailed for \$165 and was advertised as follows:

"The KART conversion unit is designed to interchange with the 45 or 38 caliber slide assembly on the Colt system receiver. The change from one caliber to another can be done in approximately 30 seconds with only a medium size screwdriver. A patented barrel locking system locks the barrel assembly securely to the uppermost surface of the receiver. The sight assembly is fastened directly to the barrel, assuring consistent relationship at all times".

The Abilene was a top notch single-action, but financing the start-up business was tough. To remain solvent, U.S. Arms was backed by a Riverhead lawyer named Irving Kahn. His son Harvey, also an attorney, is sometimes credited with co-creating the Abilene. Neither Harvey nor his father was involved in the design of the original U.S. Arms model; they only financed the business. By late 1974, Forrest and Sig split from U.S. Arms to form United Sporting Arms Incorporated. The new operation brought forth the Seville, which was a direct descendent of the Abilene. Shortly after Forrest and Sig departed U.S. Arms, Irving died and Harvey took over the Riverhead plant. With some

tooling and employees left over from the original company, Harvey kept producing Riverhead Abilenes. He wasn't a gunsmith or a machinist, so he relied heavily on the remaining employees of U.S. Arms.

A.I.G./MOSSBERG ABILENE

By the late 1970s, A.I.G Mossberg bought the rights to the U.S. Arms Abilene and distributed the model from 1980 to 1983. Mossberg didn't produce the parts, but instead assembled Abilenes from leftover U.S. Arms stock. Once the supply was used up, Abilenes vanished.

There are a handful of Mossberg variants, but most were 357 and 44 Magnums. A few hundred .45 Colt Abilenes were produced with 6 inch barrels, but they're rare. Two finishes were offered to include bright blue and a magnaloy brushed chrome; the latter has caused many to believe that stainless steel Abilenes exist, but this isn't the case. Another distinct feature was a basepin screw that locked from the front of the frame. Again, Sig and Forrest's Abilene used a spring loaded side latch, similar to those found on Rugers.

The .357s and .44s came through with 4 5/8", 6", and 7 1/2" tubes and retailed for around \$300.00. A less common model was the silhouette version of the .44 Magnum which was outfitted with a 10" barrel. These also were upgraded to include an Elliason adjustable rear sight, Partridge style front blade, finger-groove grips, and a list price of \$375.00. As for being collectable, there doesn't seem to be much demand for the Abilene. In fact, I've encountered many excellent .44 Magnums that sell in the \$250 - \$350 range. Factors that do increase their value include: 1) Silhouette models of the .44 Mag, 2) Magnaloy finished guns, and 3) Factory wood presentation cases which were originally a \$125.00 option [1].

Unlike the early Abilenes, the Mossberg version used an anvil-link safety. While it blocked the firing-pin like the traditional transfer bar, the mechanics were different (note: Ruger sued the original U.S. Arms Co. over the use of the transfer bar; more on this later).

UNITED SPORTING ARMS – HAUPPAUGE, NY

The Seville and El Dorado's history is much more intricate. As noted, these models were offshoots of the first United States Arms company, which underwent an ownership split in 1974. While U.S. Arms of Riverhead produced the Abilene from 1974 – 1979, Forrest Smith and Sig Himmelmann moved to Hauppauge, New York.

Forrest had previously worked with Pete Piffath of Hydrodyne Industries in Hauppauge. Hydrodyne was a defense contracting company that produced tank parts at 35 Gilpin Avenue in Hauppauge. Around 1974, Pete allowed Forrest and Sig to use some 6,000 square feet of empty space in the back of the facility. Pete also gave them access to unused equipment which included Bridgeports, drill presses, and horizontal mills.

One day in 1974, Sig's son John was riding his dirt bike around the Hauppauge plant when a Hydrodyne employee, Frank Vanadia, asked who he is. Before long, John was making \$2.50 an hour machining parts for hydraulic tank pistons. Not a bad job for a twelve year old. This was a significant hire though because it put John close to the operation. Thanks to his firsthand knowledge, John has provided a lot of detail surrounding the early days of the United Sporting Arms. He also has 8x10 pictures of the Abilene prototype from '72 (see photos section). Though it appears to be stainless, the first Abilene was photographed while still in the white and closely resembles what would become the Seville and El Dorado line. Unlike later Abilenes, the prototype used a standard cross-latch to lock the basepin. The hammer was also pure Seville, as opposed to the somewhat shorter version found on post-1974 Abilenes. Another major difference was the use of a transfer bar; Mossberg Abilenes eventually adopted the anvil-link safety system.

Around the time United Sporting Arms was formed, Don Mitchell of the Gamitch Corporation started distributing Sevilles and bought into the company. Gamitch was owned by Don and his wife Gail, hence the name "Gamitch"; they later went on to form Mitchell Arms. New York records show that United Sporting Arms wasn't officially incorporated until July of 1976. Then in 1978 Russell Wood bought into United Sporting Arms and had an immediate impact. Not only did he provide key financial backing, but like Forrest and Sig he was committed to total quality. Russell previously worked in his family's marine salvage business, as well as building audio speaker systems for major rock acts like Led Zeppelin. Though these ventures weren't gun related, Russell had a strong business sense and this boded well for the young company.

By 1975 United Sporting Arms was working on a firearms first, namely an all stainless 44 Magnum revolver. Many, including folks at Ruger, didn't believe stainless would provide sufficient tensile strength for the high pressure round. Fortunately, Forrest Smith drew upon his aeronautical

background and went with 17-4 PH stainless (17-4 was first used in aircraft engineering). 17-4 series is machineable like 410 or 416, but it provides higher tensile strength when heat-treated to around Rockwell 40. In 1976 United Sporting Arms completed the first stainless 44 Magnum revolver and called it the El Dorado. As with the previous two models, the El Dorado was named after an Old West, Texas town. It would be another two years before Smith & Wesson unveiled the 629, three before Ruger released the Redhawk, six until the stainless Super Blackhawk, and seven before Freedoms Arms offered the all 17-4 Model 83.

The first United Sporting Arms advertisement contained a 9 ½" stainless El Dorado in 44 Magnum and a 6 ½" 45 Colt Seville with stag grips. The serial numbers were 44-00001 and 45-00002 respectively. Both of these prototypes were later given to John Himmelmann by Sig for safe keeping and to this day they remain in like new condition. Now this is where things get a little confusing. John remembers the ad being from late 1974 or early 1975, yet the El Dorado is in stainless. Some believe the first stainless model didn't come along until 1976 or 1977, but this suggests it may have been earlier. Regardless of the year, the El Dorado was still the first stainless 44 Magnum revolver.

As with the 1973 U.S. Arms catalog, the Seville and El Dorado were offered in 357 Magnum, 357/9mm convertible, 41 Magnum, and 44 Magnum. New to the line-up was a 45 Colt/45 ACP convertible in standard barrel lengths. Unlike the smooth walnut stocks for the 357s, 41s, and 45s, the 44 Magnum was originally fit with oversized grips with diamond checkering. From the catalog:

"All models are designed so that many special grips available from gun shops – such as the staghorn illustrated in the front photo – can be substituted without alteration".

Obviously this is referring to the use of the Ruger Super Blackhawk grip pattern. While early guns came with Herrett style stocks, most 44 Magnums eventually got the smooth walnut treatment.

The Abilene was built to compete against Ruger on both price and function. Inevitably, the Seville and El Dorado would go head-to-head with the Blackhawk, but these models were really marketed as higher grade single-actions. Advertising from around 1976 illustrates how they were promoted:

"A new family of single action hand guns created to capture the spirit of the Old West. Each of these outstanding revolvers is a he-man sized weapon, accurate enough for target shooting with power to drop even the largest game. Designed for the active sportsman and the collector, each is a virtual look-alike to its frontier counterpart. Crafted in modern materials, they retain the traditional half-cock position for loading and

incorporate a modern transfer bar which prevents the hammer from striking the firing pin unless the trigger is depressed. EVERY GUN IS COMPLETELY AMERICAN MADE. All guns in the United Sporting Arms' lines incorporate features which make them equally attractive to the gun fancier who will use them for hunting, on the pistol range or who may value them primarily as a distinguished addition to his handgun collection. Accuracy is unsurpassed among comparable handguns. 8 groove rifling, one turn in 15 inches; fine honed barrel for smoothest lands and grooves, precise line-up of cylinders and barrel"

One neat aspect of Seviles and El Dorados is the hammer and trigger screws don't go completely through the frame. This blind approach leaves the right side of the gun open for engraving. As we'll see on future models, this area was often used for logos and custom engraving.

WESTWARD BOUND

A second assembly facility was established in Tombstone, Arizona, circa 1979. I later found out that this was not a coordinated move. Apparently, Sig Himmelmann wanted to transfer the operation to Tombstone because the town was synonymous with the "Old West". This decision was partially made under the recommendation of gun writer Donald Shumar. Forrest Smith and Russell Wood stayed in the east producing the guns out of Hauppauge. Early Tombstone guns were built using existing frames and some parts that were manufactured in New York and shipped to Arizona in plastic bags. Once out West, they were blued, assembled, tuned, and distributed. Thus, the Tombstone guns are somewhat hard to distinguish from the east coast models in that the frames were still manufactured in New York ("Hauppauge, NY" was engraved on the frame). Fortunately, the Arizona guns did have a "T" on the end of the serial code, which stood for "Tombstone"; as far as I know, this is the only way to determine where these early guns were assembled.

Sig Himmelmann's son recently told me that the Tombstone facility was really nothing more than a small metal shed. When his father resurveyed the facilities, he decided to move the again, this time to the old mining town of Bisbee, AZ. Going on the assurance of local bankers who sought to attract new business, Sig relocated to Bisbee where less than 200 guns were assembled; these frames were marked "Bisbee, AZ". Much of the Bisbee appeal was the lure of expansion money, floor space, and training programs. When none of this

materialized, the interest moved again, this time to Tucson. This third move occurred in 1980, and by now Forrest and Russell had formed El Dorado Arms back in Hauppauge. With moulds and production capability in both Hauppauge and Tucson, the company formally split into El Dorado Arms of NY and Sporting Arms, Inc. of AZ. One last thing to note about the dual assembly/production sites was that stainless Seviles were never built in Tombstone and Bisbee. The New York plant continued to produce the stainless El Dorado, but no frames were ever shipped to Arizona. A "Silver Seville" model was a Tombstone variant, but it was merely a blued gun fit with a stainless backstrap. Interestingly enough, this model was not planned, but instead came to be when Sig Himmelman temporarily ran out of blued gripframes. In order to finish the guns that were partially assembled, he used the stainless backstraps that were on hand. Regardless of how they were devised, the Silver Seville was a beautiful single-action revolver.

The Sheriff model Seville also emerged in Tombstone and was a carry-over from a prototype Sig built back in New York (circa 1975). Fit with 3.5" barrels and fully adjustable sights, the Sheriff Seville was chambered in either 44 Magnum or 45 Colt. Unlike many short-tubed single-actions though, the Seville had an ejector assembly and a standard length basepin. In order to clear the end of the shroud, a hole was cut in the ejector button allowing the pin to extend far enough for it to clear the cylinder. This Sheriff model was not only portable, but featured reliable extraction and a basepin you could easily grasp.

Another unique variant is the Bisbee built "Helldorado". These flat-topped, blued Seviles were chambered to shoot blanks and were made for the Tucson stunt act, "The Fall Guys". All we fit with five inch, sightless barrels and only 4 were ever produced.

QWIK-KIT SEVILLES

Before Sig moved to Arizona, he began collaborating with Ray Herriott of Centaur Arms. The two met through Adolf Wegmann, who became involved with United Sporting Arms Inc. when Sig was still in New York. Adolf also worked with Ray in the 1970s on a conversion kit using U.S. Arms Abilenes and Rugers. The system would allow multiple calibers to be shot on the same frame. By simply changing the barrel and cylinder combination, the shooter could switch from say a 357 Magnum to a 45 Colt in a less than a minute. Call it the single-action answer to Thompson Center Contenders.

The Qwik-Kit system used basepin lug that was welded to the barrel. Located flush with the front of the frame, the basepin fit through this collar locking the cylinder in place. To change barrels, the shooter removed the extractor shroud and loosened a hex-head screw on the end of the pin with an Allen wrench. Unlike most single-actions, the ejector was also held on with a hex-head screw, so caliber changes only required one tool. Lastly, the barrel was removed by hand and the steps were reversed for installation..

Qwik-Kit Seviles were reliable, accurate, and provided a cost effective way for folks to shoot multiple calibers. There were two kinks though that needed to be worked out. The first was a way to ensure people didn't accidentally match the wrong cylinder with the wrong barrel. A 44 Magnum chamber behind a 357 barrel would be catastrophic. The answer was to alter the amount of barrel-to-frame protrusion and cylinder length. For instance, the 357 Magnum cylinders were the shortest and had the most barrel protrusion. The 45 Colt kits had the longest cylinder and least amount of barrel protrusion. Because of this it was impossible to install a 357 barrel and fit a 45 Colt cylinder in the frame. Now common sense would say only a fool would neglect to check the parts before installation. Then again, this was shortly after the lawsuits against Ruger over pre-transfer bar Blackhawks. With gun litigation on the rise, Sig and Ray were smart to make the Qwik-Kit idiot proof. The second problem with the Qwik-Kits was some found the weld marks on the basepin lug to be unsightly. Eventually, Sig Himmelman came-up with a way to improve this area before bluing.

The Qwik-Kit first appeared in Bisbee and used QK-XX for serial numbers. Most conversions were 357 Mag, 44 Mag, and 45 Colt and all of them had the Centaur logo engraved on the right side of the frame. Though the model would survive the move to Tucson, very few Qwik-Kit guns were produced. If I had to estimate, I'd say no more that 150 exist making this another rare Seville variant. In mid-2007, I was fortunate enough to locate a never fired 3-barrel Bisbee Qwik-Kit in 357, 44 Magnum, and 45 Colt. As with other Qwik-Kits, it's packaged in a hard-cover, gray briefcase with foam lining. Since the 357 bores are considerably smaller than the 44 and 45 option a second, thinner ejector rod and assembly were included.

TOMBSTONE COMMEMORATIVE SEVILLES

Tombstone Commemoratives were also built in Tombstone and Bisbee using stainless steel cylinders, barrels, and backstraps. Unlike other Bisbee guns that bore an Arizona inscription, the Tombstone Commemorative had Hauppauge markings. I suspect Sig Himmelman used the last of his New York frames for this edition, though I've yet to confirm it. John Himmelman seems to think that some were assembled in Tombstone before the move to Bisbee in late 1979. Eventually, the Arizona operation had Gray Syracuse Investment Castings out of Chittenango, NY pour the frames and this ended the use of Hauppauge parts altogether.

Originally 200 were commissioned in .44-40, but only about 60 were ever completed and retailed for \$750.00. As with the Silver Seville, the frames were high-polish blued and serial numbers were to begin at TC-001. Once production got underway however the numbering started at TC-100 with the first gun going to the Tombstone Chamber of Commerce for display. The barrels contained "Tombstone Arizona, 100 Years of History 1879 - 1979, Frontier Model Cal. 44-40" while that backstraps were engraved "1 of 200". Shipped in solid walnut cases lined with blue cloth, the Tombstone Commemorative is one of the finest looking single-actions I've ever encountered.

The TC variant was a pure presentation piece, and a tough one to find at that. In all my years of collecting, this was the Seville I pursued the hardest. In spite of my efforts and contact with fellow collectors, I was never able to locate one for sale. Even single digit production Sevilles seemed easier to find than Tombstone Commemoratives. If I had to guess, most of the 60 are still NIB and are rarely sold. Now gun guides put their value around \$1,200, but be prepared to pay more if you want one. Again, they're sought after and this Seville's appearance has high dollar written all over it. Fortunately, my luck changed in early 2007 when a former Sporting Arms distributor from California contacted me about a TC that was for sale. Not only had I found one, but the gun was unfired and unturned. To this day, I've only encountered a handful of Tombstone Commemoratives with all but one being NIB.

HARLON B. CARTER EL DORADO

In 1979, the first SHOT Show was held in St. Louis, Missouri. Harlon B. Carter, the Executive Vice President of the NRA, attended and was presented with a very special El Dorado. The stainless 44 Magnum featured a 7.5" barrel, the same cylinder engraving as found on the Tombstone

Commemorative, recessed chambers, and high grade wood grips. Inscriptions included serial number "HBC 0001" and right side barrel marking of "SHOT Show 1979 St. Louis, MO: Harlon B. Carter". The gun came in a lined presentation case that housed six cartridges and an inner lid plaque. I assume Harlon either kept the gun or gave it to the NRA museum for display.

SPORTING ARMS, INC. - TUCSON

After United Sporting Arms Inc. failed to get a foothold in Bisbee, Sig moved the company to Tucson in 1980. The location would be 2021 East 14th Street and for the next five years, the Seville line-up was expanded. It was here that 454 Magnums and stretch-frames would be released. Exciting new cartridges, grip configurations, and prototypes would also follow. The company name was also shortened to Sporting Arms Inc. in Tucson. Though the quality of gun spoke for itself, Sporting Arms Inc would face its fair share of challenges.

I've long considered the Sporting Arms Seville to be quasi-custom, in spite of it being a production gun. The variation in barrel lengths, finish, chamberings, and grip configurations is staggering. Secondly, the fit and finish is well above that of most mass produced single-actions. I don't have a spec sheet for any of the New York produced guns, but the Tucson Sevilles were advertised as possessing the following features: 1) 17-4 PH cylinder construction on the stainless models and 4140 steel on the blued guns, 2) Hand fit and hand tuned assembly, 3) Maximum cylinder gap of 0.002", 4) Trigger pulls regulated to 2-3 pounds, 5) Crowned muzzles, and 6) Beryllium copper firing pins and trigger return springs. Like the Ruger Blackhawk, Sevilles used a coil main spring and contained a transfer bar safety feature. The transfer bar was very similar to the Ruger design, so much so that Ruger sued the original U.S. Arms company over its use. Sig Himmelman and Bill Ruger eventually reached a compromise and the Seville was noted as containing the Ruger patent (after 1983, United Sporting Arms referred to the part as an "Ignition Plate Safety Mechanism"). Unlike the Blackhawk however, the Seville was a "half-cock" gun and was reminiscent of the Old-Model Ruger. Another unique feature of these revolvers was the serial number was stamped on the frame, backstrap, and the front (or sometimes back) of the cylinder, hence the parts were matched. Cylinder fit was always good and the base pins were installed as to prevent jump upon recoil. Sporting Arms didn't accomplish this by way of a set-screw, but

instead drilled the latch hole on the base pin deeper (note - the latch screw often had to be loosened to remove the pin).

If there's one quality of the Seville that is immediately apparent, it's the action. They're exceptionally smooth, and as such I equate them to the Python of single-actions. Again, trigger pulls are between two and three pounds, though most come in closer to 2 lbs. Even when opening the loading gate, these guns have a very polished feel about them. This isn't to suggest the actions aren't tight; to the contrary, they're very well fit and possess rigid lock-up. If you get a chance to thumb a Seville, do yourself a favor and give one a try.

One person that contributed to the Seville's slick action was Wes Flowers. If the name sounds familiar, it's because he went on to form the West Fargo gunsmithing business. Wes has built quite a reputation in the sport of fast draw and cowboy action shooting and has even been involved in Hollywood film (as a technical advisor, stand-in double, and as an actor). In the late 1970's, he starting working in the Tombstone operation and was instrumental in tuning actions.

Dimensionally, the Seville was close in size to a Ruger Blackhawk, though they did use their own moulds (Gray-Syracuse Inc. did the castings in New York while Dolphin Castings eventually poured the parts in Arizona). Once complete, all of the receivers were heat-treated and magnafluxed, and from what I've been told the most common area for defect was around the rear sight area of the frame and ratchet section of the cylinder. Obviously, any part that didn't exhibit 100% integrity was discarded. Consider the following:

| | United Sporting Seville | Sporting Arms Ruger Blackhawk |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Cylinder Diameter | 1.728" | 1.730" |
| Top-Strap Width | 0.692" | 0.720" |
| Top-Strap Height | 0.352" | 0.300" |

Outwardly, the frames only appear different in how the top strap and lower portion are contoured. Everything else is pretty much Blackhawk in shape. Internally, the Seville did differ with respect to the use of a firing pin bushing, and this feature became the topic of debate. Sig Himmelmann made the bushing large so that it would cover the entire casehead, hence there was no "bushing-to-frame" overlap on the cartridge's rim. In doing so however, the insert protruded into the frame's ratchet recess. For whatever reason, some writers and experts alike claimed this weakened the frame. Ironically, John Linebaugh's early .45 Colt conversions were done on Seville frames using oversized 6-shot cylinders.

As many of the early reports show, the guns were safely pushed to 55,000 PSI without incident. As a result, I don't buy into the "weak frame" rumor, especially as it pertains to the stainless Seviles or El Dorados. Remember, while Ruger was using 416 (or possibly 410) series, the Seville & El Dorado went with 17-4 PH stainless construction. If there's any doubt as to which stainless is stronger, take a look at what Freedom Arms uses on their 83s and 97s.

Another similar design element between the Seville and the Ruger is the backstrap, though I'm not sure if they're interchangeable. At a minimum, the front of a Seville grip-frame is narrower than a Blackhawk's, so it would never be a perfect fit. Now Seville grips are almost interchangeable with Super Blackhawk panels. In fact, United Sporting Arms used Super Blackhawk Presentation Pachmyrs on many of their stretch-framed guns. The only difference is the Seville had the recess cut at the bottom edge of the front of the panel; Ruger located the recess on the top edge. Fitting Super Blackhawk grips to a Seville requires a relief cut on the bottom edge.

Two parts that won't remind you of a Ruger are the hammer and trigger assembly. The hammer spur is wide and akin to that of a Colt Python. Rather than curve upward like a Blackhawk, the Seville version extends farther back and is easier to reach in for fast cycling. I've always wanted to mate a Seville spur to a Blackhawk hammer for one of our Ruger conversions. Unfortunately, Seville parts dried-up years ago and hammers are next to impossible to find. Though it's a subtle difference, the Seville's trigger contour also feels straighter than a Ruger's and the guard is more squared.

One question I get a lot on Sporting Arms Inc. Seviles is where can I get a copy of the service manual? Naturally, the first thing you look for in a boxed gun is the paperwork. The answer is simply, there wasn't one. Sig used a wood-tone cardboard box lined with blue foam in Hauppauge as well as in Arizona. Gold lettering in the upper left-hand corner read, "Sporting Arms, Inc", but that's it (note – early New York boxes were labeled "United Sporting Arms, Inc"). Some of the IHMSA marked guns were boxed with silhouette cards depicting the various targets. Other than that, there was no parts list or instruction manual. Remember, filling orders from a new facility was tough and there just wasn't time or money to print service guides.

BIRDS-HEAD SEVILLES

Around 1975, Sig Himmelman built the first Sheriff Seville. Chambered in .45 Colt, the gun sported a 3.5" ejector-less barrel and rounded grip-frame. The latter is commonly known as the "birds-head" configuration. While this model was never cataloged during New York production, the prototype would carry-over to the Arizona operation.

For years I assumed the backstrap was made from a custom mould, but John Himmelman verified it was not. Early Seville grip castings had more metal in the rear, lower portion of the frame; enough metal in fact that this section could be ground to create the birds-head shape (see the photos section for a picture of an early Seville back-strap). Eventually, the mould was altered and the additional metal was eliminated from the casting. While this change lightened the gun, it prevented future Sevilles from receiving the "birds-head" treatment.

In the late 1970's, Adolf Wegmann made a trip to Arizona to visit his friend Sig. While at the shop, he surveyed a batch of rejected parts and found a few dozen grip-frames. Apparently they were discarded due to excessive casting shrinkage in the rear, lower corner. My guess is these were early New York frames because there was still enough metal in that area to contour. Sig gave Adolf three of these to play with. After some work, Adolf turned them into the birds-head design and built three Sheriff's Sevilles numbered AWA -1, AWA -2, and AWA - 3 (AWA stands for "Adolf Wegmann Arms"). All were done in 45 Colt, fit with stag grips, and had working ejector housings. What made these three unique however was their fixed sight configuration (blade front, notch rear). These were the only fixed-sight Sevilles to that point in time.

Sig liked the design enough to use Adolf's personal gun, AWA-1, in a Sporting Arms, Inc. brochure. For reasons unknown, the ad depicted the gun without the ejector housing attached. In time, Sig worked the rest of the rejected frames into birds-head editions and mated them to 3.5" Sevilles. Unlike the AWA versions, they featured adjustable rear sights and ramp front blades. Adolf Wegmann later confirmed that only 2 to 3 dozen of the round-butt Sheriff models exist. Most were in 45 Colt, though some 44 Magnums could've been produced. Frame markings were "Sporting Arms Inc., Tucson Arizona" with serial number coding in the 45SH - 20XX range (again, it's possible that some 44 Magnums were built; as such the serial number prefix would be 44SH). All other Sheriff Sevilles used the standard square backstrap and were also numbered with 45SH or 44SH prefixes. I've been lucky enough to acquire two birds-head Sheriff Sevilles, both in 45 Colt. A picture of one can be found in the "Seville Gallery" section of Single-Actions.com.

STRETCH-FRAME SEVILLES

In 1981, Sporting Arms Inc. began working with an adjustable frame mould. Made out of aluminum, individual pieces could be added or deleted to cast the standard or new stretch Seville frame. The latter was designed to accommodate Elgin Gates' SuperMag line of cartridges. Elgin was a pioneer in the sport of silhouette shooting and was heavily involved in the formation of the International Handgun Metallic Silhouette Association (IHMSA). In the 1970s, he began lengthening standard magnum cases by three-tenths of an inch, thus creating the SuperMag family. The first was the 357 SuperMag, which was nothing more than a 357 Magnum punched out to 1.610". Unlike the Remington Magnum, the 357 SuperMag was built to handle heavy bullets in the range of 180 to 210 grains. When shot at the same velocities as 158 grain 357 Magnums, the SuperMag gave incredible down-range performance. No wonder it was an immediate hit with silhouette shooters, especially when trying to topple 200 meter rams. Flat shooting, accurate, and best of all it didn't have the sharp recoil of the larger-bore magnums. At the time, the only handgun long enough for the SuperMag was the Thompson Center Contender. That would all change once Sporting Arms unveiled its stretch-frame model.

Sig worked closely with Elgin and extensively tested the round in the new Seville. Barrel lengths of 7 ½" and 10 ½" were offered and both proved fast. In fact, the 10 ½" model propelled 180 grain bullets over 1,500 fps and recoiled like a standard 357 due to the added weight. That same year, Elgin teamed with Dan Wesson to create a double-action counterpart. Though Ruger would release the Super Blackhawk Maximum in 1983, Sporting Arms was the first single-action to shoot the new cartridge. When Ruger and Remington finally got into the act, they named it the "357 Maximum". Elgin Gates designed it, Ruger & Remington rode his coattails, and to me it'll always be the 357 SuperMag.

By the time Sporting Arms started cranking out 357 SuperMags, Ruger already had press releases on the 357 Maximum. Remington quickly followed with loaded ammunition and to avoid confusion, most Sevilles were inscribed with "357 Maximum". Some of the very early guns though were marked as 357 SuperMags. I acquired one of these a couple of years back and to date it's the only one I've seen.

The next SuperMag cartridge was the 375. Unlike the 357, it wasn't based on a lengthened pistol round. Instead, Elgin cut 375 Winchester brass to 1.610" and allowed for body taper. The resulting performance was 357 Maximum trajectory and more punch than a 44 Magnum. In 1982, Elgin asked

Sig to work over one of the early Dan Wesson 357 SuperMags. The cylinder was re-chambered and fit with a fast twist 375 barrel they had at the shop. John Himmelman remembers shooting the gun and the shock of it coming unglued in his hand. While he can't remember all the details, he seems to think they went with too fast a twist. When feed a proof load of 375 SuperMag, it blew. Sporting Arms Inc. only ever produced two 375 SuperMag Seviles before the company reformed as United Sporting Arms. According to John, both used 1 in 18 inch barrels.

Ruger's 357 Maximum Blackhawk hit the market in late 1982 or early 1983 and was met with a wave of controversy. Shooters quickly found that after only a few hundred rounds, top strap cutting occurred. Two things contributed to this. One, a lot of folks tried to hot rod it by shooting light bullets at very high speeds. Remember, Elgin designed the SuperMag to push heavy slugs at standard 158 grain velocities. 110 and 125 grain bullets at 1,800+ fps were never in the game plan. Secondly, the flame cutting only went so deep and then stopped. Powder selection also played into this and factory ammunition seemed to accelerate the process. With slow powders (like WW680 and H4227) and heavy bullets, flame cutting was minimal and forcing cone life was also extended. High charges of these same powders under light bullets hastened the corrosion. It's hard to overcome bad press though and "flame cuts" quickly doomed the Maximum. After only 9,600 guns were shipped, Ruger pulled the plug in 1984. The erosion never weakened the gun or made it unsafe, but a handful of gun writers wrote just enough to send it to an early grave.

While the Ruger Maximum was heavily criticized for top-strap cutting, the Seville was never plagued by this problem (or if it was, no one made a big deal of it). Old IHMSA shooters will tell you that cylinder length was the difference. Whereas the Blackhawk Max cylinder was 1.952" in length, the Seville's was ~2.070", or 0.118" longer. Whether the extra 0.118" made much of a difference, many swore it reduced top strap cutting. Sporting Arms use of stainless steel probably did more to prevent erosion than any degree of cylinder length. That plus a lot of Seviles were sold to IHMSA members through Elgin Gates. Having designed the 357 SuperMag, I'm sure Elgin advised them on how to load the round.

WFDA SEVILLES

In 2006, I received an email from someone asking about a special edition Seville. The gun was a 4 5/8" .45 Colt and featured a blued frame and ejector housing with the remaining parts being high polish stainless. I knew by the caliber and length it couldn't be a Tombstone Commemorative plus the serial prefix was WFDA. After some email exchanges, he provided the barrel inscription which read "World Fast Draw Association". A few photos followed and they showed a highly engraved Seville with mirror-like stainless, bright bluing, and a very clean set of walnut grips. The cylinder was engraved with two strands of barbed wire that wrapped around in front of the bolt stops. In between the strands were icons that included a coffin, a cross, some initials, etc. The right side of the frame contained the Word Fast Draw Association logo and as with the Tombstone Commemorative, the backstrap was marked "1 of 200". I had never heard of WFDA Sevilles before, but knew I had to have one.

No matter how bad I wanted it, I was honest and told the guy that it appears to be a rare Seville. One thing I learned from the Tombstone edition is just because a Seville is marked 1 of 200 doesn't mean two-hundred were produced. Since it was unfired, I estimated the value to be between \$800 and \$1,000 (but that was based on limited knowledge of the gun). I told him if he ever goes to sell it to contact me. The next day he wrote and said it was available. Now when it rains, it pours. I had just bought two other Sevilles earlier that month and my gun fund was running on empty. I threw out a low-ball offer of \$700 and stated it may be worth much more. As the old saying goes, it pays to be honest and he accepted the offer. A week later the WFDA Seville arrived....his photos didn't do the gun justice.

John Himmelmann remembers his dad building these out of Sporting Arms, Inc. in Tucson. Apparently, Tom Wentz commissioned 200 to be built for the World Fast Draw Association in 1981, but only 21 were assembled. Like the Tombstone Commemorative, the WFDA variant is a tough Seville to find.

I spoke with Tom Wentz in early 2007 and he provided a lot of the history surrounding these guns. The plan was to use the proceeds from their sale to help fund the World Fast Draw Association. Sporting Arms Inc. charged \$280 per unit and Tom sold them for around \$350 wholesale. Retail prices were \$425. The first 10 went to Tom and he bought WFDA-1 for himself. The remaining 9 were sold and Tom put the profits back into the organization. Then things got messy. One of the Chairmen of the WFDA purchased the next 11 straight from the Tucson plant, sold them, and pocketed the money. Once Tom found out, he put a halt to the model. It's a shame too, because they were great looking Sevilles. Tom has WFDA-1 and I have WFDA-21, the first and last ones built.

Tom's involvement with Sporting Arms Inc. goes beyond the WFDA model however. In fact, he invested in the company back in 1980 after it moved

to Tucson. Sig also gave Tom the exclusive distribution rights for the Qwik-Kit guns for the eleven Western states. As Tom traveled for Fast Draw events, he would show a Seville or two to local dealers throughout the southwest. The quality of the gun spoke for itself and orders soon followed. Tom does remember one dealer in particular though. When handed the sample Seville, the guy started shaking the gun to check for noise. After hearing a rattle, he shoved the gun back and rudely said, "No way". Of course the rattle was the transfer bar and after Tom explained the noise, the dealer immediately back-peddled on his ignorance. Tom simply re-boxed the gun and left.

UNITED SPORTING ARMS – TUCSON

By late 1982, Sporting Arms Inc. faced financial pressure. Building a quality gun wasn't the problem, but getting solid distribution channels was a huge challenge. Dealers that handled the Seville liked the model and usually ordered a few. IHMSA also promoted the gun, with many members using them in competition. The obstacle was really how to drive demand. With so many single-actions in the market, Sporting Arms Inc. needed a way to bring the Seville to the masses. Differentiating it from the Blackhawks, Virginian Dragoons, Abilenes, Ubertis, and Colts of the world wasn't hard based on features alone. Stainless steel stretch-frames, SuperMag chamberings, 454 Magnums, match-grade barrels, and highly tuned actions definitely set the gun apart and justified the Seville's higher price points. But how do you communicate this to gun buyers? Magazine ads, test guns for writers, and travel to shows and distributors required a lot of advertising dollars. The young company just didn't have the resources for a big marketing push. When orders were received, they were often sporadic. This presented new challenges, especially in terms of coordinating production. Some dealers didn't want to wait for Sevilles when Blackhawks would ship in a couple of days. Sales were lean and in early 1983 Sig Himmelman filed for bankruptcy.

Ken Kamrath was assigned as the trustee in charge of the proceedings. Both Sig and Ken tried to reorganize the company, but after multiple attempts they couldn't make a go of it. Sporting Arms Inc. was put up for sale and eventually purchased by a Pennsylvania based group. Comprised of Jeffrey Munnell, Harry Moore, and Bill Mahley, the sale was made in conjunction with the bankruptcy filing. Jeff was a Pittsburgh area attorney and avid Ruger collector. Harry Moore had firearms sales experience while Bill operated a

successful electrical supply company. Since Sig knew the production side of the business, it was decided he'd stay on. The immediate concern though was how to pay off the outstanding debt. Ken had to either put financing in place or devise a plan to raise the funds. He opted to assemble and sell Seviles from remaining stock, hence satisfying the court. The sales revenue would not only pay off the balance, but also cover Sig and John Himmelmann's labor. Ironically, Sig was now an employee of the company he co-founded 10 years earlier.

Sig and John continued to work at East 14th Street until February of 1984. By that time Bill Mahley had moved to Arizona to run the operation and soon he and Sig went their separate ways. There was still the issue of the court appointed guns. In order to finalize the sale, the debt had to be retired and this put the new owners in a precarious situation. Understandably, they were eager to start production, but the question of who would build the "debt" Seviles loomed large. In due course, Ken Kamrath put Sig and John in charge of manufacturing them and imposed a few stipulations. The proceeds would first go to Ken since he was the bankruptcy trustee. These funds would cover the following: 1) the debt balance, 2) Production space and material cost, 3) Ken's fee, and 4) Sig and John's labor. Next, a machine shop and FFL had to be secured for production and distribution. Eventually, an arrangement was made to use part of Jim Rock's RPM (Rock Pistol Manufacturing) facility in Brea, California. Rock, a retired Navy barber, had been working on the Merrill Sportsman single-shot pistol for sometime.

Two problems arose as they moved to California. Not only did it take over two months to get the agreement with RPM finalized, but Sig had to get acclimated to new production space and equipment. What was supposed to be a six-month venture soon turned into a year long ordeal. By now, Seviles were starting to flow from Tucson and this only added to the confusion. Dual production sites fueled rumors of sub-par Seviles in 1984 and 1985. Some just assumed the Brea guns were cheap one offs made from surplus stock. I own a few of the "debt" Seviles and trust me, their quality is top notch. I should also add these were marked as "Sporting Arms Inc" to differentiate them from those being built in Tucson. I've never been able to verify the exact number of "debt" Seviles, but I believe it to be in the 100 – 150 range.

While at RPM, Sig helped Jim Rock improve the Merrill Sportsman. One such improvement was a redesigned trigger which eliminated the chance of accidental discharge when closing the barrel. This enhancement is found in early Sportsmans, but I'm unsure if it's still used in current production RPMs. As time went on though, the relationship with RPM waned, largely because Jim Rock wasn't getting paid by the court for rent. Sig left RPM in early 1985, but his time there would inspire his next project, the Competitor pistol.

357M-2097

By mid-1983 the Ruger Maximum was starting to get bad press. Talk of top-strap cutting and premature cone erosion gave the model a black eye. The Seville however, with Elgin Gates as an advocate, gained considerable success in IHMSA competition. The Sporting Arms SuperMag also didn't exhibit the degree of top-cutting and barrel erosion as found in the SRM. Rumor pegged the Seville's 416 stainless and a longer cylinder as the difference. I'm not convinced that's the whole story, but more on that later.

Ruger wanted a Seville to test against their 4140 Blackhawk Maximum. So in August of 1983 Walter Howe (Ruger's Special Projects Administrator) contacted Jeff Munnell. The two knew each other and at that time Munnell's group was negotiating the purchase of Sporting Arms Inc. Jeff had acquired a 7.5", fluted 357 Maximum from Sig Himmelmann on August 4th, 1983 for the sole purpose of loaning it to Walter. The serial number was 357M-2097 with a production date of 07/26/83. Factory shipping occurred on 07/28/83 in the standard wood grain cardboard box with blue foam insert. Surprisingly, Mr. Howe had a difficult time acquiring one thru the regular sales channels.

Three months later, Walter realized the gun had never been returned. As it turns out, a Ruger employee fired the gun thousands of times to include 100+ proof loads. In a letter to Jeff dated November 15, 1983, Walter explained their findings. The follow excerpt is directly from that letter:

"As I explained to you in our recent telephone conversation I was chagrined that the United Sporting Arms revolver (#357M-2097) which you were kind enough to loan to us had been kept for such an extended period. As promised, yesterday I requested the gun be returned to me promptly so I could "return it to the person who was kind enough to loan it to us".

Well, today the revolver was rushed to me and it is painfully apparent that the gun was used for much more and much heavier testing than I ever anticipated it would be!

The gun shows multiple signs of repeated firing, barrel erosion, top strap (underside) erosion, broken trigger spring, 4 Rockwell hardness 'marks' (2 on the left top strap, 2 on the top of the barrel), scratches and dings overall, loose gate, and worn lock work.

In short, the gun needs factory overhaul. The question now is, do you want the revolver to be returned in this condition or would you prefer that we purchase it from you? If you do, just name the price and a check will be sent to you.

If you prefer that it be returned to you, as is, so that you can have it overhauled, just say the word and I will send it to you at once via UPS. OF COURSE, we will pay the full price for full overhaul of the gun. Just let me know the amount."

Jeff elected to have the gun returned for repair. After a thorough cleaning and spring replacement, it was shot thousands of more times (note - if the trigger spring was the beryllium copper type used on later Sevilles it probably would've held). In all, this gun digested well over 10,000 rounds of 357 Maximum. 357M-2097 is now owned by a gentleman that collects Ruger Maximums. He was kind enough to share this information in a phone conversation we had in August of 2010.

COMPETITION ARMS INC.

Sig's wife passed away in October of 1984, so unquestionably this was a tough time for the Himmelmann family. After leaving RPM, he returned to Tucson and began work on a similar single-shot handgun called the Competitor. Before long he ran into Bob Riley who also wanted to build a new single-shot. Bob was a former Freedom Arms employee and worked for United Sporting Arms at 2021 E. 14th Street. Sig drew upon his knowledge of guns and mould production to design the Competitor; as he did, Elgin Gates advised on how to make it IHMSA compliant. With a working prototype in place, Competition Arms Inc. was established at 1010 S. Plummer Ave., in Tucson in 1985.

On the outside, the Competitor resembles a Merrill Sportsman, but functionally it's quite different. The gun is comprised of four basic units to include the frame, receiver, barrel, and shroud. The barrel indexes into the receiver block and is locked into place by the vented shroud. This assembly then mates to the frame and is retained by a threaded hinge bolt. The hinge bolt functions like the cross-pin on a Thompson Center Contender, except it threads into the frame. A barrel release latch resides on the left side of the gun, just above the grip panel. Wisely, Sig designed the Competitor so the latch could also be installed on the right side of the receiver as well. Pushing the button forward unlocks the action, allowing the barrel to tilt forward for loading. Once

the cartridge is in place, the barrel is locked back into the frame and like the Contender the Competitor has an external hammer to cock. After firing, case extraction is by way of a small cam that's retained by the hinge bolt.

The Competitor was offered in a variety of chamberings ranging from 22 LR all the way up to 45-70. 357 Maximum and 41 Magnums were favorites among silhouette shooters. A 25-35 Winchester was also offered which was well suited for whitetail and varmit hunting. While all Competitors came from the factory with adjustable iron sights, the top of the receiver is slotted for scope mounts. Conveniently, the sights don't need to be removed when adding mounts and optics. The grips were two piece smooth walnut and the frame was machined from solid 4140 as opposed to investment casting. Early Competitors were finished in blue with some plated parts. Though a stainless version was planned, I doubt any were ever built. Sadly, only 300 or so Competitors were ever completed. Today, they're rarely found in the used market and very little has been written about them. To my knowledge, the only review was Raymond Page's in the February 1987 issues of "Guns". Raymond tested a 14" barrel in 22 Long Rifle and two 10.5" versions in 25-35 Win and 357 Maximum. Reported accuracy from all three was outstanding. In fact, one five shot group with the 25-35 measured just under 0.3" at 25 meters.

While working at Competition Arms, Sig converted a 357 Max Seville which was leftover from court ordered production. Fit with a 7mm barrel and a 7mm TCU cylinder, this was truly a one of a kind piece. I believe, but have not been able to confirm, the gun was featured in Elgin Gate's "Shooting Steel".

UNITED SPORTING ARMS - 1984

In late 1983 and early 1984, United Sporting Arms increased promotion for their stretch-frame and 454 Sevilles, and why not? Ruger, Interarms, and El Dorado Arms were already producing stainless and blued single-actions in standard calibers. Freedom Arms announced their 454 model in 1983, but they weren't readily available early 1985. Ruger tried the 357 Maximum, but sent it to the bone yard after only a couple of years. United Sporting Arms and the new ownership saw an opportunity to capture some of the high performance single-action market and acted on it. They had a platform proven to handle the 454 Magnum, 357 Maximum, and Elgin Gates' new 375 SuperMag. With IHMSA going strong and handgun hunting on the rise, their future looked bright.

The guns themselves changed little under new ownership. Quality was still very high, the actions remained exceptionally smooth, and accuracy was outstanding. One small change was the switch from the engraving of Seville markings to an etching process. The new markings weren't quite as deep and sharp as the engraved, but overall they still looked good. Packaging and advertising of the Seville also got a facelift. A United Sporting Arms logo was created and consisted of an upside-down pentagon which was filled with interconnected "U-S-A" lettering. Gone were the wood grained boxes lined with blue foam, as a gray one with black lettering was adopted in 1984. For the first time since birth of the Seville, a service manual also came with the guns. This not only included a parts schematic, but detailed instructions on operation and a description of Seville features.

Post 1983 Tucson production was heavily weighted towards stretch-frames models. 454 Magnums were initially offered along with other standard length cartridges such as 357, 41, and 44 Magnums. Seventy percent or more of the total output however were maximum frames. 1984 also brought forth the official release of the 375 SuperMag Seville. Remember, just two were built under Sig Himmelfmann's Sporting Arms Inc. Wisely, United Sporting Arms did extensive testing with the round and provided load data with the 375s. I have a few of these data sheets and they're thorough. Six or seven bullet weights were tested and nearly all of the available magnum pistol powders were tried. Advertising from early 1984 for the 375 SuperMag was as follows:

"The new standard: a brand new offering in an already widely acclaimed revolver. Possibly the best revolver hunting round ever made available to the shooting public. More muzzle energy than a 30-30 Winchester, great penetration, and with a 1:12" twist, the rotational velocity to be deadly on any thin skinned game animal in the world. All of this with no more recoil than the .44 Mag, thus making this cartridge also possibly the ultimate revolver silhouette gun. Available in stainless only in 7 1/2" barrel length and in the 10 1/2" barreled silhouette model"

When introduced, the 375 SuperMag quickly gained a reputation for being a great silhouette round. As the advertising suggests however, it's equally good in the field. In fact, one United Sporting Arms ad shows an 800 pound Kudu that was taken by a 375 Seville in Zimbabwe, Africa.

The 454 Magnum received a similar marketing push, but very few were ever built (see below). I've never been able to determine why the model was dropped, but early United Sporting Arms touted its potential:

“Also new, this is the powerhouse that other companies have tried but have been unable to produce. Now available in a special 5-shot cylinder enclosed in the strongest and most massive single action frame on the market today. 2,000 fps with a 260 grain bullet makes this a real game-stopper. Available in 7 ½: barreled Seville stainless and 10 ½” silhouette model”

In 1984 the Seville catalog was again expanded. The standard 357, 41, 44, and 45 calibers could be had in either blue or stainless with barrel lengths of 4 5/8”, 5 ½”, 6 ½”, 7 ½”, and 10 ½”. The 10 ½” versions were called Silhouette Sevilles and included stretch-frame counterparts in 357 Maximum and 375 SuperMag (though these were only offered in stainless). 454 Silhouette Sevilles were made in limited quantities and five contained IHMSA markings (note – some sources indicate six IHMSA 454s were made). The Sheriff model was a carry-over from the Sporting Arms Inc. days, but now .38 and .44 Special cylinders were added. Then in mid-1984 the Deputy model was announced, though I’m unsure if any were built. Cataloged in both blue and stainless, these were ejector-less, 2 ½” barrel Sevilles.

Retail prices for the 1984 models ranged from \$360 for the standard frame in blue, up to \$540 for the 454 Magnum. At a time when Ruger Blackhawks could be bought for \$200 or so, the Seville was an expensive single-action. Then again, the fit, finish, unique chamberings, and accuracy potential more than justified the higher price points.

VARIANTS

Summarizing Seville variants is no easy task. J.C. Munnell indicated it would be nearly impossible to list all the various “caliber-finish-barrel length-grip-frame” combinations that exist [2]. One thing that complicates such an inventory is United Sporting Arms offered many different chamberings and built quite a few prototype guns. Standard calibers like the .44 Magnum, .45 Colt, .41 Magnum, and .357 were the common examples. Stretch-framed guns were sold in .357 Maximum and .375 SuperMag (United Sporting Arms called it the .375 USA), though experimental guns were built in .41 and .44 SuperMag. The last two are relevant because they were done well before Dan Wesson unveiled the .445 and .414 SM. Other chamberings include the .44-40, 9mm and .45 Winchester Magnums, .44 Special, .32 H&R Mag, .218 Mashburn Bee, .22 K-Hornet, 375 Special, and even the .454 Casull. Unquestionably, these calibers

were produced in very limited numbers and I wouldn't be surprised if some were single-digit runs.

454 MAGNUM SEVILLES

The .454 Casull is a unique Seville chambering. Apparently, only 30 were manufactured by United Sporting Arms before production ceased; rumor has it that the cartridge was considered too much for the Seville frame. Unfortunately, this myth has been around for years and it needs to be put to rest. The Seville platform is plenty strong for the 454 and 17-4 construction, 5-shot cylinders, and heavier barrel threads provide an added margin of safety. J.C. Munnell even talks about shooting the .454 Casull in a Seville and makes no mention of it being unsafe [2] (for the record, United Sporting Arms used a “.454 Magnum” inscription on these guns). The Standard Catalog of Firearms article also points to the fact that some 50 .454 Casulls were produced by a source other than United Sporting Arms. These guns were actually built by Sig Himmelman and all were labeled “Sporting Arms Inc., Tucson, Arizona”. Some were produced prior to the formation of United Sporting Arms, while others were assembled after Sig Himmelman left the company in March of 1984. I was lucky enough to get two of these, as well as a 1 of 5 IHMSA .454 built by United Sporting Arms. Though J.C. Munnell claims the Sporting Arms version was sub-par in quality, I don't find this to be the case. In fact, my Sporting Arms versions have better fit and overall tolerances than my IHMSA Seville, with the exception of one dimension. Simply put, the Sporting Arms .454s had oversized chambers for the Casull cartridge. Whereas most .454s mic at 0.479-0.481”, the Sporting Arms came in at 0.490”. Though not ideal, these guns are perfectly safe for the .454 when pressure is kept at or below 50,000 PSI.

Another point of confusion was whether the .454 used a different frame from that of the standard Seville. Outwardly, they appear to be the same size, but I later found out that the Sporting Arms .454s did have heavier barrel threads. Much of this was the result of Wayne Baker of Freedom Arms visiting the plant. Not only did he recommend a 5-shot cylinder, but also suggested that the barrel area be expanded to accommodate a larger thread diameter. The barrel shank area was altered to achieve this, and thus the .454 Seville frame was born. Below are the dimensions for both the Sporting Arms and United Sporting Arms .454 frames. As you can see, the exterior dimensions are essentially the

same, with the main difference being the larger barrel threads on the Sporting Arms frame (larger thread diameter, not total thread length).

| | United Sporting Arms 454 | Sporting Arms Inc 454 |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Frame Window Height | 1.760" | 1.748" |
| Frame Widow Width | 1.874" | 1.891" |
| Cylinder Length | 1.759" | 1.737" |
| Top Strap Height (at gap) | 0.293" | 0.337" |
| Top Strag Width | 0.692" | 0.694" |
| Frame Thread Length | 0.600" | 0.600" |

Since the frame moulds were adjustable, Sig milled a new insert for the front portion to expand the shank diameter.

EL DORADO ARMS – HAUPPAUGE

After Sig Himmelmann went west, Forrest and Russell transformed the New York operation into El Dorado Arms. In doing so, Russell gave half the stock to Forrest, beginning what would be a long and productive partnership. Records show that the company became official on January 9th, 1980 and with the help of others, El Dorados continued to flow from 35 Gilpin Avenue

Forrest's mechanical genius coupled with Russell's artistry turned the El Dorado into one of the finest single-actions built to date. Michael Violette recently contacted me with great insight into the early days the company. In the fall of 1980, Michael was a senior in high school and his work study program director, Dave Wells, placed him at 35 Gilpin. Think about how rare that would be nowadays...a public school sending a student to a firearms plant. The basic design of the El Dorado remained unchanged, but the fit, tuning, finish, and manufacturing techniques improved greatly. In fact, many production firsts came from El Dorado Arms and all were a testament to those involved.

Hand-fit became the new focus. Whereas United Sporting Arms worked to become a full production gun, El Dorado Arms took the custom approach. The goal was the utmost in quality as quantity became a secondary concern. Michael remembers assembling guns and how patient Forrest and

Russell were in teaching him the mechanics of a single-action. Parts weren't simply screwed together, they were meticulously matched. Forrest and Russell were indeed perfectionists and it wasn't uncommon to try a dozen or so of a given part before the right fit was achieved. The actions were also highly tuned and Michael recalls him and Russell competing to see who could get the best trigger pull. Of all the El Dorado Arms guns I own or have handled, I've never encountered one with a mediocre action. They were all as smooth as the proverbial silk. How smooth you ask? I have two Hauppauge El Dorados with 1 pound trigger pulls and no hint of creep. My other New York El Dorados scale at 2 pounds.

If there's one aspect of El Dorado Arms that should be highlighted, it's their innovative approach to production. The constant question was, "How can we make the El Dorado better?" The answer brought about two firsts within firearms manufacturing. One was taper honing bores while the other was button down rifling. Make no mistake about it, these weren't niche methods but instead laid the groundwork for current production techniques.

Sometime around 1982 or 1983, the Long Island chapter of the National Rifle Association contacted the Hauppauge plant and asked for a special edition El Dorado. This was no ordinary one-off request in that the gun was to be given to President Reagan at an NRA convention. Eventually, it was built out of stainless, fit with an 8 3/4" barrel, and chambered in 44 Magnum. Forrest and Russell offered to have the gun custom finished, but the NRA wanted to use their own engraver. The Reagan El Dorado was subsequently shipped out and to this day no one knows what became of it. I've tried to track its whereabouts through the NRA, but no records of it being presented seem to exist. It's a shame too because it's uncommon for a young gun company to get such an order. Then again, the El Dorado was far from a common gun.

El Dorado Arms also caught the attention of Roy Weatherby, so much so he offered to purchase the company. Roy wanted the El Dorado to compliment his outstanding line of rifles. He had no intention of changing the design of the gun or those that built them, but he did want to increase production. Remember, El Dorados were always made in small numbers, with an emphasis of total quality. Though I don't have their production figures, it was nowhere near the 150 guns per month required by Weatherby. In the end, Forrest and Russell decided to keep control of El Dorado Arms and stay independent. Roy's offer to buy the operation however speaks volumes of the gun and those that built them.

In the early 1980s, Forrest and Russell were testing El Dorados at the T.D. Indoor Gun Range in the Medford, Long Island. One of the employees was a retired New York police officer by the name of Virgil Varrone. The three

hit it off and before long Virgil bought stock in the company. Whenever he had time, he would go to Hauppauge to make parts and Michael Violette fondly remembers Virgil teaching him machining. Like Forrest and Russell, he was a fun guy to work with. Though back taxes owed to the IRS would cause this great company to close in 1983, the three would soon be reunited.

THE FS-2 EL DORADO

2004 was a productive year for Seville & El Dorado collecting. I acquired a couple of 454 Sevilles, the first 375 SuperMag built in Chimney Rock, and two IHMSA marked stretch-frames. Then in September my friend Nick Vesa contacted me about a Hauppauge El Dorado that was for sale. When I asked about the caliber, he claimed it was a 357 Maximum. I immediately questioned him knowing that the New York operation never had moulds for the long frame. He assured me that it was a stainless Max, fit with a 9 ½" barrel and wore the serial number "FS-2". The last detail grabbed me big time. I knew Forrest Smith used the "FS" prefix on his personal El Dorados. But how did they make the 357 Max work without the adjustable moulds? A picture of the gun quickly provided the answer. At first glance, it looked like any other standard El Dorado. Closer inspection however showed that the front of the frame was thinned. A couple of days later the gun arrived and when I opened the box, it was obvious how Forrest made it work. Basically, he cast a standard stainless receiver, milled 0.2" out of the front of the frame window, and fit it with a 1.90" cylinder chambered in 357 Maximum.

When I show folks the gun they usually respond with, "sounds dangerous". My standard answer is, "If Forrest built it - it's safe". And why wouldn't it be? The guy was a retired aeronautical engineer, so he knew metal. Secondly, the only thing that changed was the length of the barrel shank and I have reason to believe Forrest went with heavier threads on this gun. If I could only keep one of my Abilenes, Sevilles, and El Dorados, it would be the FS-2. Forrest built it, shot it, and owned it and I'm honored to now have it my possession. Russell Wood later confirmed that only one standard frame 357 Maximum was ever produced. All the more reason it's the high-point of my collection.

OTHER LIMITED EDITIONS

Additional limited production models include:

- **Bisbee Helldorados** – four of these were built in the Bisbee facility. All were flat-top guns, had no front or rear sight, were blued, and had barrel lengths of around 5" [2]
- **Tucson Helldorados** – John Himmelmann remembers 6 other blank-firing Sevilles built for Old Tucson Studios. Five were fit with 4 5/8" barrels while one had a 6" tube. All were flat-topped and sightless like earlier Helldorados, except these were done in stainless and came with one year warranties.
- **Tombstone Commemorative** – 60 were produced in .44-40 using blued frames and stainless steel cylinders, backstraps, and 8 3/4" barrels (1979). Serial numbers started at TC-100 and the barrel contained "Tombstone, Arizona 100 years of history 1879-1979"
- **Harlon B. Carter El Dorado** – 7.5" El Dorado in 44 Magnum; presented to Harlon Carter (Executive Vice President of the NRA) at the first SHOT Show in St. Louis in 1979. Serial number is HBC 0001. Right side barrel inscription reads "First SHOT Show 1979 St. Louis, MO: Harlon B. Carter".
- **Sheriffs Models** - most were blued and had 3.5" barrels and used a standard Seville backstrap. I've seen a few of these for sale and many have yellow ramp inserts on the front sight
- **Birdshead Sheriff Models** – 2 to 3 dozen were made in the early 1980s. Mis-cast grip-frames were contoured to the birds-head design and mated to 3.5" Sevilles. All had adjustable sights and ejectors and were marked "Sporting Arms Inc. Tucson, Arizona". Most were chambered in 45 Colt, though some 44 Magnums may exist
- **AWA Sheriff Models** – 3 were built by Sig Himmelmann and Adolf Wegmann the early 1980s. Chambered in 45 Colt, they used birds-head grips w/stag, full ejector assemblies, and fixed sights. Serial numbers were AWA 1 thru 3.
- **The Ronald Regan El Dorado** – the Long Island chapter of the NRA commissioned El Dorado Arms to build an 8 3/4" 44 Magnum. The gun was to be presented to President Regan around 1982 or 1983.
- **.357/44 Bain & Davis** – Sig Himmelmann chambered at least one cylinder for this round in the late 1970's.
- **Word Fast Draw Association Sevilles** – built for Tom Wentz of the WFDA in the early 1980's. The model used a blued frame and ejector

housing whereas the backstrap, barrel, and cylinder were high polish stainless. 200 were to be made, but production ceased at number twenty-one. Serial numbers are WFDA-XX.

- **Rawhide finish guns** – these were blued guns that were lightly bead-blasted
- **Hunter finish guns** – non-glare stainless finish that was the result of light bead-blasting
- **Pastime Shooters Supply Seviles** – standard Sporting Arms Inc. Seviles made for a distributing company by the name of Pastime Shooter's Supply. Serial numbers were PSS-XXX; an unknown number of these were Qwik-Kit guns.
- **IHMSA .454 Casulls** – 5 were produced using 10" silhouette barrels. The IHMSA logo was also engraved on the top strap and all 5 were made by United Sporting Arms, Inc., Tucson.
- **Sporting Arms IHMSAs** – .357 Maximum and .375 SuperMags that had the IHMSA logo engraved on the top-strap. I've been unable to determine how many of these were made, but most were produced by Sig Himmelman (their quality is outstanding).
- **Sporting Arms Maximums/SuperMags with fluted cylinders** – some of Sig Himmelman's Sporting Arms stretch-frames used fluted cylinders. I've seen examples for both the 7.5" and 10.5" models.
- **Qwik-Kit guns** – an interchangeable barrel and cylinder design so that multiple calibers could be used on the same frame. Originally designed by Ray Herriot of Centaur Systems [3]. These guns had the Centaur logo engraved on the side of the frame
- **7mm TCU Seville** – Sig Himmelman built one stretch-frame in 7mm TCU. For those not familiar with the TCU, it was a 223 Remington necked up to 7mm. The gun was noted in Elgin Gates' book "Shooting Steel" in the 1980s. S/N 001; currently owned by John Himmelman.
- **.22 Long Rifle/.22 Magnum** – introduced in 1988 and built in the Chimney Rock, N.C. shop
- **Rebel Model** – an El Dorado Arms gun that was of fixed-sight design. Offered in both blue and stainless steel
- **Laredo Model** – introduced in 1988; essentially a blued version of the El Dorado
- **.357 Maximums on non stretch-frames** – One .357 Max was done on the standard El Dorado frame. The gun was built Hauppauge, New York and had the front of the frame windows milled to accept a 1.90" cylinder (the result was a shorter barrel shank length). Built and owned by Forrest Smith, this gun received the serial number "FS-2".

POST FALLS, IDAHO SEVILLES

United Sporting Arms was eventually bought by Burolcy Industries of Post Falls, ID in late 1985. They weren't in the gun business long though and in total only around 200 Seviles were made at this location. Two additions that did come from Idaho were the .32 H&R Magnum Seviles and the .41 B&M prototypes (see below). From the get go however, the Idaho guns were plagued with problems. Quality was never up to par with the Tucson United Sporting Arms Seviles, and I'd never even try to compare them to the Sporting Arms version or El Dorado models. They also lacked consistency and the quality seemed to decrease as more guns were built. I have one of the first twenty built and one of the last twenty built, and trust me, the quality went downhill fast. Most of the problems were related to timing, cylinder fit, and finish. The latter was quite obvious in that the frame markings were etched, not engraved. As a result the writing was shallow, hard to read and just plain sloppy. My Post Falls .357 Maximum actually has the United Sporting Arms logo inverted, as placed below the loading gate area. Basically, the whole design it mirrored 180 degrees left-to-right, so the "S" is to the right and is backwards. I noticed it the minute I picked-up the gun, yet somehow it still got out of the factory. Granted, it doesn't effect how the gun shoots, but does speak to the lack of production control at Post Falls.

I suspect some of these inconsistencies stemmed from where the parts were manufactured. Early Idaho Seviles were assembled off of remaining Tucson stock and the quality of these guns was good. As the plant switched to their own part production however, fit and finish slipped. It's also hard to determine if a Post Falls Seville is truly a Post Falls Seville. As J.C. Munnell noted in his article, some parts and/or completed guns were stolen from the plant. Though only 200 or so guns were shipped from the factory, I've seen serial numbers as high as 350. I'm not suggesting that serial numbers in the 200 – 350 were part of the theft because only Burolcy and the BATF know the IDs. I do know the numbers of the stolen Seviles were reported, so they're at least on record.

Idaho models had two features not present in other Seviles. For one, the firing pin bushing was reduced in size. I have no clue as to why this was done, but suspect it had to do with the rumor that the oversized bushings weakened the frame. Secondly, the ejectors were not positioned on the stretch-

frame guns to where the base pin could be held in place when extended. In other words, they'd fall out when you pulled the cylinder. It's a minor difference, but still annoying. Stalker models were also introduced in Post Falls, though they were merely short barreled guns. The Maximum Stalkers used 7.5" tubes, while the standard frames were fit with 4 5/8". Lastly, a few Idaho guns were engraved with the IHMSA logo, as was the case with some of the Tucson Sevilles.

EL DORADO ARMS – CHIMNEY ROCK

El Dorado Arms became what was the best of the El Dorado/Seville line of revolvers. Though El Dorado Arms started in New York after Forrest Smith and Russell Wood split from United Sporting Arms, they evolved even further in the North Carolina facility. While Chimney Rock, NC was used for the P.O. Box, the production site was actually on Rt. 64/74 in Rutherfordton. It was there that the "all" 17-4 PH stainless guns were built. This included not only the cylinders, frames, and barrels, but the backstraps, ejector housings, and internal parts right down to the screws. El Dorado Arms was also the first to button rifle 17-PH stainless barrels in the early 1980s and this practice continued in North Carolina. When hardened to Rockwell 38, the barrels had roughly twice the tensile strength of 416 stainless which Rockwells around 21 (apparently, Forrest Smith's daughter did all of the barrel work out of the North Carolina shop). Secondly, the guns were meticulously assembled, tuned, and tested. Frames were x-rayed after being poured to eliminate any casting inconsistencies. If you take a look underneath the trigger assembly, you'll see that the frames were stamped to indicate they passed this test. There's also a number under the trigger that specifies which mould was used to cast the frame. To the best of my knowledge, this is either a "1" or "2" designation. The grips were completely custom fit to each backstrap and were offered in coco bolo, rosewood, or burl native wood. I've also been told that Russell did most, if not all of the grip work. Additional features include cylinder gaps between 0.0015" and 0.003", engraved (not stamped) lettering that was gold filled, sand blasted front sights to deflect light, and a 60 month warrantee.

For years, I've heard a lot of talk about Chimney Rock guns and their hair triggers. I too assumed they were one pound or less, and though I have six North Carolina guns, I never took the time to measure. After I did, one scaled at 12 ounces but the rest were between two and three pounds. How can this be?

The hammer seems to drop the instant you touch the trigger. Russell Wood explained that they tuned the actions so thoroughly there was absolutely no creep. This coupled with true 2 – 3 pound pulls gave the illusion of a hair trigger. As smooth as Seviles were, El Dorado Arms took the actions to another level. In fact tuning the guns was the most time consuming task on the North Carolina models, even more so than machining the cylinders. You have to remember this was a custom shop and they built revolvers on their terms. Pride and commitment to total quality was a huge part of this operation. As with their Hauppauge days, the question wasn't "how many can we make" but instead was "how good can we make them". .

El Dorado Arms offered numerous models in both standard and stretch-frame configuration. With a starting price of \$650, the stainless El Dorado could be had in .22 LR, .357 Magnum, .357 Maximum, .375 SuperMag, .44 Magnum, and .45 Colt. While the .375 SuperMag wasn't always catalogued, they'd build you one if interested. I recently purchased a North Carolina built .375 and it's definitely one of the best fit Seville/El Dorados I own. .41 Magnum was also catalogued early on and then dropped within the first year. In fact, I doubt any .41s came out of the Chimney Rock plant, though I'd love for someone to prove me wrong. Barrels were set to 4 5/8", 5.5", 7.5", 9.5", or 10.5", but El Dorado Arms would cut other lengths upon request. One of the most popular Seville options was the birds-head grip frame, so El Dorado Arms offered these as well for an additional \$20; for another \$40 the customer could have a brass backstrap and ejector shroud installed. A very rare Chimney Rock gun is the blued Laredo model and fixed sight Rebel versions. These, as well as any other blued El Dorado variants, had a base price of \$575.00.

The Chimney Rock operation was a reunion or sorts, not only for Forrest and Russell, but Virgil Varrone as well. Ironically, Virgil was already considering a move to North Carolina when Forrest informed him El Dorado Arms was back in business. Before long, he was again building El Dorados. When Virgil wrote me in early 2007, he unknowingly answered a question I had for years surrounding these guns. Namely, why is the fixed sight Rebel so rare? I've never even seen a photo of one and with the growth in Cowboy Action shooting throughout the late 80's and 1990's, the model seemed like an obvious winner. According to Virgil, few Rebels were built because of the amount of welding it took fill the rear sight slot. Rebel frames were first cast using the standard El Dorado mould. Then the rear sight slot was welded over and the entire top strap was machined to fixed sight profile. Unfortunately, they kept getting a lot of pin holes in the weld area, so very few were ever completed.

Though El Dorado Arms produced guns in North Carolina from the 1980s up until 1996/1997, it's unlikely more than 1,000 guns came out of Chimney

Rock. In the used market, they're far rarer than either the Tucson Seville or New York El Dorado. In keeping with the history of these guns, it was a quality over quantity proposition for Forrest Smith and Russell Wood.....a factor that definitely contributes to their collector value. El Dorado Arms ceased production in 1997, and I believe that Forrest Smith passed away in either 1998 or 1999. From what I've gathered, Forrest's daughter had much of the tooling destroyed, though I suspect that the component moulds still exist (note – these moulds were adjustable and could be expanded to produce the maximum length frame).

SERIAL NUMBERS

Seville and El Dorado serial numbers are another point of confusion. Most of the early sequences started at high number ranges such as 1,000, 2,000, or 3,000. In doing so, the lower numbers were left open for limited edition runs and special requests. Thus, serial numbers such as "S/N – 357M 31XX" may have been the "hundredth + XX" built or the "eleven-hundredth + XX" built, etc. The prefix also indicated the chambering. "44S-2000" would've been a stainless 44 Magnum. "357M" was used on the 357 Maximums, "454" was used on the Casull models, and "57S" represented the stainless 357 Magnum to name a few. When El Dorado Arms formed in 1980, they kept the "44" identifier, but stopped using a multiple of one-thousand. Their numbering started at 1.

Sig Himmelman left Sporting Arms in early 1984, just after the name was changed to United Sporting Arms. Once the company reorganized, they dropped the old convention and started at 0001. Prefixes stayed and were caliber specific, but they weren't obvious. Some examples include 6's for 45 Colts, 2's for 357 Maximums, and 4's for 41 Magnum. By 1986, new ownership spawned a third change in Seville numbering. Idaho guns were etched using 5 digits that began with 00001. Short of special editions or prototypes, the numbers were sequential until the operation folded.

Once in North Carolina, El Dorado Arms became a full-fledged custom shop. Serial numbers were done at the request of the customer, assuming no duplication of IDs. Most of the Chimney Rock guns I've seen use people's initials such as "LBM-1". My friend Dave Morris ordered a 375 SuperMag from Forrest and Russell in 1989. This was just after they received the stretch-frame moulds from Idaho, so they hadn't done Maximums yet. Since his 375 was to be the first from El Dorado Arms, he asked for "001" and they gave it to him. I purchased "001" in 2004 and when most folks see it, they assume it's the first

Chimney Rock gun. That isn't the case, but it is the first stretch-frame out of North Carolina short of any test guns. I should add that if you ever encounter an El Dorado with the serial number prefix of "FS", it was one of Forrest Smith's personal guns. Likewise, El Dorados labeled "RW" belonged to Russell Wood.

Abilene numbering contained prefixes too and can be equally confusing. The Riverhead variants used 10 for 357 Magnums, 40 on 45 Colts, and 50 for 44 Magnums. After Mossberg bought the model, some frames were already numbered, so this scheme can be found on North Haven guns. Eventually, Mossberg went with an "A" prefix and straight numbering.

The Appendix summarizes these numbering conventions from U.S. Arms and continuing through El Dorado Arms of North Carolina.

TIMELINE

Confused yet? With so many location and ownership changes, its no wonder folks convolute the history of these firearms. Below is a summary timeline of production, which is partially based on the J.C. Munnell article [2]:

- **1972** – Forrest Smith and Sig Himmelman build the Abilene prototype
- **1973** – United States Arms is formed in Riverhead, NY
- **1974** - United States Arms splits into United States Arms of Riverhead, NY and United Sporting Arms of Hauppauge, NY
- **1973 to 1979** – United States Arms of Riverhead produces the Abilene model
- **1974** – United Sporting Arms of Hauppauge begins producing the blued Seville
- **1976** – The Hauppauge facility begins to produce the stainless steel El Dorado
- **1979** – A second United Sporting Arms facility is set-up in Tombstone, AZ. Only blued guns were built here using Hauppauge parts
- **Mid 1979** – The Tombstone site is moved to Bisbee, AZ (less than 200 guns were produced at this location)
- **1980** – The Bisbee site is moved to Tucson, AZ. Around this time, United Sporting splits into El Dorado Arms of New York and Sporting Arms Inc. of Arizona. New York guns used the El Dorado name, while

the Arizona model was called the Seville (both stainless and blued guns were now available from Arizona).

- **1979 to 1983** – Mossberg acquires United States Arms and begins producing the Abilene in New Haven, CT.
- **1982** – Sporting Arms Inc. begins to manufacture “maximum” length frames.
- **Early 1983** – Sporting Arms, Inc. undergoes another ownership change and the name becomes “United Sporting Arms, Inc.”.
- **1983** - El Dorado Arms of Hauppauge ceases production. Russell Wood moves to North Carolina in 1984.
- **March 1984** – Sig Himmelman leaves United Sporting Arms. He would continue to build Sevilles however under the name “Sporting Arms Inc, Tucson, Arizona. Though the exact number of post ’84 “Sporting Arms, Inc.” guns is unknown, I believe it to be between 100 – 150.
- **Late 1985** – United Sporting Arms is sold to Buroly Industries and moves to Post Falls, Idaho. Only a couple hundred guns are produced at this location and their quality was sub-par
- **1988** – Forrest Smith moves from New York to North Carolina, and with Russell Wood, creates El Dorado Arms of Chimney Rock, NC. A new blued counterpart to the El Dorado is added (the Laredo model). A fixed sight single-action called the “Rebel” is also introduced. Interestingly enough, the first North Carolina El Dorados were assembled in Russell Wood’s living room. Eventually, a production facility was built near Forrest Smith’s home.
- **1988** – United Sporting Arms of Idaho sells its assets and the tooling/inventory is moved to Chimney Rock, NC. El Dorado Arms is now the combination of both the old United Sporting Arms (AZ) and El Dorado Arms of New York.
- **1997** – El Dorado Arms ends production.

STRETCH-FRAME GUNS & THE .375 SUPERMAG

For as many different Seville models that exist, I’ve always been hooked on the stretch-frame version. In part because they were stainless, a finish that was never offered on the Ruger Maximums. More importantly, they were chambered for real flat shooting rounds like the .357 and .375 SuperMags. I have

nine or ten in .375 and consider it to be one of the most overlooked handgun cartridges of recent times. Though it did capture the attention of silhouette shooters in the 1980s, the .375 SM was terribly short-lived. Dan Wesson chambered the round up through the early 1990s, but production numbers were low. Unfortunately, the .375 SuperMag was always an expensive and/or time consuming gun to shoot. Factory loaded ammunition was never mass-produced, in spite of Winchester manufacturing components for IHMSA (~100,000 cases made off of cut down .375 Winchester; the headstamp read “.IHMSA – 375 SM”). I acquired a box of 50 unfired shells when I bought a .375 Seville and due to its rarity I’ve kept them NIB. The only other option is to make the cases off of either .375 Winchester or .30-30 brass.....undoubtedly a step that would deter many shooters from working with the cartridge. Secondly, loading dies are uncommon and tend to be expensive. I have three sets of Reddings that are of excellent quality, but know that RCBS and CH-4D still make the .375 SuperMag. If you’re interested in the Reddings, they’re part of their custom series and cost around \$140.00. RCBS lists these under their Series H dies as “.375 USA Magnum”, which would make the price well over \$150.00. CH-4D is the most reasonably priced, and at last check, they went for \$69.00.

Load data for the .375 SuperMag (aka .375 USA) is somewhat inconsistent. The Hornady manual includes a section for this round using their 220 grain flat-point bullet, but the velocity figures seem low. With an 8.75” Dan Wesson, Hornady shows a 220 grain going at only 1,300 fps. One of the major reasons that the DW’s weren’t as fast is that some used a slow 1-12” to 1-14” twist, whereas that Sporting Arms version used a 1-18” (which would definitely help in the velocity department). My Seville came with suggested loads covering a wide-range of suitable powders. Some notable ones include:

| | Powder | Chg Wt (grs) | Velocity |
|-------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| 220 Hornady | WW296 | 24.0 | 1,671 |
| 220 Hornady | H110 | 26.0 | 1,709 |
| 220 Hornady | IMR 4227 | 23.5 | 1,639 |
| 220 Hornady | WW680 | 27.0 | 1,692 |
| 220 Hornady | 2400 | 21.5 | 1,688 |

Note – *all of these were from a 10.5” barreled Seville, and are considered maximum.*

For more, please see “.375 SuperMag – Seville Loads” in the appendix. The data is from United Sporting Arms original work with the round, circa 1983.

If you talk to a lot of the old IHMSA shooters, many preferred WW680 in the .375 SuperMag. Winchester did discontinue this powder back in the early 1990s, but surplus WW680 still exists. Fortunately, AA1680 is nearly identical to 680 and it works well in the SuperMag. Though I've yet to try them, I've also been told that H108 and H116 are close substitutes. One thing I do recommend is the use of large rifle primers in the .375 SuperMag. Large pistol will work, but most people have found that good accuracy requires a hotter spark. Since Seviles and El Dorados were tuned to very light trigger pulls, you may need a heavier mainspring when shooting large rifle. If so, Wolf spring kits can be adapted to the gun.

IHMSA worked with Hornady in the 1980s and altered the 220 grain bullet to accommodate the Dan Wesson SuperMag. This change also benefited the Seville. Their newsletter, "The Silhouette", detailed how the bullet's cannalure was moved up 0.050", allowing the full 1.60" worth of case to be used with a good crimp. The resulting cartridge was 2.100" long, or 0.04 – 0.05" shorter than the cylinder. The article also suggested trimming cases to 1.575 – 1.580" if standard Hornady 220s were used. Solid crimping could then be achieved and still made the loaded round fit the cylinder with 0.035" to spare. Like previous tests, The Silhouette set the 375 SuperMag's pressure max at 45,000 PSI.

Another long-framed Seville that I find intriguing is a Post Falls, Idaho prototype that was chambered for the .41 B&M Magnum. Though I've never even seen the gun mentioned in print, they exist because I spotted one on internet auction in early 2003. The description was vague, but did note that it was a 1 of 2 prototype which included a set of reloading dies and a second cylinder in .41 Remington Magnum. Originally, I thought that the round was simply a .414 SuperMag that had been coined the B&M Magnum (remember, U.S. Sporting Arms worked with the .41 Maximum prior to Dan Wesson), but it seems unlikely. Specifically, I doubt that they'd make a separate, long cylinder in .41 Mag since the Remington can be fired in a .414 chamber. Eventually, I got in touch with the current owner and he confirmed that the .41 B&M is a .445 SM necked down to handle 0.410" bullets. In the end, the gun sold for around \$750 and to this day I regret not buying it.

IN CLOSING...

One reason I decided to write this article is there's a lot of misinformation surrounding these guns. In fact, I've heard many conflicting stories as to who designed the revolver, how the models evolved, where they were built, etc., etc. Though this isn't the "end-all" to the history of the Seville & El Dorado, it will hopefully give credit where credit is due. Folks like Forrest Smith and Russell Wood deserve credit for their innovative "firsts in firearms". Sig Himmelman should be remembered for building some of the original SuperMags, the first production based 454 Casulls, Qwik-Kit guns, and the Competitor. He also created some outstanding limited editions like the WFDA Sevilles and Tombstone Commemoratives. My secondary goal is to dispel the myth that these revolvers were mere Blackhawk clones, because that isn't the case. Instead, they exist as high-end to custom grade single-actions that brought forth some unique innovations.

I don't often see Sevilles/El Dorados for sale, though I'm always looking. In the Munnell article, he estimated only around 7,000 guns were produced between the New York, Arizona, Idaho, and North Carolina facilities. Russell Wood indicated however that 4,500 guns were built in New York alone, with another 1,000 being produced in Chimney Rock. Adding to that the 200+ from Idaho and the Arizona runs and I'd estimate total production to be closer to 8,000 – 9,000. Again, this excludes any of the U.S. Arms Abilenes. Even so, consider for a moment that Ruger Maximums are rare with ~9,600 being shipped between 1982 and 1984....in other words, 1,000 more than the twenty-plus year Seville & El Dorado run.

Over the years, I've collected a lot of literature on these guns to include the following:

- El Dorado Arms Price Sheet (1989)
- El Dorado Arms Product Description Guide (1989)
- El Dorado Arms Price Sheet (1993)
- El Dorado Arms Product Description Guide (1993)
- IHMSA News – "El Dorado Arms" article (1992)
- U.S. Arms business card from the early 1970s
- U.S. Arms letterhead (mid-1970s)
- United Sporting Arms Letterhead (1984)
- United Sporting Arms business envelopes (1984/85)
- United Sporting Arms advertising slide: .454 Magnum, .375 USA, and .357 SuperMag (1984)
- United Sporting Arms dealer price list (1984)
- United Sporting Arms distributor price list (1984)
- United Sporting Arms consumer price list (1984)

- United Sporting Arms box labels (1984/85)
- El Dorado Arms business card (early 1990s)
- Original United Sporting Arms Seville & El Dorado advertising slide (mid-1970s)
- U.S. Arms price sheet (circa 1973)
- United Sporting Arms Seville Service Manual (1984-1985)
- Qwik-Kit conversion, advertising slide (early 1980s)
- Sporting Arms Silhouette Seville advertising slide (early 1980s)
- Sporting Arms Seviles, standard frame advertising slide (early 1980s)

If you would like photo-copies of any of the aforementioned, or have additional information to share, please write me at lee@singleactions.com. Also, I buy all variants of the Seville and El Dorado single-action. If you have one for sale, or know of one that's available, please drop me a line.

Note: I consider this article to be a work in progress. As I gather more information on the history of these guns, I'll make periodic updates.

THANKS TO: Russell Wood, Mike Violette, Sig Himmelmann, J.C. Munnell, Adolf Wegmann, Tom Wentz, Dave Morris, Nick Vesa, Virgil Varrone, James Conaway, and Rick Maples

VERY SPECIAL THANKS to John Himmelmann.....without his help, this article would not have been possible.

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[1] Havlin, Victor & Cheryl Havlin, Mossberg: More Gun For The Money, The History of O.F. Mossberg & Sons, Inc., 1995, pp. 245 – 248.

[2] Munnell, JC, "United Sporting Arms Inc.", 1999 Standard Catalog of Firearms: The Collector's Price & Reference Guide, 9 ed., Krause Publishing, 1999, pp. 1108 – 1111.

[3] Swiggett, Hal, "A Born Again Equalizer", Big-Bore Hanguns, Vol. 1, No. 2, Modern Day Periodicals, Inc., 1983, pp. 10-11.

APPENDIX – SERIAL NUMBERS

Listed below are some of the common serial number prefixes used on these guns. The appendix does not include all limited editions or prototypes.

U.S. Arms Abilenes (Riverhead , NY):

| | |
|-----------|------------|
| 10-00XXXX | 357 Magnum |
| 40-00XXXX | 45 Colt |
| 50-00XXXX | 44 Magnum |

U.S. Arms Abilenes (New Haven, CT – Mossberg):

Leftover stock from Riverhead

| | |
|-----------|------------|
| 10-00XXXX | 357 Magnum |
| 40-00XXXX | 45 Colt |
| 50-00XXXX | 44 Magnum |

New Haven numbering

| | |
|----------|------------------------|
| A-00XXXX | (not caliber specific) |
|----------|------------------------|

United Sporting Arms (Hauppauge, NY):

| | |
|----------|-------------------------------|
| 44-XXXX | Blued 44 Magnum Seville |
| 44S-XXXX | Stainless 44 Magnum El Dorado |
| 57-XXXX | Blued 357 Magnum Seville |
| 45-XXXX | Blued 45 Colt Seville |

United Sporting Arms (Tombstone, AZ):

| | |
|----------|--------------------------------|
| 44-XXXXT | Blued 44 Magnum Seville |
| 57-XXXXT | Blued 357 Magnum Seville |
| 45-XXXXT | Blued 45 Colt Magnum Seville |
| TC-XXX | Tombstone Commemorative, 44-40 |

United Sporting Arms (Bisbee, AZ):

| | |
|---------|---|
| QK-XX | Qwik-Kit Seville |
| 44-XXXX | Blued 44 Magnum Seville (Bisbee marked) |
| 45-XXXX | Blued 45 Colt Seville (Bisbee marked frame) |

Sporting Arms Inc (Tucson, AZ):

| | |
|-----------|--|
| 44-XXXX | Blued 44 Magnum Seville |
| 44S-XXXX | Stainless 44 Magnum Seville |
| 57-XXXX | Blued 357 Magnum Seville |
| 57S-XXXX | Stainless 357 Magnum Seville |
| 45SH-XXXX | Sheriff Seville, 45 Colt |
| 44SH-XXXX | Sheriff Seville, 44 Magnum |
| 41-XXXX | Blued 41 Magnum Seville |
| 41S-XXXX | Stainless 41 Magnum Seville |
| 454-XXXX | Stainless 454 Magnum Seville |
| 357M-XXXX | Stainless 357 Maximum Seville |
| WFDA-XX | World Fast Draw Association Seville, 45 Colt |

United Sporting Arms (Tucson, AZ):

| | |
|----------|---|
| 6-XXXX | Stainless 45 Colt Seville |
| 3-XXXX | Stainless 375 SuperMag Seville |
| 4-XXXX | Stainless 41 Magnum Seville |
| 1-XXXX | Stainless 44 Magnum Seville |
| 2-XXXX | Stainless 357 Maximum Seville |
| 7-XXXX | Stainless 454 Magnum Seville |
| 5SP-XXXX | 44 Special Seville w/brass grip and ejector |

United Sporting Arms (Post Falls, ID):

| | |
|-----------|----------------------|
| S/N-00XXX | Not caliber specific |
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El Dorado Arms (Hauppauge, NY):

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|--------|-------------------------------|
| 44-XXX | Stainless 44 Magnum El Dorado |
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El Dorado Arms (Chimney Rock, NC):

No standard prefix – custom serial numbers were used

PHOTOS

Please visit the “Seville Gallery” section of Single-Actions.com for photos of these fine revolvers. Also included are advertising slides, price lists, excerpts from service manuals, and pictures of some of the production sites.