

# SHOOTING RUGER'S MINI-MAGS

**Carryable, concealable, shootable—  
the sweet shootin' GP-100 and SP101!**

*By Rich Grassi*

I've been a fan of the Ruger DA revolvers from the second one I owned. The first one was rugged, all the way down to its too-heavy trigger pull. I quickly realized I couldn't hit a bull in the ass with such a rig. The lip I had to take from others on my smallish police agency, who had "better guns" also got the best of me.

I returned to the Security Six after trying the action on a new one a year or so later. Still a rugged gun but now the SS had a trigger that rivaled competing makes. I had a pair, a 6-inch and 4-inch heavy barrel. Both shot well and were tough as the ammo they consumed. A 2.75-inch Speed Six, essentially the Security Six with fixed sights, followed and ultimately stayed with me.

Since then, the Speed Six and Security Six series dropped from production. Along with the advent of the Ruger Redhawk and SP-101, and then we got the GP-100.

The GP came along somewhere along the mid-1980s, but I didn't get involved in it until recently. When I did, it also became obvious it was a keeper.

## **GP-100 Details**

The original .357 Magnum came out in 1935 from Smith & Wesson. Soon after its initial appearance, it was issued with a 3.5-inch barrel. This was the shortest barrel length possible without interfering with the ejector rod lug under the barrel.

Four-inch magnums showed up some years later and that barrel length became an industry standard. When



*Available for both Rugers, the Galco Metropolitan is a purse and holster.*

shorter guns became popular, the industry dropped back to sub-3-inch guns, the 2.75-inch Speed Six and 2.5-inch M19/66 Combat Magnums being representative of the breed.

As far as I'm concerned, for the optimum .357 Magnum revolver, we need a service size frame (or nearly so) and cylinder headed up with a 3-inch barrel.

The FBI agreed. Some 3-inch Model 19s existed in the 1960s, according to Skeeter Skelton. They ended up with the Model 13, a fixed sight .357, with a 3-inch barrel before going to autos. This is also a gun I'm fond of.

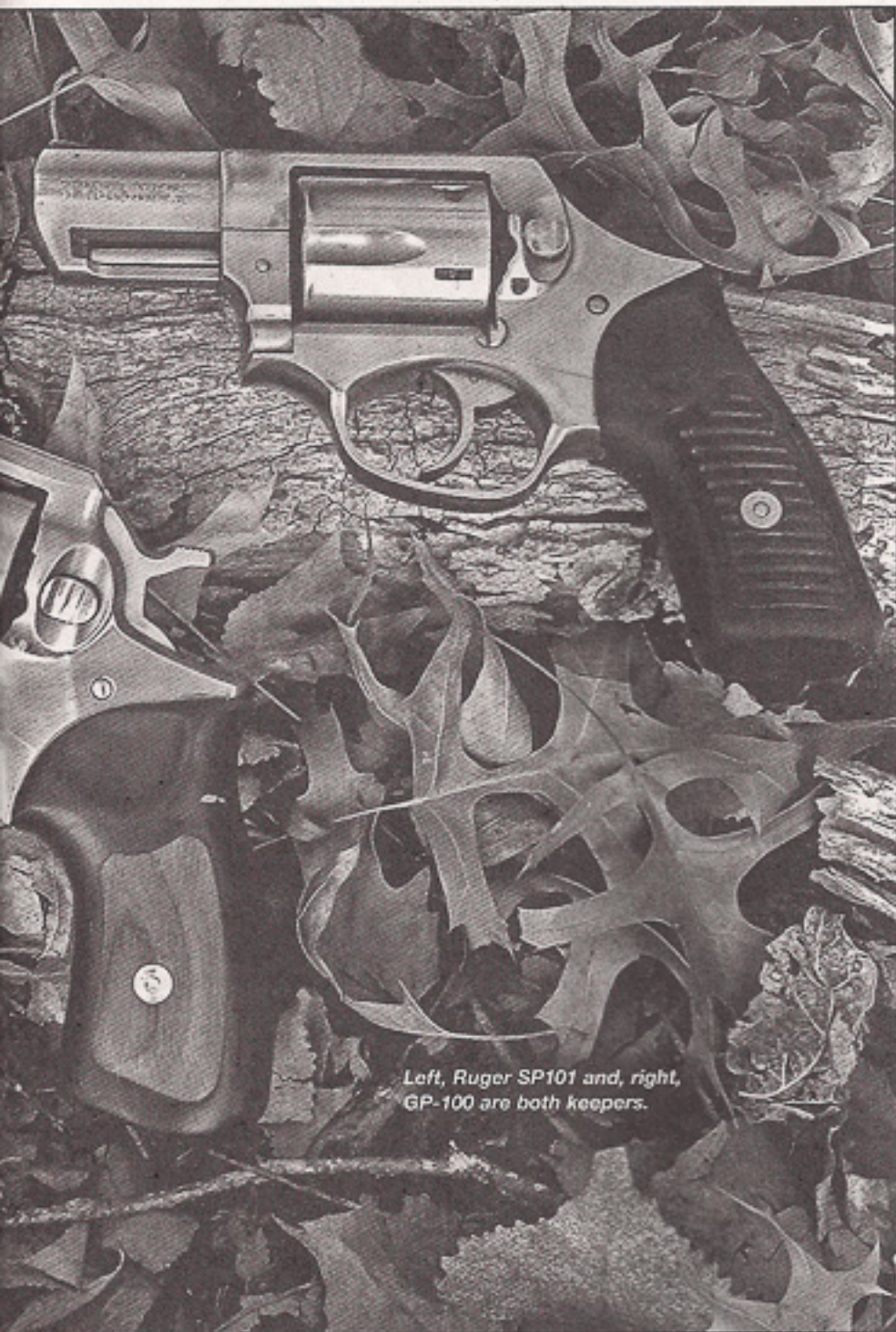
I came to prefer fixed sights on service and backup revolvers. Fixed sights won't be "knocked out of alignment" without knocking the barrel or frame out of whack. If that happens, there



are more problems than simply sighting. They won't be knocked off either. They are truly rough-duty sights. When you're in the gunfight, that's what you need.

In a fight over the gun, the greater the leverage a bad guy has, the greater the chance of a successful disarming assault. I don't need that. My barrel preference is short.

In fact, the 3-inch barrel on the service size revolver is about perfect. The 2-inch snub is even better in the gun grab prevention area but it is too easy to make a sighting error at any distance past 15 yards (yes, it does happen that far out, not often, but Murphy is present). The 3-inch tube gives us the best



Left, Ruger SP101 and, right, GP-100 are both keepers.

compromise of accuracy, power, concealability and retention characteristics.

My Ruger GP-100 has a 3-inch partly lugged barrel. It is fabricated of stainless steel and weighs about 35 ounces unloaded. Like earlier Ruger revolvers, the GP has a frame-mounted firing pin and transfer bar safety. The trigger has to be pressed to push the transfer bar into alignment, allowing the strike of the hammer to be transmitted to the firing pin.

The hammer spring is a coil spring. The trigger group is mounted into the triggerguard unit. The cylinder release is a push button on the left side of the receiver. The cylinder locks in the rear and forward, on the crane. There is no

real grip frame, but a stud that contains the mainspring unit. The stocks are made of recoil-absorbing rubber with rosewood inserts.

#### SP101 Details

The Ruger SP101 is a heavily built snubnose small-framed revolver. The sample, a 2.25-inch .357 Magnum, double-action-only with spurless hammer, is a personally owned firearm purchased in the few years after the line's introduction in the early 1990s.

Weighing in at around 25 ounces, this stainless steel powerhouse is a little hefty for a backup gun, which was its role before 2001. Originally tried with

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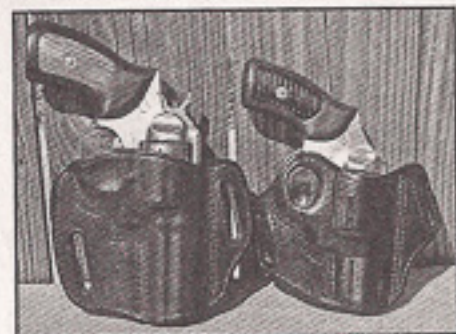
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The Hume H721 (left) is built for the 3" GP-100. The Bulman FBS is made for the little brother SP101.

Remington 125-grain JHP Magnums, the author declined to continue that abuse opting instead for Remington or Winchester 110-grain JHP rounds.

While the 125s were stout for present company, they were no match for the sturdy 5-shooter. The object of this piece consumed a good many of them when shot by others and myself, involved in the gun's early examination.

That the gun is sturdy should be no surprise. It shares the GP-100's non-rotating ejector rod, front lockup and, for user comfort, some of the best recoil-absorbing stocks of any factory revolver.

The SP101 was originally rendered in .38 Special, overbuilt as these were the waning days of the revolver in law enforcement. Everyone at the time was trying to pack as much power into the Special as could be had and manufacturers were happily churning out +P for everyone, and +P+ for agencies who signed "please don't sue us" letters.

The SP101 easily consumed anything thrown at it. Enterprising armorers were known to punch the chambers out to allow the consumption of .357 Magnum ammunition. The heaviest round that could chamber in these conversions was the 125-grain JHP from various makers.

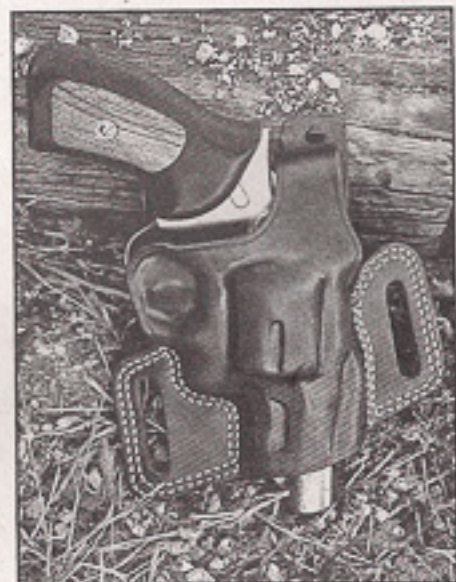
Most gun types liked that round anyway. Anything heavier was too long and protruded from the cylinder face, tying up the otherwise reliable cannon.

Eventually, Ruger lengthened the cylinder window and cylinder 1/10 of an inch to allow anything in factory .357 inventory to fit. Having checked back then, it does.

I carried this "first successful small .357" as a backup gun, usually in win-



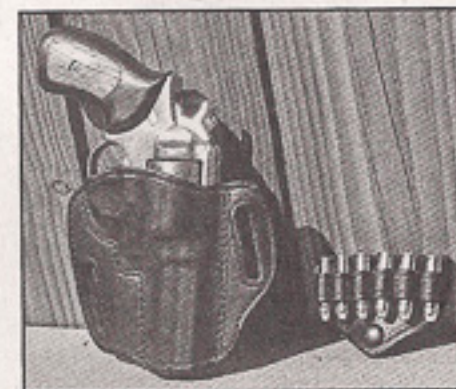
The SP101 is shown with the new Cor-Bon DPX Magnum load.



Galco's High Ride Silhouette is an open bottom belt slide holster to allow carry of revolver with longer barrel.



The Kramer Belt Scabbard is tastefully finished in stingray. It nicely complements the utilitarian GP-100.



The Don Hume H721 Open Top "Double Nine" is a close-riding, fast-drawing holster. The D405 bullet loop belt slide is a handy way to carry spare ammo.

ter. The normal carry mode was in the side pocket of the heavy wool uniform trousers accessible to the left hand. A Bianchi Speed Strip or two, filled with Magnums, resided in a shirt pocket.

## Holsters

I selected a sample of packing gear for the Ruger wheelguns. Revolver holsters, other than cowboy types, are

getting a little thin, so it took some looking.

As I carried the SP101 in the backup role, I selected the high end Kramer Pocket Holster. For belt carry, the Bulman FBS (Full Belt Slide) was selected, as was the Galco Speed Master and a Kydex paddle holster from Center of Mass Tactical.

Knowing that one of the two Rugers could be selected for carry by female licensees, I looked to Galco for a solution. Mike Barham sent along the Metropolitan Holster Handbag for examination.

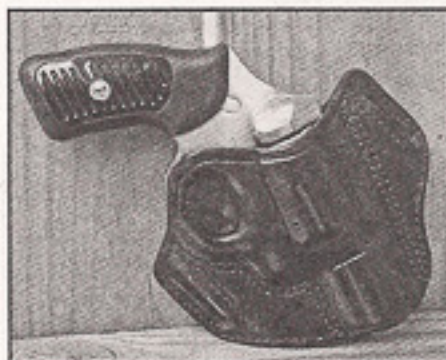
The Galco Silhouette and Don Hume 721 OT (Open Top) were selected for the GP-100.

## GP-100 Carry

Do you think a 35-ounce concealed carry piece is too heavy? Consider the alternatives. Lighter guns don't always yield the best on-target results either in terms of accuracy or power. Really light guns with lots of power usually are too punishing to practice with regularly. If the user remembers to dress around the gun, not wear a gun according to



COM Tactical's Kydex Paddle Holster is a comfortable way to carry the Ruger SP101.



The Bulman Full Belt Scabbard is a tightly molded, pancake-style holster. It requires breaking in before use.

clothing style, the 3-inch GP-100 is no problem to hide.

When the gun was first acquired, I used the Don Hume H721 OT holster. Also known as the "Double Nine," this rig is available for revolvers and autopistols. If you own both and periodically carry each of them, this is a way to have the same holster for each. Your hand goes to the same place for either gun and that commonality helps your speed and confidence.

The "OT" refers to the holster's open top. There are no snaps or straps. The 3-inch GP-100 fits snugly enough in my sample that it is quite secure. It's also comfortable.

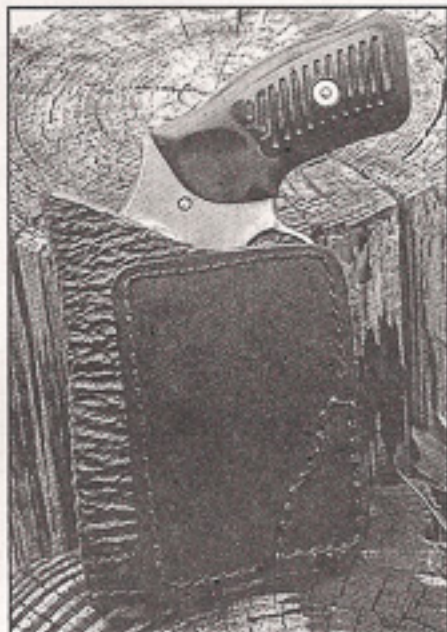
Mine has the natural, saddle tan finish with white stitching. That doesn't matter when the gun is concealed, but I still like the look. My new H721OT is of a darker brown and it is tightly boned to the gun.

The belt slots are extended beyond the holster pouch front and back. They are covered on my original sample and open on the newer. The resulting effect is a "pancake" style holster that fits closely to the wearer. There is a body shield on the back face of the holster. This keeps perspiration off of the handgun, but it also keeps a loose shirt from getting caught between gun and holster, preventing a complete re-holstering of the gun.

Along the same lines, the Galco Silhouette is a high ride belt slide holster. It has a reinforced thumb-break safety strap. This rig is an open muzzle design, making it handy to carry GPs of various barrel lengths using the same holster.



The Kramer Pocket Holster was in sharkskin, an attractive and protective finish.

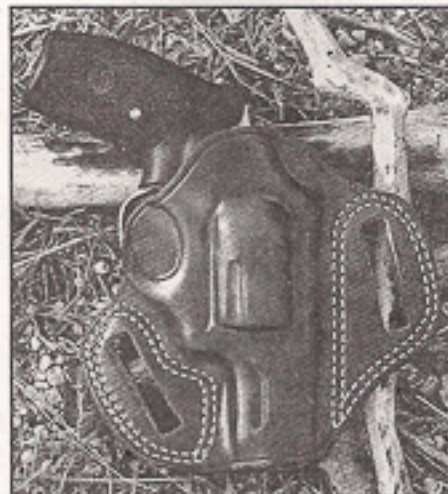


The outside (away from the body) of the Kramer Pocket Holster has a piece of plastic laminate to disguise the gun.

Tell the truth, it's hard finding leather for the 3-inch revolver.

The Silhouette has 1-3/4-inch belt loops and works okay on a 1-1/2-inch belt that is cinched tightly. My sample was in tan. It's a nice-looking holster, and also fine for all but the closest concealment.

The fine folks at Don Hume added something I hadn't seen for some time, a six-round snap-on belt slide unit. Handy for the (rare) tactical reload for revolvers, the "bullet loops" are ideally placed right in front of the holster. If there is the fabled "lull in the action," you can open the cylinder, put upward pressure on the ejector rod and then let it drop without ejection. The empty rounds, swelled from the pressure of firing will stay up, allowing their removal



Ruger SP101 is a natural match for the well-named Galco Speed Master.

by fingernails. The few empties plucked out, the bullet loops allow quick refilling without sacrificing rounds to use a speedloader.

It may not seem likely and maybe the bullet loops are a security blanket for an old-timer, but it's good to see them back.

The Kramer Belt Scabbard has long been a favorite of mine for casual concealment of autopistols. The revolver version was quite a surprise. It was the typical high quality one normally sees from Kramer; tightly boned to the gun, rigid horsehide, and secure without requiring long periods of breaking in.

The surprise was that the holster was faced in stingray. Now, I'm not a huge fan of exotics on concealment holsters; no one can see the beauty of the holster artist. I'm willing to re-examine that position now. If I can get fancy stocks for the 3-inch GP100, I think that the gun and holster would be appropriate for a barbecue.

The Galco Metropolitan handbag

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is a large business case. There is a key strap, cellular phone pocket and a place for eyeglasses. As one might expect, there is a side-entry holster pocket. It closes up with a locking zipper.

Made of nylon microfiber, the bag is light. The high-class leather accents, and handles and nicked hardware are Galco trademarks. Our sample was black and very tastefully rendered. My wife liked its looks and she's very picky when it comes to purses.

## SP101 Carry

Stashing a 25-ounce, 2.25-inch snubnose magnum takes some thought. On those rare occasions where the SP101 would be the "up-front" main line of defense, I selected a few belt holsters.

Among these was the Galco Speed Master. Another open-top, pancake type, belt slide holster, the Speed Master is a tightly molded high ride rig. Double stitched in beige thread, the holster in tan, its appearance is striking. The fore and aft belt loops are set to give the holster a strong forward cant in the FBI style of old. This makes for a quick "shoulder forward, shoulder back" presentation.

The cant somewhat mitigates the high position of the gun in the holster. The triggerguard is covered; for many years holsters for double-action revolvers had exposed triggerguards. The Speed Master is a classic revolver holster style, well rendered.

For quick on/off, I got Center Of Mass Tactical's kydex paddle holster. There are times when pistol permit licensees and retired officers have to disarm, such as when entering a federal building. The COM paddle makes that sidearm removal and replacement chore easy.

The triggerguard is covered and tension is adjustable. I noticed that the draw from the Center of Mass unit is quick too. In spite of the chunky Ruger's mass, the COM holster made carrying it comfortable.

I contacted Josh Bulman to see what he had for the Ruger' revolver line. He didn't have any molds for the odd-size GP-100, but he could fit a holster up for the SP101. He sent the FBS. This rig is another pancake style holster,

## SPECIFICATIONS:

### RUGER GP-100 (KGPF-331)

**Caliber:** .357 Mag  
**Barrel:** 3 inches  
**OA Length:** 8.25 inches  
**Weight:** 35 ounces  
**Stocks:** Rubber with rosewood inserts  
**Sights:** Fixed  
**Action:** DA/SA  
**Finish:** Satin stainless  
**Capacity:** 6-shot  
**Price:** \$597

## SPECIFICATIONS:

### RUGER SP101 (KSP-321XL)

**Caliber:** .357 Mag  
**Barrel:** 2.25 inches  
**OA Length:** 7 inches  
**Weight:** 25 ounces  
**Stocks:** Rubber with synthetic insert  
**Sights:** Fixed  
**Action:** DAO  
**Finish:** Satin stainless  
**Capacity:** 5-shot  
**Price:** \$530

## PERFORMANCE: RUGER GP100

Load	5-shot group	Best 3/5	Notes
Remington 158gr SJHP	4 1/4"	2 1/2"	Hot load!
Winchester 145gr STHP	4 1/2"	3 1/4"	—
Black Hills 125gr JHP	3 13/16"	1 1/2"	—
Cor-Bon 125gr JHP	4 5/8"	3 1/2"	—

GP100 Accuracy test, shooting at 25 yards from a rest (Outer's Pistol Perch)—single action shooting

## PERFORMANCE: RUGER SP101

Load	5-shot group	Best 3/5	Notes
Black Hills 158gr JHP	2"	1 1/2"	Hot load, heavy slug
Cor-Bon 125gr DPX	2 1/4"	1"	Smooth ejection, no flash. Moderate blast.
CCI Blazer 125gr JSP	2 5/8"	1 1/4"	Lots of flash, blast
UMC 125gr JSP	3"	1 7/8"	Lots of blast

SP101 (no single action operation) 10 yards, shooting without support, Weaver grip and stance

## PERFORMANCE RUGER GP100 AND SP101

Draw time—to single hit. Start—hands hanging at sides, gun secured in holster. Five attempts per gun fired from 7 yards. Time measured in seconds.

	GP100— Galco Silhouette High Ride	SP101— Galco Speedmaster
Attempt 1	1.5	1.7
Attempt 2	1.4	1.4
Attempt	1.4	1.7
Attempt	1.6	1.7
Attempt	1.4	1.6
Average	1.46	1.62

Note—While the SP101 was shorter and the Speedmaster isn't hampered by the thumb-break safety strap, it holds the gun much closer in to the side slowing the first step of the draw—GRIP. While neither setup was a total speed rig, these are concealment holsters and are not range training holsters.

very rigidly molded to the gun. A forward cant, the revolver butt rides tilted up. The precision molding is incredible. There is a depression inside the triggerguard, behind the trigger. This is

additional security for the gun. You might say that could cause the gun to fire if the hammer was cocked. My SP101 is DAO; it can only be trigger cocked during firing.

This is a very tastefully rendered holster, a high-end rig for professional users. I don't think you can go wrong looking at this holster or this holster maker. If I were carrying this revolver as the main protective firearm on a serious job, I'd give the full coverage Full Belt Slide a hard look. It does require a break-in. I believe the holster will easily outlast me.

Finally, the SP101 is a very heavy backup gun. In exchange for the weight, you get lots of power and good handling. I asked for one of the famous Kramer Pocket Holsters, set up for my left hand. I figure my right hand will be busy doing something else and like to have a gun available for the other hand.

Like the Belt Scabbard, the Pocket

Holster was "duded-up" with a covering of shark. Aside from being attractive, the shark hide is protective. It works pretty well for the shark. The outside of the holster has a plastic laminate shield that disguises the shape of the revolver, making it look like a wallet. The body side is precision molded and this one has the sharkskin cover. The holster has a high projection at the top of the front edge, the better to mitigate the hammer spur snagging on fabric.

The chunky SP101 rides comfortably in the Kramer Pocket Holster. My hand rests comfortably on its rubber stocks inside the pocket, not a threatening stance by any means, but quick to action when needed.

The Kramer Pocket Holster is justifiably famous.

### Final Notes

This pair of Rugers will do what's needed, when needed. Loaded with the new Cor-Bon 125-grain DPX round, which is rated nominally at 1300 fps, either will get the job done.

While there aren't tons of holsters out there to fit around them, the ones that I found are amongst the highest in terms of quality and value. I'm sure there are some I missed; we are blessed with some of the finest leathersmiths (and plasticsmiths) in our history.

If you are a revolver fan or feel more comfortable with the format, there are none better than the GP-100 and SP101.

### For more information, contact:

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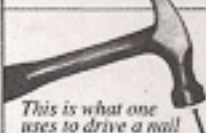
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