

BLACK POWDER SHOOTING IS FUN!

(This commentary by D. Goodwin, of the Tasmanian Pistol and Revolver Club, is reprinted by kind permission of the T.P.&R.C. and was submitted by Norm Tilley, Chairman of the APSUA Technical Committee).

Of all the disciplines shot on the T.P.&R.C. range, the one that appears to create the most fun is the Black Powder Shoot. Busy individuals can be seen pouring powder into chambers, or appearing to do an on-the-spot lube job with their favourite replica. To the new shooter this doesn't sound like the joys of pistol shooting, but take my word for it, it is.

The laborious tasks don't start until the firearm returns home. There one must strip it right down, including removal of the grips. Do I hear someone say "Phooey! I've got a stainless job and she'll be O.K." Well, Fred, I've got news for you. Stainless or not, it must be stripped down and cleaned.

The main benefit of a stainless job is that you can scrub away without removing the blueing. Side benefits are that they don't rust with moisture as easily as does a blued firearm.

The reason for cleaning a black powder firearm after each shoot is that large quantities of solid residue, generated when the powder burns, clings to everything it touches. It makes the pistol and the shooter look as if they have just crawled through a chimney. The residue is highly hygroscopic (it absorbs moisture from the air with great rapidity). Non-cleaning can result in an inaccurate shooting iron, and moreover, a dangerous one. Rust results in a loss of inherent strength.

How do you clean the firearm? The answer is simple. Black powder fouling is water soluble. For centuries it has been washed out, or wiped off with a wet rag. So remove the grips and wipe thoroughly with a wet rag. Dismantle the metal-works, remove the nipples from the cylinders, etc. All small parts can be placed in a jar with a tight fitting lid; half fill it with HOT water and a small amount of washing up detergent (beware of powder detergents. If small lumps are left undissolved, they are highly corrosive on stainless steel). This container can now be shaken vigorously, drained, and filled with fresh HOT water, minus detergent, and again shaken vigorously. Repeat this action until all detergent is dispersed. Small parts can now be laid on paper or rag to aid drying.

Large parts (frame, cylinder, etc.) can be placed in a basin or bucket and treated in a similar manner. Use a bristle brush to scrub the bores of barrel and cylinder. Some people prefer not to use any detergent and still produce a clean firearm, so I suspect that its value is more psychological than real — except where the fouling has become solidly caked.

Hot water has a dual purpose — it makes cleansing easier and the metal heats up, thereby assisting drying off.

The final drying can be accomplished successfully by any of three methods. The first is to switch the oven on, with the temperature control set to 200-250 degrees F and place all parts, with the exception of grips, into the oven for about 30 minutes. This is guaranteed to dry out every nook and cranny. The fire-

arm must be allowed to cool slowly prior to re-assembly.

2. Blow off with compressed air. Not every home has a compressor but a lot have a vacuum cleaner with a reversible connection. A cork pushed into the end of the hose and containing through it a 4 mm diameter metal tube makes, in effect, a compressor.

3. Use a hair dryer and blast all parts with hot air.

The advantage of blowing off all moisture is that it allows immediate assembly. The disadvantage is that moisture is not removed as thoroughly as it would be with the oven method.

When assembling, all moving parts must be lubricated (not swamped) with oil. No need to buy expensive gun oils, ordinary paraffin oil is just as satisfactory.

A quick and 'so-called' cleaning method, is to buy a can of commercial black powder solvent, squirt the firearm all over and pray! All one ends up with is a conglomerated mess, which in turn has to be washed off or wiped off. So you may as well do the job properly in the first place and **use the solvent that comes from the laundry tap.**

To sum up, the cleaning sounds like a belluva lot of work but once into the swing of things, takes practically no time at all and the bonus is that you don't have to purchase a new black powder firearms every twelve months.

P.S. For shooters with Ruger Old Army firearms, it is recommended that you purchase a Lee 456-220 IR mould. This mould was designed specifically for the Ruger Old Army.