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Page 110
John Wootters once said the magnetic dampened balance powder scale was the greatest invention in the evolution of handloading. If that’s true, then the electronic powder scale tops the balance scale by a measure of 9, heck, make it 10 on a scale of 10.

The problem with a balance scale is time – it takes lots of it to dump the powder in the pan, wait for the scale to stop oscillating, then top the charge off or take a bit of powder out of the pan, and wait for the scale to stabilize. Then adjust the powder a bit more, and wait again, repeating each step until the desired powder charge is obtained. Even if you use a powder measure to dump the initial charge, it will be off just a tad one way or the other, and requires fine-tuning – more time.

An electronic powder scale reads the weight of the charge almost immediately and reacts to fine-tuning in a second or so. In retrospect, an electronic powder scale would have saved days, possibly weeks, when I was averaging well over 1,000 rounds a week, 52 weeks a year using the balance scale for handgun and rifle reloading projects, sometimes three or four projects at a time.

When the new electronic powder measure with integral scales showed up a few years ago, the handloading process was speeded up a bit more, although the real time savings was with larger powder charges used in rifles. Handgun cartridges could still be charged fairly quickly with a volume dipper and/or measure and/or electronic scale with cases set up in loading blocks.

More recently, the second generation of measures/scales has fine-tuned the powder measuring chore a bit more. The one I’m using now is the RCBS ChargeMaster 1500 Scale and Dispenser. As the name implies, it consists of a scale and dispenser that are connected to work as an integral unit. It is programmable, with memory for up to 30 charges, and somewhat faster than the first generation measure/trickler that was a bit, well... sluggish. The new unit is also smaller, more compact, and takes up less space on the bench – and on my bench that is a decided plus.

I suppose the feature that attracted me the most was the programmable memory. I don’t do feature handloading projects anymore, mostly because I simply don’t have the time, but I do work on personal projects quite a bit, and while most standard powder charges are etched somewhere in the back of my head – like 16.5 grains of 2400 with RCBS 45-270-SAA cast bullets or 250-grain Remington swaged lead bullets over 7.3 grains of W-231 in the .45 Colt – I do venture into new territory now and then, such as the 7mm and .325 WSM. I used W-760 in both cartridges, since it is closest to the non-canister powder Winchester uses in factory loads, but there was data available for the 7mm, and all I had to do was work up a suitable load.

The .325 WSM was another matter entirely, since no load data was available. So I started from scratch, working up in one-grain increments from 10 percent below a charge used in factory loads. The list of loads used was logged in my ledger and taped to the upper shelf on the loading bench while work was in progress. Final charges were chosen by miking case heads and comparing that data to factory loads as described in Handloader No. 235.

Now those loads are programmed into the memory of the RCBS 1500 and entered in the log book. Maybe I’m getting lazy or something after 50 years of handloading, but the memory feature in the 1500 is just too easy.

Many years ago, as an aspiring freelance outdoor/shooting/hunting/handloading writer, I subscribed to the magazine Writer’s Digest. I was using an Olympic electric typewriter at the time but followed new developments in computers and word processing programs. In one issue, a
A columnist went on sort of a rant regarding word processors – explaining, “If you are a writer, or pretend to be one, and you aren’t using a word processor (as opposed to a typewriter) you are an idiot.”

Those were somewhat harsh words, but later I went to the local Radio Shack and bought a TRS-80 computer, a word processing program and a printer. The ensemble was primitive by present standards (it had to be programmed to do anything), but it worked, although I could type faster than the printer could print.

As personal computers evolved, I tried to keep up, and finally just quit, mostly because of the prohibitive cost of keeping up, and went back to the electric typewriter. Then, a few years back, I decided it would be a lot better for me (and the other folks in the office) if I at least had a computer in my office - just in case I might learn how to use it. So it is with electronic powder measures and scales.

It’s just a guess, but I’ve been using an electronic powder scale for five years or so. When the new dispensers came out, I rejected them outright – much slower than doing the job manually. Now that the RCBS 1500 is sitting on the loading bench, and I’ve had a chance to become somewhat familiar with it - I’m still learning - I’m inclined to remember the comment by that columnist many years ago, to paraphrase and tone it down a bit, “If you think you want to be a handloader and you aren’t using an electronic scale (and dispenser), you’re kidding yourself.”

The following is the result of a hunt a couple of months back, as this is written. The rifle was a Kimber Model 8400 that was rebarreled to .325 WSM by Bill Atkinson (910 Garland Drive, Prescott AZ 86305) with a 26-inch Douglas barrel and a Dave Manson .325 reamer. Velocities were 3,080 fps for the 200 grainers and 3,187 fps for the 180-grain Barnes Triple-Shock. A Swarovski 4-12x rail mount scope was mounted on Weaver bases and set on 5x to 6x throughout the hunt.

The first animal addressed with the Model 8400 was a black wildebeest at 190 to 200 yards, slightly downhill, with the bull facing the rifle. The 200-grain Nosler AccuBond hit an inch or so to the right of dead center in the chest. The bull dropped in his tracks. The recovered bullet was a bit roughed up but penetrated about two feet, making a serious mess of the clockwork.

A gemsbok was taken at around 80 yards, again facing the rifle. The Barnes 180-grain Triple-
Handloader 236

Shock hit dead center, and the animal ran a few feet and fell over. The bullet passed over the heart and was recovered from the lower stomach.

Another gemsbok took a 200-grain A-Frame behind the shoulder, about midway between the sternum and top of the back as it stood broadside about 80 to 90 yards. It dropped immediately but was shot again in the lower neck with a 200-grain AccuBond. Neither bullet penetrated completely but were not recovered. (The insurance shot on the gemsbok, or any spiral-horned animal, is basically because even a seriously wounded bull can get up and stick one or both of those long, beautiful horns through you.)

A bull kudu was shot broadside at around 80 yards with a 180-grain Triple-Shock just below the spine. The bull dropped instantly, but an insurance shot was administered from a few yards to finish the matter. Both bullets passed through.

A blue wildebeest was hit with a Barnes Triple-Shock at about 225 yards just below the spine. The bull tried to get up but was finished with a similarly placed shot but from the opposite side, from a range of around 150 to 160 yards. Both bullets passed through.

A 600- to 700-pound Hartman's mountain zebra was hit at a bit of an angle, behind the shoulder on the left side at a measured 174 yards. The Barnes Triple-Shock stopped in the offside shoulder, and the animal dropped where it stood.

A red hartebeest was hit near the last rib on the left side at a slight quartering angle. The Swift A-Frame stopped in the shoulder on the offside. The beast ran a few yards and dropped.

Craig Boddington borrowed the Kimber 8400 and shot a gemsbok close behind the shoulder at around 100 yards with the 180-grain Barnes Triple-Shock. The bull staggered and fell over.

Yet another gemsbok was hit a bit off the mark — I was aiming at the last rib for a forward racking shot from the left side, similar to the hartebeest mentioned above — in the left leg with a Swift A-Frame at something less than 100 yards. The bullet exited the upper leg and entered the lower stomach, traveling forward to the right lung. Averaging estimates offered by the Professional Hunter Pete Kibble, the tracker,
the cameraman and myself, the bull covered close to five miles before collapsing. I don’t know if the bullet hit a limb, it was a bit brushy, or if I misjudged the angle. Either way the result is the same: a poor hit.

In all, the first .325 WSM to enter Africa produced fine results on plains game ranging from 300-pound wildebeest to 600- to 700-pound zebra with three bullets. Not to ignore the errant shot placement on the gemsbok, all three bullets penetrated well and dropped a variety of plains game with considerable authority.

As an anecdote to the effectiveness of the .325 WSM, several of our party were gathered on the patio. There was a discussion regarding a bit of difficulty one hunter had in putting a particular animal on the ground. I noticed Pete and his tracker, Poulus, were having their own little parlay as well. Then Pete walked over and said, “Poulus thinks they should let the old man shoot.” I had no idea who he was referring to and asked, “Who’s that?” Pete raised his index finger, pointed it at my nose and offered in his best British brogue, “You, because you have the big gun, old boy.” (Of course, Poulus was not referring to “big caliber,” but “big medicine.”)

For those who might be contemplating a hunt in Africa for plains game, contact Dirk DeBod, Dirk DeBod Safaris Namibia (PO Box 11621, Windhoek Namibia; phone 011-26461221038). I had the pleasure of hunting with Pete Kibble for most of the 10-day excursion and enjoyed his expertise and sense of humor immensely. The accommodations were first-class, and as Boddington quipped when we first entered our tent, “This is the first time I’ve been in a tent that’s nicer than my house.” And he hadn’t even seen the plush bathtub and chrome plumbing in the back of the tent!
The stunned look on my son’s face indicated something had gone wrong with the cartridge he had just fired. Opening the bolt on his Remington Model Seven rifle required tapping the handle with a hammer. The primer pocket of the fired 7mm-08 case was blown to about twice its normal size, and the case and bolt face were covered with black soot from escaping powder gas. Brian’s safety glasses had shielded his eyes, and other than a few flecks of powder that had stung his cheek, he was no worse for the wear.

Are You Trimming Cases?

The question remained, though, of what had caused the cartridge to develop such excessive pressure. I had loaded the 7mm-08 with a reduced powder charge to lessen recoil for practice. A double charge of the powder would not fit in a case. However, just to make certain, I weighed each of the remaining cartridges. I also measured the length of the cartridges and the cases. Of the 80-some remaining cartridges, two of the cases measured way over the 7mm-08’s maximum length of 2.035 inches.

I was confident those few hundreds of an inch of excessive case length caused the high pressure that had jeopardized my son’s safety. On chambering, the mouth of the too long case neck jammed into the front of the chamber throat. Closing the bolt jammed the case mouth into the bullet. The case mouth was wedged so tightly between the bullet and the chamber throat that the case mouth could not safely expand to release the bullet. The pressure went through the roof.

Ever since that evening, I have checked to make certain every rifle case is the correct length before reloading it. Paying attention to that neglected re-

Facing page, cases stretch most when they are inserted in a resizing die. Below, trimming cases is an often overlooked reloading step. The difference in the maximum length and trim-to length of most cases is .01 inch. Below right, this .01 inch is all the brass that has to be cut off a .30-06 case to make reloads safe and more accurate.
ökelled
Loading
Step
Handloader 236

loading step has made my hand-
loads safer, a better quality and
more accurate. Along the way I
also learned a few techniques to
minimize case stretching and
found a few tools to reduce the
time required to trim cases.

**CASE STRETCH CAUSES**

Cases supposedly stretch on
firing and lengthen even more
when fired with a maximum
amount of powder. Case bodies
with a lot of taper from their
head to the shoulder also pur-
portedly stretch an inordinate
amount. To determine how much
cases of various designs stretch
on firing, I measured a batch of
once-fired Winchester factory
loaded .22-250 Remington cases
and .25 Winchester Super Short
Magnum cases before and after
firing. The .22-250’s trim-to length is
1.902 inches, and maximum case
length is 1.912 inches.) I neck-
sized half the cases and full-
length sized the remaining half
and trimmed all the cases to
1.902 inches in length. Five each
of the neck-sized and five each of
the full-length sized cases were
loaded with 31.0 grains and 36.0
grains of Varget powder and
Sierra 55-grain BlitzKing bul-
lets. The loads were fired in an
old Ruger Model 77 .22-250 Rem-
ington.

Believe it or not, 8 of the 10
.22-250 cases from the two sets
of light loads actually shrank .001
inch in length. The two remain-
ing cases stayed the same length.
This ever so slight amount of
shrinkage may have been from
the cases forming themselves
more completely to the rifle
chamber. With real low-pressure
loads, the force of the firing
primer may even shorten a case
equally to cause excessive head-
space. The five neck-sized and
five full-length sized cases loaded
with the maximum amount of
powder remained the same
length after firing.

The .25 WSSM cases were full-
length resized and trimmed to
1.660 inches in length. Half the
cases were loaded with 42.0
grains and the other half with
44.5 grains of H-4350 and Hor-
nady 117-grain Spire Point boat-
tails (SPBT). The length of the
.25 super short cases remained
unchanged when fired with the
light amount of powder. The
cases firing the maximum amount
of powder grew in length, at the
most, .002 inch.

The resizing die is where the
cases stretched in length.

**Case necks grow in
length during insertion
into the sizing die.**
The once-fired Winchester factory .22-250 Remington cases grew in length .002 inch when half the length of their necks was sized by backing a full-length sizing die out of the press a couple turns. In comparison, full-length sized cases grew in length about .005 inch. The extra length was no doubt from sizing the case body and the fact that the squeezed down brass had to go somewhere.

The .25 WSSM cases stretched a similar amount. Fired with

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minimum amount of powder, the cases lengthened .003 and .004 inch. Cases that fired the maximum powder charge grew .004 inch. However, after .25 WSSM cases have been fired a few times, they do seem to quit stretching.

For years I thought a case neck stretched at least somewhat when an expander ball in a resizing die was pulled squeaking and rasping through the inside of a dry neck. Lightly lubricating the inside of case necks removed the grating noise, allowed the expander ball to easily slip through case necks and, I was sure, stopped any stretching of the necks. About all lubricating the necks does, though, is reduce wear on the inside of the necks.

Case necks grow in length during insertion into the sizing die, not when the cases are removed and the necks dragged over the expander ball. I ran a .25 WSSM case into an RCBS resizing die, then unthreaded the decapping rod from the resizing die as I removed the case. This left the expander ball inside the case. I measured the case length, then ran it back into the die far enough to rethread the decapping rod. Measuring the case after it had been pulled out of the die and over the expander ball showed no increase in length. This test was done with several cases, and none of them changed in length.

Repeated trimming is unnecessary when an RCBS X-Die is used.

Carrying Out a Boring Job

When I was first married, the only rifle cartridges I reloaded were the .30-06 and .250 Savage. I had only a few boxes of cases at a time to trim. So in the evenings, my wife read her mystery novels,
and I sat across the room, little squeaks coming from the Lee hand tool as I trimmed cases, one twist of the cutter at a time. Small bumps of muscles formed on my index finger and thumb from hours of twisting the Lee case trimmer.

For my birthday one year, my wife gave me a Forster case trimmer. The Forster’s collet held and released cases with a flick of the wrist. I could crank the Forster’s handle pretty fast too. After awhile I rigged up my power hand drill to the cutter shaft. The trimming didn’t go much faster, but it did give my hand a rest. I did find it was faster to cycle every case in a batch through the trimmer, instead of measuring each case to determine if it needed trimming.

A few years ago, I bought a proper power trimmer, an RCBS Trim Pro Power Case Trimmer. It’s really no faster than a manual trimmer to trim a small number of cases. Most of the time is consumed stopping the trimmer, removing a case, inserting another case and turning the trimmer back on. Recently it took about 40 minutes to trim 90 .204 Ruger cases. I can trim that many cases in the same amount of time with a hand-powered trimmer, but many more cases than that and the power trimmer starts to save time and energy.

Another 40 minutes was required to deburr the outside of the .204’s case mouths, chamfer the inside of the case mouth and clean the primer flash holes with the RCBS Trim Mate Case Prep Center.

This past winter I looked reluctantly at a couple of gallon buckets of .223 Remington cases that needed reloading for the spring campaigns in the gopher fields. There was no way I was going to sit hunched over my reloading bench for hours on end trimming, chamfering and deburring all those cases.
The next Saturday I drove to the local sporting goods store and bought an RCBS 3-Way Cutter that fit on the Trim Pro Power Case Trimmer. The 3-Way Cutter reduced my time by half to trim all the cases. At the same time, the 3-Way Cutter trims cases to length, a blade on the pilot chamfers the case and an outside blade deburrs the case mouth. If this little tool had been available 20 years ago, the time I would have saved could have been directed toward building a boat to sail the oceans or earning a degree in brain surgery.

Repeated trimming is unnecessary when an RCBS X-Die is used because the X-die stops stretching in the die. Cases that will be trimmed in the die. Cases that will be overlength. Every once in awhile a too long case makes it into the X-die and the case buckles. But that’s a small price to pay for such convenience.

**Better Reloads**

Ensuring all cases in a lot are trimmed to a uniform length goes a long way in producing good reloads and, if nothing else, attractive cartridges.

One time I started loading several hundred .30-30 Winchester shells. I made sure none of the cases were over length. But largely through sloth, I didn’t take the time to trim all the cases to the same length. Some of the finished shells had their case mouths crimped heavily in the bullets’ cannelures. Other shells had little or no crimp. At the range one Saturday morning, a persnickety friend picked through my box of reloaded .30-30 cartridges. His nose turned up more than slightly.

My shells did border on defective looking. The varying amount of crimps probably contributed to less than consistent velocity and perhaps accuracy. They fired adequately at the range. However, that might not have been the situation in the hunting field. A cartridge with a light crimp on its bullet in the tubular magazine may have had its bullet shoved into the case from the recoil of firing or from just the pressure of the magazine spring. About the time that shell’s turn came to cycle through the action, the biggest buck of the season would happen past. Of course, the messed up shell would seize up the action.

Properly trimmed cases also promote accuracy, or at least remove one cause of inaccuracy. I recently trimmed several boxes of .22-250 Remington cases. I carefully removed the burrs on the inside and outside of the mouths on most of the cases. But on a few of the cases, I left a bit of a Burr on the outside of the mouths. Checked on a Sinclair Concentricity Gage, the cases with the smooth mouths that were loaded with Nosler 55-grain Ballistic Tips had .002 inch bullet runout. By comparison, cases with a Burr remaining on their mouths had a bullet runout of up to .009 inch. That doesn’t take into consideration how cockeyed these cartridges would sit in the chamber.

In the end, keeping cases trimmed to the proper length is primarily a safety measure. Completing this simple, yet often overlooked, reloading step goes a long way to guard the safety of your reloads and the people who shoot them.

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For years I’ve stopped by the Scharch Manufacturing, Inc. booth at the annual SHOT Show to check on its wares. When I began, the company manufactured cartridge case handling equipment for sale to ammunition companies. Offhand, I can remember sorters, military crimp removers, resizers and so on, as well as packaging supplies. Sales were good, but eventually such a market had to dry up, at least on the equipment side. Packaging supplies sales continue unabated, I’m told. Anticipating this, company owner and president Dan Scharch set his sights on the manufacture of cartridge cases. As he put it, it was a natural extension of what he already knew. That he chose to name his brand Top Brass hints strongly at his goals and expectations.

Since the company location in Salida, Colorado, is not all that far away, I began promising Dan and his wife and partner, Kay, I’d come down for a factory tour and pick up some Top Brass samples for testing and reporting on in Handloader. It’s disconcerting to note this took longer than expected but gratifying that the trip was well worth it.

After my arrival and with the obligatory greetings out of the way, Dan Scharch gave me a tour of the case manufacturing operation. It begins with cylindrical “cups” of pure brass (70 percent copper and 30 percent zinc) from which each case is formed. The cups are purchased from an outside source. All operations to form a completed cartridge case are performed in-house. At the time of my visit there were barrels and barrels of cups on hand, and at each of several stations a worker was overseeing a particular operation. There are a series of draws to form something that resembles a cartridge case. These are followed by other operations that form the head and the primer pocket, punch the flash hole and cut the extractor groove. There are also trimming operations, washing, polishing, packaging and finally a finished product. Quality control is constant.

After the tour, we sat down to review the Top Brass product line. At the present time, new cartridge cases are being manufactured in .44 Russian, .44 S&W Special, .44 Remington Magnum, .45 Colt, .45 ACP and .45 ACP +P. They are available either unprimed or with Federal primers. Reconditioned cases are available in several categories from “as is” to “reamed/cleaned/sized/trimmer/primed.” For the most part, reconditioned cases are handgun cartridges, notably .380 Auto, 9mm Luger, .38 Special, .40 S&W and .45 ACP. Cases for .223 Remington and .308 Winchester are also available from both military and civilian sources. The entire product line seems to be quite reasonably priced.

There are some unusual items being offered that I find intriguing, but not necessarily for the reasons they are being manufactured. One is the .45 Colt blank case, identical to its parent except the flash hole is opened to .140 inch. An open flash hole, necessary for blanks, is also required when shooting wax bullets. Scharch’s blank cases are most sought after by cowboy mounted shooters. Fast draw competitors, and those of us who like to keep our hand in firing wax bullets indoors when weather or circumstance dictate, stuff them with bullets cut from wax cakes used in canning, prime them and have at it. They, too, are available unprimed or primed.

Soon, Scharch will have available .45 Colt rifle cases with the larger flash hole. They differ from their handgun counterparts in the length, being .400 inch longer. The purpose is to allow the use of blank cartridges in lever-action rifles or carbines chambered for traditional handgun cartridges. Without a bullet seated, most standard length handgun cases won’t feed properly in such guns. My ears perked up when he mentioned these. I immediately thought of all the trouble I’ve gone to over the
years to make cylinder length cases for shot loads in revolvers. In the .45 Colt, I began with .444 Marlin cases. They had to be trimmed to length, of course, but also rims had to be thinned, something of a nuisance. With these Top Brass cases, even with the large flash hole . . . I hope to find out soon. There are other innovations in stages of development. We’ll just have to wait awhile.

As promised, I picked up samples of Top Brass to take home for study. I had chosen the unprimed .45 Colt and .44 Russian cases. At home I began by selecting 10 cases at random from the new .45 Colt Top Brass supply along with 10 each from new supplies of three other manufacturers’ .45 Colt cases. Upon these 40 cases I performed a series of measurements. I charted results and variations of results for each brand of case in weight, case length, wall thickness, flash hole diameter, rim diameter and rim thickness. By assigning a 1 to the brand with the smallest variation in each category up to a 4 for the largest, I was able to make comparisons. The brand with the lowest number, the most consistent overall, was Top Brass by a fairly large margin.

I also assigned values to weight and wall thickness in the belief that heavier cases with thicker walls will have a reduced interior capacity. I consider this a plus as the .45 Colt case, beginning life as a black-powder cartridge, is much larger than it need be for modern smokeless powders. Also the heavier cases better withstand the higher pressures the round is being loaded to in some heavy bullet hunting loads for use in Ruger and Freedom Arms revolvers. Moreover, I get a better chamber fit, frequently better accuracy and higher velocities in these special loads with heavier cases. I found the Top Brass .45 Colt cases to be the heaviest of all that I tested, as well as having the thickest walls.

Sharp-eyed handloaders, peering inside Top Brass cases will notice something is different. There is a circular depression around the flash hole; other brands are simply flat. Questioning Scharch about this he said, from a manufacturing standpoint, it makes for a more consistent product and reduces the effort needed to punch the flash holes. As Top Brass was also first in the most consistent flash hole category, I certainly couldn’t argue with him. It did occur to me, however, that this technique also reduces the distance the primer flame must travel to reach the powder and could aid in shot-to-shot consistency. There is no way to prove it, I suppose, but my range tests suggest the unusual case shape certainly didn’t hurt anything.

For these range tests, I loaded each case brand with two loads: a standard Colt load of 8.5 grains of Unique with a 250-grain cast bullet at 860 fps or so and a heavy bullet hunting load with 23.0 grains of H-110 under a 300-grain cast WFN of LBT design at about 1,200 fps. The bullets were from Meister Bullets and Beartooth Bullets, respectively. All loads were fired in a customized Ruger Bisley Vaquero with a 5½-inch barrel at 50 yards. Each shot was chronographed and each group measured.

In the former, standard velocity groups, the Top Brass load produced the highest velocity and
The Classic Cast press is just that: classic O-frame design, sturdy cast iron construction with a few thoughtful innovations thrown in for good measure. The principal justification for this press and most of the other new ones on the market has been the increased popularity of loading cartridges having longer-than-usual case lengths. These range from the new Remington Ultra Mags at 2.850 inches to black-powder cartridges, such as the .45-120 Sharps at 3.25 inches, to the British cartridges designed for African use such as the .470 N.E., also at 3.25 inches, and even the .50 BMG at 3.291 inches. With a frame opening of 5 inches, the new Classic Cast press will handle them all.

Ambidextrousness is not a word tied for best accuracy. In the latter, heavy bullet groups, the Top Brass loads earned both top velocity and best accuracy laurels.

My .44 Russian tests are far from complete, but I was able to discern the same level of consistency in weight, length and other measurements I found in the .45 Colt cases. My only other .44 Russian cases are REM-UMC from probably the 1960s. The Top brass cases are slightly longer and somewhat heavier, but well within specs, of course. At Russian pressures, they should last a long time.

On a wall in the factory is a chart showing the level of consistency to which other cartridge case manufacturers are holding their case length, based on actual measurements of their products. Scharcch informed me his standard for the .45 Colt is 1.280 inches, ± .001 inch, something no one else is able to meet consistently. In the measurements I made of the Top Brass cases at hand, I found a case length of 1.280 inches, with a range of ± .001 inch! It’s clear to me after meeting Dan Scharch and viewing his operation he understands there is no room at the bottom of the pile for so-so cartridge cases, no matter how attractively priced, but there is room at the top for, well, Top Brass.

For more information, contact Scharch Mfg., Inc., phone: 1-800-836-4683; send an email to: topbrass@scharch.com; web site: www.handgun-brass.com; or web site: www.top-brass.us. – R.H. VanDenburg, Jr.

Lee Classic Cast Press

I suppose it was inevitable. With most of the other reloading press manufacturers upgrading their basic product line in recent years, could Lee Precision of Hartford, Wisconsin, be far behind? Actually, Lee did not upgrade any existing model but rather added another press to the line: the Lee Classic Cast press.
The Big Shooter Portable Bench

For an embarrassing number of years, I've made my living as a writer specializing in hunting, shooting and testing guns. That means I've spent a fair share of time hunched over an unimaginable variety of portable shooting benches. While I've sometimes taken advantage of the permanent benches available at shooting clubs and commercial ranges, I much prefer packing a portable bench in my car and driving to the nearby desert.

Hauling my own bench is a bother, but when I have a dozen different rifles that need testing, being all by my lonesome surrounded by several square miles of barren sagebrush is a huge advantage. I don't need to wait for others to finish firing before heading downrange to switch targets. I can shoot at my own pace — all day long, when necessary.

I've experimented with many different shooting benches, ranging from super-light models that set up quickly to poorly engineered behemoths that were a skinned-knuckle nightmare to assemble. My garage is filled with benches I've tried once or twice, then abandoned. One day soon I'll hold a yard sale.

A few weeks ago, the UPS driver showed up with another portable bench. The first thing I noticed when unpacking The Big Shooter was its impressive 82-pound heft. The heaviest component was the base, which consisted of a base frame with an integral leg, to which a pair of additional legs were bolted for convenient transport.

A single ½ inch diameter bolt was all that was needed to attach each leg to the base. Instead of a conventional nut, a ball knob was used to secure each bolt in place. I didn't need a wrench — the ball knobs were supposed to be fastened only finger-tight.

A pair of ⅜-inch, four-pronged studs allowed adjusting the ground-to-leg angle on the two dismountable legs.

Next, a 6 inch diameter mast was inserted into the base frame. This heavy, tubular post incorporated a mounting assembly that allowed the seat to be installed (with another set of ⅜-inch bolts and ball knobs) at several different heights. Finally, the angle-iron-reinforced top deck of ¾-inch plywood was slipped over the post. Rotate the deck to the desired position, snug it in place with another four-pronged stud, and you're ready to shoot.

I like several things about The Big Shooter bench. First, the low, tripod leg arrangement makes the bench stable, even on uneven terrain. The four-legged benches in my collection require level ground for stability. Second, this bench is incredibly rigid and sturdy — and its “load-locking” design makes it sturdier yet when you sit down to shoot. Adding sandbags, rifle and yourself to The Big Shooter's already substantial heft gives you a shooting bench weighing in the neighborhood of 300 pounds!

In addition to providing rock-solid support, the bench allows the generously proportioned padded seat and shooting platform to rotate through a full 360 degrees. Unlike some portable benches I've used, the table top is plenty roomy enough for prolonged shooting sessions. The bench adapts for right- or left-handed shooters and adjusts to accommodate a wide range of heights and body types.

I've used The Big Shooter bench several times now, and it's worked great. I've cussed its weight when lugging it from the car but have really appreciated its stellar performance. If I wanted to shave a few pounds, I could always buy the “Lite” Big Shooter version. At 60 pounds, it's 25 percent lighter.
UNIQUETEK
MICROMETER
POWDER BAR KIT
FOR DILLON AUTO
POWDER MEASURES

UniqueTek, Inc. recently introduced its Micrometer Powder Bar Kit, which upgrades existing Dillon powder bars to a micrometer powder bar. It's said to provide, "both true indexing capability and 1/1000-inch adjustment increments."

According to the company, the Micrometer Powder Bar Kit eliminates the need to guess how many turns of the adjustment screw will return you to a previous powder weight. It fits all powder bars for the Dillon Auto Powder Measure and Belted Magnum Powder Measure. The kit includes all-metal micrometer head, LocTite® and instructions. The powder bar is not included.

"The primary advantage of the Micrometer Powder Bar Kit is that it allows users to return to any powder charge weight previously recorded with an accuracy equivalent to 0.002 grains of Winchester 231 gunpowder," UniqueTek says. "One powder measure can be easily moved from one toolhead to the next, then instantly adjusted to dispense the correct powder weight." This eliminates the need for an expensive powder measure in each caliber, producing significant savings in both time and cost.

"This product has been four years in the making, and I'm excited to finally bring it to market," says Lee Love, UniqueTek's product design engineer. "There just isn't another micrometer adjuster for the Dillon Precision Auto Powder Measure available anywhere."

For more information contact: UniqueTek, Inc., Dept. HL, 222 E. Stonebridge Drive, Gilbert AZ 85234; or visit its web site: www.uniquetek.com.
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