



Dan Wesson Forum

Reloading Roundtable

General Discussion

April 28, 2010

Data compiled by Steve CT

Our Reloading Roundtable participants are IHMSA 80x80 (Dean), SHOOTIST 357 (Mike), Ibruce (LB), and Supermagfan (Phil). These are very knowledgeable shooters, and we know how passionate they are about their Dan Wesson's. Their combined Post Total on DWF is currently 5778, over 20% of the Forum posts to date. In addition to being DWF Site Supporters, they are all Members of the Dan Wesson Collectors Association.



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Please give us your “Reloading Resume”

LB: I started reloading around 1984 when I was 20 years old. A friend showed me the basics but I mostly learned on the fly by reading the loading manuals and talking to other reloaders. My loading goes in spells just like my shooting. I will load and shoot a lot for a spell then life gets in the way and a long dry spell comes along. On average several thousand rounds a year, which isn't a lot in the grand scheme of things. I usually work alone. I load 38spc, 357mag, 357 SuperMag, 44mag, 445 SuperMag, 45acp, 30/06, 30herret, 223. I have equipment to load 9mm, 308win, and 35rem but currently do not own firearms in these calibers.

Dean: I started reloading in 1985, a year after I bought my first centerfire gun. That one was a .38 Special, and I knew little about the hobby. My sister bought my first press, a Lee Challenger, for my birthday. I purchased a couple of reloading manuals, read all I could about it, then started to reload my first cartridges, 158 grain JHP bullets, Unique powder and CCI primers. The brass was what I had kept from my factory ammo, which was all Federal. Since handgun silhouette requires a lot of ammo, I do a lot of reloading every year. Generally I will shoot 10-15,000 rounds per year, total, so about 6000-9000 rounds of that are reloaded each year. I reload several times a week, trying to stay caught up. I like to keep at least 500 pieces of brass for each gun and the new season will start with all of it loaded and ready to go. As I shoot each week, I will reload in small batches to try keep up with the number of rounds I shot.

Mike: I've been reloading religiously since I was a youngster at my dad's bench. I grew up in a hunting/shooting family, and reloading was a big part of it. When I was living at home, my dad and I went through a LOT of shotgun reloads due to small game season in PA, as well as dusting many clay pigeons. I reload every caliber I own and quite a few other calibers for friends. The big stuff is getting loaded less and less due to increasing prices, which means the 9mm and 357 are being loaded in bulk. I run about 20k rounds of 9mm every year—the kids and I give the Lee progressive 1000's a real workout. I started both my boys out VERY young. The RCBS Rock-Chucker is a 5 year olds best friend when it comes to sizing cases! I love reloading with the boys—they really enjoy it, and it gives us plenty of time together. Life is easier for them than it was for me... progressive presses, electronic automatic powder measures, carbide dies.... You get the idea.

Phil: I learned the basics of reloading from my father at a young age, just handing him the parts and paying attention. I eventually graduated to operating the press with him setting the dies first. After time dad decided he was done with that part of his shooting life and after I was moved away he handed over all the tools, table and all. Since then I have added many calibers, including shotgun to the loading room. I load for everything I own, almost no factory ammo is used except for some of the autoloaders specifically 38 Super and 40 S&W. I dislike loading autoloader ammo as my success at ones that feed well has been less than the best. The reason we got into shotgun loading was that my sons' first real shooting endeavors were at the Trap range shooting lots of 410 and 20 gauge rounds, it was a cost saving measure in those gauges. I have all MEC equipment in shotgun. I still reload 20 gauge, 28 gauge and 12 gauge shells. We have a progressive loader for the 12-gauge. We load very little shotgun right now as the sons are into motor powered toys right now more than shotguns. Time to shoot is a limiting factor on how much loading is required annually.



Why do you reload?

Phil: Cost is a factor to a point, but primarily I enjoy the craftsmanship of the hobby. It is very satisfying especially when hunting to take an animal with a load you built rather than one you purchased. In rifle calibers we can usually match but rarely exceed a good factory load in the accuracy department, but in revolver cartridges it is common to exceed the accuracy of factory rounds. Some of the loading is a requirement on the more obscure cartridges such as the (4) Supermag rounds. I also load 475 Linebaugh and 500 Wyoming Express due to difficulty in finding affordable factory options.

Mike: Besides being a source of relaxation, I reload for a variety of reasons. Growing up shooting the 22-250 at groundhogs in PA, accuracy was always a goal. Dad and I spent a lot of time with those 22-250 dies and IMR 4064 (35 gr 4064 over 52 gr Sierra HPBT). The rising cost of ammo is nothing new—been going up as long as I've been alive. Reloading allows me to shoot more rounds more often. Plus, for me as a hunter, there is a sense of confidence that my bullet is going to go where I want it to every time.

Dean: Reloading has always been touted as saving you money over factory ammo, and it certainly does that. What they don't tell you, is that with the savings, you will shoot more, a LOT more, since you perceive it as being less expensive. With handloads tailored to your own specific guns, it is far easier to find more accurate ammunition than the factory offers. Many more bullet weights and styles are available to the reloader, offering far greater versatility, along with many more powder choices to fine-tune those loads. Handgun silhouette and wildcats have gone hand in hand since the beginning, and you cannot buy factory loaded ammunition for them, so reloading your own opens up a whole new world of options and exciting new cartridges. There is nothing more personally satisfying than taking that game, or winning that match with ammunition you made yourself. It is a great sense of accomplishment and one of the biggest reasons I reload my own.

LB: The main reason is I enjoy the loading almost as much as the shooting. I also like the ability to tailor my loads to a specific purpose. Factory ammo is very good, but built for the masses and may not necessarily be the best combo in a given firearm. Also reloading is virtually the only way to come up with specialty loads such as silhouette loads and or extreme hunting loads. The possibilities are almost endless. Of course availability can be an issue especially with less common cartridges such as a Supermag. Last but not least is cost.



Tell us about the cost impacts of reloading.

Dean: Compared to factory ammunition, reloading can save you from 25-75 percent per box. Most of my reloads come in around 30 percent of the cost of factory rounds.

A box of 50 Remington .357 Magnum 158 grain JHP factory ammunition costs \$39.99 at Midway. With the brass being the biggest cost, once you initially purchase it, it is not factored into the reloading costs as it is reusable. 100 Remington bullets costs \$18.49, primers cost \$28.99 per 1000, a pound of Accurate # 5 powder is \$17.99.

Cost to reload one round is

\$.1849 per bullet

\$.02899 per primer

\$.01542 per round (6 grains per round)

\$.22931 per round

x 50 rounds

\$11.4655 or, a cost of about 29 percent of the factory ammo. Rounding out, 100 rounds of factory .357 Magnums will cost \$80, while the same number of reloaded rounds costs you \$23.

Mike: I'm a frugal kind of guy... all my brass is range pick-ups, or bought used. I cast my own bullets for 9mm and 38/357 as well as 44. I buy most of my factory jacketed bullets at yard sales, flea markets, etc. Primers and powder I get where I can and when I can. I even make my own bullet lube from internet recipes, and they work really well

LB: At today's cost a Supermag can cost as much as 2 or 3 dollars every squeeze of the trigger when a reload can be as little as 15 cents to about 90 cents depending on brass and or home cast lead vs. jacketed bullets. I pour most of my own bullets, and brass is capable of many reloadings if you do not get carried away, which allows me to shoot for example 38 specials for approx .05 cents a shot where factory ammo goes for at least .25 cents a shot. Prices vary but this is average. I once heard it said "Reloading doesn't save you money; It allows you to shoot more for the same money." I believe this is accurate.

Phil: To be honest I don't keep track, it doesn't matter to me.



What about accuracy as opposed to commercial ammunition?

Mike: Accuracy has always been an issue for me, but as the years have gone by the factory stuff has gotten a lot better. I still reload in the quest for the one-hole group. I've made groups at the range that would be unbelievable if I didn't have witnesses. I remember reloading 7mm Rem Mag for my Grandfather—one day we were checking our rifles before deer season. The target was a paper plate held up with a thumb tack. The thumb tack was the bulls eye....Grandpa pulled the trigger and the plate fell...

LB: Commercial ammo is built to suit the masses. It is very consistent and quality is great. The problem with commercial ammo is it must function in all types of firearms where a hand loaded cartridge can be tuned to find the sweet spot of a particular firearm, something just not feasible with commercial ammo.

Dean: With the increase of reloaders over many years, today's factory ammunition is constantly improved, and is pretty accurate. The problem is, each gun is different. Many different factors contribute to this. With reloading, you can tailor the ammo to your own specific gun, finding the right combinations of components that will make accurate ammo. Changing bullets, seating depth, powder types and amounts, maybe different primers will lead you into some very accurate loads, which would be hard to match with factory stuff. Over all the years I've reloaded, I've yet to find a gun that won't shoot better with handloads. To be fair, you can't possibly try every factory load available without spending a fortune, and you can never run through all the possible reloading combinations, but it is easier, cheaper and takes less time when you reload.

Most of my Contenders will shoot 100 yard groups of around 1.25-1.5" with factory ammunition. I can get those down to about 3/4" groups, some less, with my reloads. A couple of my revolvers won't shoot less than 5-6" groups at that distance. My accuracy handload for a .41 Magnum can get that down to half.



Are you reloading any items you just can't get any other way?

Dean: Without reloading, many of my guns would have never been bought, as no factory ammunition ever existed for them. I have all the Dan Wesson SuperMags. Without reloading, the .375 .414 and .445 would be safe queens. Even the .357SM version would be hard to get ammo for...the original supply has almost dried up and few custom reloaders sell ammo for it. The 7-30 Waters has only 1 factory round ever made. If you don't like the Federal 120 grain FP, you're out of luck. With reloading, I can turn it into a fine silhouette round with 150 grain bullets, 160 grain loads for stubborn rams, or a nice varmint round with a 115 grain Hornady bullet. For the .41 Magnum, most factory ammunition is limited to 210 grains maximum bullet weight. A reloader can cast his own, or buy commercial cast bullets up to 320 grains for hunting applications.

Mike: I try to avoid owning anything truly "weird". I do reload 33 WCF because it is obsolete. I even make brass for it from 45-70 cases. And of course I have 357SM and 445SM. I'm working on reloading all brass 410 cases, which I will fire-form using oatmeal and a light charge of powder. Plus, you just can't go buy a 357 magnum round loaded with an 88 grain JHP designed for 9mm...AWESOME.

Phil: I reload all the Supermag cartridges. To my best knowledge the only one currently not available somewhere is the 414 Supermag, just not enough demand for commercial loaders to set up for it.

I am a hoarder of sorts when it comes to loading components. Many of the Supermag and other cartridges that are less than common I have many 1000's of cases around for with equal amounts of the required components to assemble complete rounds for when I feel like putting some together. I am always on the lookout for somebody getting "out" of loading and will buy their entire package.

LB: I believe currently that reloading is the only way I can get ammo as there is still a shortage (hoarding) in my area. However normally ammo would be available with the possible exception of the Supermag cartridges as it is hard to find 357 Max and 445 Supermag ammo. Plus the cost is usually ridiculous. I also load 30 Herrett which until recently was a wild cat round and no commercially produced ammo or brass was available, although I believe it is available now.



Tell us about how you feel “shooting what you built” as opposed to commercial.

Phil: This is very satisfying. It is a great pleasure to harvest an animal with a handload. I also enjoy the ability to create loads not offered from the factory. Recently I have been experimenting with a heavier bullet in one of the AR-15's just to see how well I can dial it in rather than the standard 55 FMJ rounds sold in bulk.

Mike: Just like everything else in my life, if I didn't build/design it, I never fully trust it. You get a sense of satisfaction seeing your weapon / ammo combo performing the way it should. And sometimes it is a necessity—I once had a 40 S&W that would jam with anything. After a lot of load development, I found a bullet and powder combo that was 100% reliable and accurate. Plus, what do you do with those 15 leftover factory rounds after the first five made a 3” group?

LB: Knowing that I produced the ammo just adds to the satisfaction when the mark is hit.

Dean: I have the utmost confidence in my handloads. I know each one is done carefully, and done right. They will hit whatever I accurately point the gun at. When I am in a shootoff, I know without any doubt, that load will do the job for me. I never worry about my ammo



What other general observations would you share about reloading?

Phil: Do not try to perform this task with a lot of distractions. If there are two of us in the room it is not bad, if there are others trying to talk to you, it is easy to get distracted and make a mistake. I often play a radio when going solo in the room, but that is not a distraction in the same way a couple people are. I would also add, loading to me is not something to get in a hurry at, It is something you should concentrate on doing well. Your safety and other's safety are always at risk if you make an error. Finally, take time to enjoy the art of loading. I can think of fewer things I enjoy doing in the middle of winter when it is to miserable to be outside, most of my loading is done in the winter months for the coming season.

LB: Reloading is the ultimate way to get the most out of a firearm. In reality commercial ammo is capable of better accuracy than most of us can accomplish but loading allows us to tweak our stuff and test our abilities to develop the best loads. Having a good day at the range is great but can to some extent just be considered luck or your just having a good day. When you work a recipe down and until you find a load which consistently shoots “better” groups you really have accomplished something which can't be explained by luck or a fluke. And of course more accurate ammo means a more accurate shooter. Loading your own is for the shooter who wants to push themselves to be the best they can be leaving nothing to chance or the responsibilities of others. Besides it's just plain fun.

Mike: You think DWAS is bad? Wait until you have a bench full of presses, powder measures, etc... A whole cabinet full of dies and reloading manuals, so much powder that you store it in a separate cabinet in the garage for fear of the house blowing up, and enough primers to keep you wondering if you will ever run out. So many bullets that you can't store them on ordinary shelves because they will bend from the weight-Yeah, you've got it bad, and it keeps getting worse. I've got presses on the bench, under the bench, etc. Enough “spare” equipment that neither of my boys will ever have to buy any stuff to get started.

Dean: If you've ever thought about it, just do it. Start with a couple good reloading manuals, read them carefully. Ask questions, don't be afraid. We've all been novices just like you. When you start, keep distractions away. Like any other mechanical activity, it is perfectly safe if done right. You will be starting on a rewarding hobby that will further increase your shooting experiences.