

SHOTSHELL RELOADING

Dear Technoid,

When in doubt, go to the source. I recently purchased a new Hornady 366 Auto Reloader. Unfortunately, the literature accompanying it didn't answer my questions. I hope you can help.

The 366 came equipped with a 1 & 1/8 oz. powder bushing (#468-18 gr. Red Dot) and a 1 & 1/8 oz., 7 & 1/2 shot bushing. The seller had also purchased a number of other shot bushings, including one marked 1 & 1/8 oz., with no reference to shot size. The package also included 4lbs of Hercules Unique powder and both Winchester and Herter 209 primers.

Here are my questions:

- 1) Are shot bushings specific to a particular shot size or does one size fit all. In other words, will the bushing marked 7 & 1/2 also drop 1 & 1/8 oz. of eights?
- 2) The recipe for Unique powder, loading AA hulls, Versalite wads, W209 primers, shooting 1 & 1/8 oz. of shot at 1200 fps. calls for 21 grains of powder. Can I trust both the reloader and the bushing to drop the right amount of powder? Is this a good load for sporting clays?
- 3) Assuming you would use a different "recipe" what would your ideal all-around clays recipe be?

Thanks for your input!

Cliff (Frequently wrong and often in doubt)

Dear Cliff,

Good questions. I hope that I find some good answers. If not, I will just make them up as usual.

1) Are shot bushing specific for a certain shot size? Sort of, maybe. Clearly a certain space filled with large shot will have more voids in it than the same space filled with small shot. Thus a higher weight of #9s will fit into a given bushing than of #7 1/2s- assuming that both pellets contain the same lead alloy. If your bushing holds exactly 1 1/8 oz of #9s, it will hold slightly under that in #7 1/2s. Is it enough to matter? Probably not. At best, shot bushings are "approximate" anyway. When you buy your reloading scale (see #2 below) it is easy enough to check.

Some shooters, especially .410 American-style skeet shooters, file out their shot bushings until they drop exactly the correct amount of a specific shot size. This can be worth the trouble if you consistently use one shot size and hardness. If you use all sorts of different stuff, I would not bother.

2) Can you trust the reloader and bushing to drop the stated weight of powder? ABSOLUTELY NOT! You must weigh, repeat- MUST WEIGH, your powder (and shot) charges when setting your reloader up. I reweigh my charges at the beginning of each reloading session and especially when I open a new can of powder.

A powder scale is a REQUIRED purchase when you start to reload. I recommend a scale that can weigh 1000 grains, not the one that can only weigh 500 grains. A finished shell weighs over 500 grains and it is often handy to weigh them if you forget which finished shells were the one ounce loads and which were the 1 1/8 ounces. My scale is an RCBS 1010 model and it has given good service.

In my experience, powder bushings are notoriously inaccurate. They almost always drop light, but do not count on that. Weigh your powder charges. I cannot be more emphatic in urging this. With MEC bushings, I have often had to go up two bushing sizes to get the correct drop, but not always. Pick a bushing that drops just a touch light and then file out the bushing a bit until the drop is perfect. I also recommend that you use a powder baffle in the powder tube and that you check your charge frequently. Better safe than sorry.

3) Good all around Clays recipe? I have not tried the recipe that you have mentioned, so I cannot comment on it. Unique is my first choice of powders in the 28 gauge, but I feel that it is not ideal for 12 gauge clay target loads. For standard 1 1/8 oz clay target loads I prefer a faster burning powder such as Hodgdon Clays or Winchester Superlite. I have shot hundreds of pounds of Red Dot and 700-X also, but prefer the two powders mentioned first. Clays is quite clean, but I found Superlite to be the softest shooting (that is a very subjective conclusion). Superlite is a Ball process powder and thus fine grained for accurate metering too. A 1145 fps 1 1/8 oz load using Clays or Superlite is hard to beat.

As to exact recipes, when you buy the powder ask the dealer to give you a free powder company reloading manual with it. You might also consider buying the excellent Lyman's Shotshell Reloading Handbook. The Lyman book is extremely detailed as to reloading procedures and absolutely packed with recipes of every conceivable type. Buy this book when you buy your scale.

Look for a target load that will propel your 1 1/8 oz of shot at about 1145-1150 fps. This is a typical 2 3/4 dram equivalent load. It has all the speed that you need and a bit less recoil (and better pattern) than the heavier loads. Pick a recipe that matches the hulls, primers and wads that you have. If such a recipe is not listed, buy different components. It is not a good idea to substitute components if you want uniform (and safe) performance. Follow the recipe carefully.

There you go. More than you even wanted to know (or could possibly believe).

Regards,
Bruce Buck
Shotgun Report's Technoid