



SHOOT-N-IRON Academy



Reload for Fun and Savings

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Rolling your own ammunition may seem like a lot of work and requiring the purchase of expensive equipment. While there is a certain amount of time, work, and cost involved, it's no more than any other hobby requires; and besides, it's fun.

With today's across-the-counter ammunition costs, any serious shooter, rich or poor, has to take a look at the possibility of loading his or her own ammo. Buying ready-made cartridges, some priced well over twenty dollars per box, can curtail one's shooting habit sharply. I believe that saving seventy-five percent or better on ammo cost could place you on the firing line much more often and even help your better half's disposition as far as justifying your shooting expenditures.

Let's look at the equipment that you will need.

You can get into reloading without a high outlay of money to get started. First, you have to decide just how much you plan to shoot, how many different calibers you want to load for, and how much your budget will stand. Keep in mind that while the progressive loading equipment--the machines that turn out a loaded round with every throw of the handle--are many times faster than the single stage presses, they, too, have their shortcomings. I like to weigh each and every powder charge placed into my hunting and target rifle cartridges. This is not practical with the progressive loaders.

The single-stage presses are less expensive, plus they are simple to maintain. They will load any center fire, metallic, pistol, or rifle cartridge equally, as well--and in some cases better--than the higher-priced progressive equipment. I am not telling you that I don't recommend the progressives, because they are excellent; I currently own and use several regularly. But, unless you're going to load ammunition by the gross, you can do very well with the slower (and cheaper) rigs. I use both.

Both RCBS and Lyman, as well as some others, offer complete reloader starter kits, containing a heavy duty 'D' press, powder measure, powder scales, a deburring tool, and a case lube pad for under two hundred dollars. Dies and shell holders for each caliber are extra and will cost around twenty dollars per set for standard rifle dies and approximately thirty dollars for the carbide pistol three-die sets. These kits contain everything you will need to get started.

If you want a progressive loader, you can purchase a 'piggy back' for the RCBS that sure speeds things up and doesn't cost an arm and a leg. RCBS also puts out a progressive that they call 'The Green Machine.' It costs a little more than the piggy back, but it also does more.

Lyman and Hornady companies have a complete line of loading equipment that is excellent. Lee Industries has a complete line of loading equipment ranging from the single stage presses to their fine ultra progressive machines that will load up to three to five hundred pistol cartridges per hour, and is priced somewhat lower than some of the other brands.

While I do not work for any of these companies and am not connected with any of them in any way, I personally like Dillon equipment. They offer a complete spectrum of presses ranging from single stage rigs to the ultra fast and accurate 10-50 that will produce upward of 1,000 rounds per hour.

There will be other accessories that you will want as time goes by and they do make things go a little faster and smoother. These items can be picked up along the way and at low cost.

One item you will need is a good loading manual. Lyman's 47th Edition is excellent. Speer, Rornady, Nosler, and several others also have high quality manuals on the market. These books explain most everything you will need to know and should be considered your 'Reloading Bible.' Follow the instructions therein and use the data found there for powder charges, bullet weights, etc. If you do not stray from the listings found in these manuals, you will not get in trouble with overloads and possibly ruin a fine firearm or, at worst, get hurt.

It doesn't make a lot of difference which equipment you purchase or use. You can save big bucks by loading your own ammo. Right now, one box of fifty .357 Magnums, will cost around a twenty-dollar bill. let's see how much we can save by 'rolling our own.'

A cartridge case can be reloaded several times if it is properly taken care of, cleaned, trimmed, etc. You can acquire range brass from several of the indoor ranges for a reasonable fee. New brass cost vary according to where you buy it. Primer costs are about 1.3 cents each. Allow 3.5 cents for powder, (it will be less in some calibers and a little more in some rifle calibers).

Bullets vary in price. A .357 jacketed hollow-point costs about 3 to 4 cents each. You can set up and cast your own lead bullets for about a penny apiece or buy good hard cast lead bullets for about 2.2 cents each.

Adding this up you will find that the cost of a box of fifty .357 has dropped to about \$4.50. Thus, you have saved about \$15.50. By casting your own pistol bullets you can reduce your cost to just over \$2.50 per box. These figures are approximations and may vary somewhat by location and components used. This also doesn't include your labor, but you can't count as a cost a labor of love.

There is a lot of satisfaction in winning a match or dropping that big buck with ammunition that you loaded yourself. Over the years I have found my own ammo to be more reliable--more accurate than the factory rounds, as I can tailor it for the gun that is shooting it. As a law enforcement officer I always carried ammunition of my own manufacture.

Reloading. Try it. You'll like it!
