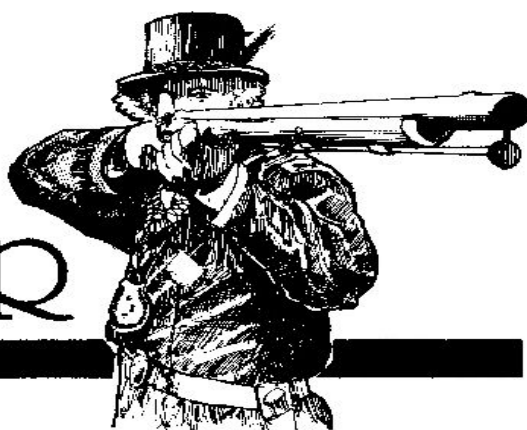


Black POWDER

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Black Powder Cartridge Shotgun? Easy!

There must be tens of thousands of old cartridge shotguns in Australia. Some are treasured keepsakes handed down from relatives or ancestors who used them during the final quarter of last century. Many are poor, rusting relics that have stood forgotten in a dirty shed for decades, and have only recently been dusted off.

A goodly number of these old guns were never nitro proved. That means they may not be safe to shoot with modern ammunition. Most of them were chambered for 2½" paper cartridges.

Then there is the question of condition which is often the result of neglect. This must all be considered when thinking of shooting one of these veterans.

Unless properly qualified, any prospective shooter must seek professional advice on the safety of shooting any old firearm. Be sure to mention to the gunsmith that it will only be shot with black powder. On the other hand, any gun that is safe with modern nitro loads will be safe with the black powder loads here described.

The loading tools left to right: loading block, decapper, case trimmer, capping jig, 12.5 millimetre punch, powder-shot measure, seating ram.

It's easy to load black powder shotgun cartridges with just a few home made tools. Consider the muzzleloading shotgun load: powder, card, cushion wad, shot, card. Now think of the cartridge as a very short barrel.

1. The Decapping Tool

This can be made out of a piece of hard wood dowel with a 25 mm nail in the one end. The nail must be cut to leave 10 millimetres sticking out and the dowel should just fit the inside of the case. Note that the shotgun case is slightly tapered, inside. It may take a few tries to get this tool right. I found it best to drill the nail hole in the dowel and then Araldite the nail in place.

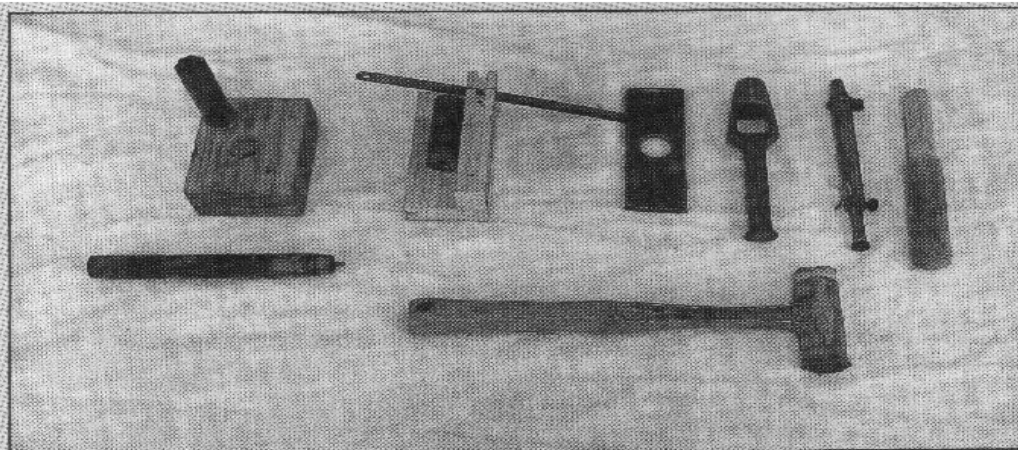
2. The Loading Block

A small block of wood 50x50x30 mm has a hole drilled half way through it with a carpenter's auger, so the hole will be flat at the bottom. The hole must be large enough for the base of the cartridge to enter - 23 mm is ideal. Then drill the rest of the way through the block with a 10 mm drill. The block is used to support the cartridge while decapping and loading.

3. The Case Trimmer

Two pieces of wood, 55x19 mm and 110 mm long, and 30x19x110 mm long, are glued and nailed together to form a right angle or L shape, 110 mm long. With the L facing away, drive a nail into the foot of the L 10 mm

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from the left hand end, measure 63 mm from the nail and make a vertical cut 10 mm vertically in the leg of the L.

This device is used to trim the cases to 2½". The operation is accomplished by holding the empty case base against the nail and into the corner of the L. Then using a piece of hacksaw blade carefully cut the case using the vertical cut as a guide. Hold the blade so it cuts as it is drawn backward, and turn the case as the cut progresses.

4. The Capping Jig

This is simply a piece of mild steel 40x5 mm thick and 110 mm long, with a hole drilled in the middle and then filed out so that a shotgun case body will fit through, but the rim will not. When held in a vice this tool will hold the cartridge while the cap is installed.

5. The Seating Ram

A piece of dowel sized so as to just enter the cartridge case is all this is, the equivalent of a short starter, and it is used to seat the card wads and compress the powder.

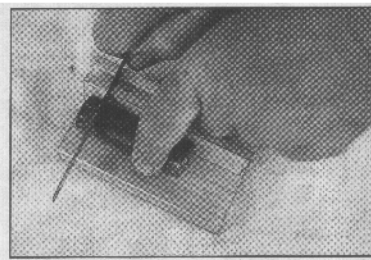
The remaining tool must be bought unless access to a lathe is available. A wad punch 18.5 mm in diameter is required to cut the card and the cushion wad. Since the nearest size available is 18 mm it is necessary to open the punch a little. This can be done with a small half round file, and a little care.

A punch can be obtained from most large engineering supply houses.

An ordinary sliding adjustable black powder measure works not only for measuring the powder charge, but also for measuring the shot.

Here is the Loading Procedure.

- a. Trim the case to 2½" in the trimming jig.
- b. Place the case in the loading block, and, using the decapping tool, gently tap



Case trimmer in use.

out the old primer. It is often possible to push out the old primer with hand pressure.

c. Examine the case for defect in the primer pocket, and over all. Check that the case will chamber in the gun it is to be used in.

d. Install the new primer. All shotgun primers that I have encountered are of good quality and will work with black powder.

Push the primer into the pocket as far as possible with the fingers then place the flat of the blade of a table knife over the primer and gently tap the primer home with a small hammer. On no account must the primer be hit directly!

I have seated thousands of primers in this manner without mishap. However, the possibility exists, so wear protective glasses and use a minimum of force while priming.

5. *Load Powder*: the procedure is exactly the same as for a muzzleloader. How much and what grade is the vexing question.

If GOEX is to be used then it should be FF or F. With any other brand use FFF. The maximum charge must not be more than ninety grains, and such a charge should only be used in guns in excellent condition.

The recommended charge is sixty grains. This is comfortable to shoot and powerful enough for most purposes. As always, only testing will prove which load is best.

6. *Overpowder Card*: This must be of hard cardboard and at least two millimetres thick, and 2.5 mm is even better. The card is pushed into the case and seated with the seating ram. Push the card down on the powder as hard as possible with bare hands to compress the powder.

7. *Cushion Wad*: This can be either a 10 mm thick felt wad cut with the wad punch and dipped in melted beeswax lard lube (50-50), or treated with any other non-runny lube. The blue and grey commercial shotgun cushion wads also work well.

The wad is pushed into the case and gently seated on the over powder wad.

8. *Shot*: The amount of shot and for that matter powder that will fit into a case depends on the thickness of the cushion. In most cases it will not be possible to get more than an ounce and a quarter of shot in. Shot can be measured in an adjustable powder measure using the following table.

1 oz no. 7 shot = 65-gn measure

1 1/8 oz no. 7 shot = 75-gn measure

1 1/4 oz no. 7 shot = 85-gn measure

1 3/8 oz no. 7 shot = 90-gn measure

1 1/2 oz no. 7 shot = 100-gn measure

These equivalents are not exact, but very close. The shot is of course just poured into the case.

9. *Shot Card*: A thin card one millimetre thick of hard cardboard is best. Wine cask will work well. It is placed on top of the shot and seated to about two millimetres below the rim of the cartridge. Seal it in with a little Aquadhere or other glue. This is to prevent the shot from falling out in transit.

That is it.

Of course every gun is different and so the load will probably need a little development to get the best shot pattern.

Rondivoo

Do you and your family enjoy meeting other muzzleloaders? Do you enjoy trophy and novelty shoots? Do you enjoy talking around the campfire? If the answer is yes to any of these, then don't miss the Second National Open Rondivoo at Millmerran (SE Queensland).

All muzzleloaders are welcome, on the 1st to the 9th of July this year. I'd love to see you all there. For more information:-

Rondivoo Discipline, 630 Channel Street, Cleveland Qld 4163. Phone: (07) 286 2206.