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by Jim Berndt

Lee Precision .457 Round Ball Mould



I love shooting my .45-70; the cartridge is rich in history and it brings down deer like Thor's Hammer. However, full-power loads in a modern rifle can shake your fillings loose! Not only is the recoil something less than pleasant, this cartridge gulps huge quantities of powder when loaded to capacity. If you want to have fun shooting this cartridge, you need a solution to the high cost of factory ammo. Even hand-loaded ammunition can get expensive if you are using jacketed bullets full doses of powder for practice.

Fortunately, the .45-70 lends itself extremely well to low-recoil cast bullet loads. While many books and articles have been written about lead bullets in the .45-70, much of the available data is about performance with black powder or competitive shooting. Those of us who love hunting with this old-timer and just want a light, cheap practice load may want a slightly different slant on the issue.

Of the many light loads available for the .45-70, one of my all-time favorites is a simple round ball loaded over a small dose of fast-burning powder. This type of load delivers ragged-hole group accuracy from my Marlin 1895 at 25 yards, has a very mild report and recoils slightly more than a .22 LR. Using 10 gr or so of Unique behind a 143 gr .457 round ball delivers a respectable velocity of 1,150 fps – plenty of oomph to put this load beyond the squib category and make it suitable for close-range varmint control.

In the interest of keeping costs low (as always!) I did not want to pay the going rate of about \$11.80 (plus shipping) per 100 round balls – the obvious solution is to cast the balls myself. Since this load is my only use for round balls, I didn't want to invest a lot of money in a mould, so I turned to Lee Precision's fine line of round ball moulds. For about \$25 (MSRP) I had a mould which could easily produce thousands of balls,

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Lee Precision
www.leeprecision.com

Alliant Powder
www.alliantpowder.com

paying for itself in the first 300 balls cast.

I cast these round balls from wheel weight metal and then lightly coat them with Lee Liquid Alox to minimize any potential barrel leading. I measure the load of Unique into primed cases with a Lee powder dipper and thumb-press a lubed ball into the mouth of the case. Since I single-load these cartridges I have never messed with crimping. I suppose a bullet seater could be used to seat each ball at exactly the same depth, but I just eyeball it. At \$15.30 a pound for Unique powder, each load uses just a bit more than \$0.02 of powder, throw in another \$0.03 for primer and you are looking at about a nickel a shot (assuming your lead is free). Considering the rate at which we can go through a 100 of these loads at the range, a nickel a shot doesn't hurt my wallet or my shoulder!



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