There’s More to Reloading Than Just Saving Money

By Nick Sisley

It may be incorrect to break shooters who reload into two categories, but let me propose that one category of reloaders shoot factory ammo in tournaments while their reloads are shot in practice. Another category of reloaders shoot reloads for both practice and registered competition. In this latter category I’m guessing there can be a lot of differences, i.e. there are really expert reloaders and the not-so-expert reloaders. It’s the really expert reloaders that I’m addressing this month.

Cliff Moller at Briley Manufacturing suggested this approach to me. Cliff considers himself in the first category above; he shoots factory ammo in tournaments and reloads for practice. He told me he feels poorly any time he shoots factory ammo in practice; it’s like he’s guilty—not being the proper custodian of his company’s money. When it comes to reloading machines, he uses a Spolar, noted for the high number of shells it can produce in record time, but he has not experimented at all with recipes. He uses the same primer, powder, wad, hull and shot capacity that Spolar set up for him at their factory.

Advance to a day Cliff was practicing with some other folks and Cliff runs out of his own 20 gauge reloads. He was shooting doubles with All-American Lindsay Plesko *(photo)* and Cliff lamented that he couldn’t hit anything—which, believe me, is a total stretch. Anyway, Lindsay offered Cliff a box of her 20 gauge reloads, for which she apologized, “This box—they are all my rejects; they look bad but you will find they shoot well.” Obviously, from a cosmetic standpoint these were not the perfectly crimped shells she used in gaining All-American status.

Cliff slips two of them into his tubed Perazzi and voila—he cleans up and never missed a bird the entire round. Further, he remarked those Plesko reloads were just obliterating targets, but he wasn’t being bounced off the gun which is so important in any doubles shooting. Up until this point Moller had not considered that Lindsay had put any extra thought into those 20 gauge reloads, but he soon discovered that she had spent an unbelievable amount of time, money, energy and patterning into developing this 20 gauge reload—and no, she’s not about to share her recipe. Why should she? You need to spend the time, money, energy and pattern paper that she did to find out, so don’t be an oaf and ask her.

One note of interest is that Lindsay has more total confidence in her reload than she ever could in a factory load—and we know what confidence means in this clay target game. Another point is that she’s a woman, and how many of you males consider that such a person could concoct better reloads than you? Or how many of you females think that reloading is just for the guys? Don’t forget—she’s an All-American. There’s something very positive going on here.

In patterning Lindsay strives for evenness, a lack of any pattern holes, and a lack of pellet concentration. I think with most of her early reloads she didn’t get that result. One or two patterns with one reload showed this was not the powder, wad, primer, shot combination she was looking for. So it’s back to the reloading machine to come up with the next recipe. In addition to changing the load, she also tries changing the choke. She uses pattern paper not a pattern plate, and she says the Houston Gun Club has an excellent pattern facility. Does your club have that feature?

Lindsay has been experimenting and developing reloads for years, but it has only been recently that she has achieved a reload that she is especially happy with. She started off with a single-stage reloader but now uses a MEC 9000G.

Another example of an expert reloader is John Castillo *(photo)*. John and Cliff are very close, and Cliff told me that John is constantly working on perfecting his reloads—checking velocities, being true to himself about any recoil reduction sensations, and, most important, spending an inordinate amount of time at the patterning board to determine how his reloads are progressing. You are probably already aware, but if you’re not, John is another All-American.

Cliff suggested that there are many, many skeet shooters who are just as professional in concocting truly great ammo after plenty of experimentation. The proof of this pudding is in the hundreds of pattern papers or pattern plates that have been perforated over the years. Reloaders in this category know when they have come up with something better because their confidence soars when they (1) get down to serious practice or (2) start shooting a tournament.

Cliff thinks reloaders in this latter category reload slowly, maybe even on a single-stage reloader, though not necessarily. Sometimes I hear talk from a guy who claims he reloads x number of shells in 30 minutes (the number always being a high one.) In my view we should not reload for speed. We can only do our best at this pursuit if we really slow down and carefully take our time. I’ll bet Lindsay Plesko and John Castillo reload very carefully.

How many squib loads do you turn out—say per 1000 rounds? The number should be zero, or one or two at most. Anyone encountering five or more squib loads per 1000 rounds is hardly an expert reloader. I’m not talking about primer dents and the primer not going off.

This leads to the wrap up of this treatise. Many of us genuinely enjoy reloading. I often fib at folks saying, “The only reason I shoot clay targets is so I have something to reload.” While not entirely true, reloading is enjoyable to me. After all, we’re creating something from individual components that don’t look, feel or react like the finished product. Personally, I spend an inordinate amount of time using my brain pounding this keyboard, then going over and over what I’ve written. Consequently, I usually can’t wait to get away from this computer, pull the black cover off one of my reloaders and start working the operating handle and inserting wads—slowly of course.

I’m guessing that many of you feel the same way. You work so hard at what you do that it’s relaxing to get away from the turmoil and stress to just sit down and crank out 100 or so shells. Some with stressful jobs will disagree—if they do not reload. Many non-reloaders look at this pursuit as dreadful, mundane, boring and/or other negatives. But reloading is what you make of it, and I guarantee that thousands and thousands of skeet shooters love to create their own shotshells.

Further, if you are not a reloader and decide to take up the past time, work your way slowly toward the expertise of Lindsay Plesko and John Castillo. You won’t make the progress they have made in a week or month or even a year. Life is a journey, and becoming an expert like the above two can be your journey.