

GUN MAINTENANCE

BY JOHN CAFFEY

Whether you are hunting, shooting trap, sporting clays or skeet your shotgun is the one common denominator. To keep your shotgun performing at its highest level it needs to be cleaned and maintained on a regular basis. The shotguns made today are different than your granddad's old gun. Today's guns benefit from improved high technology machining and surface treatments that increase the life and price of the gun thus making it oftentimes a significant investment. To protect that investment and keep it performing like it should you need to have a regular cleaning and maintenance program in place. I don't care if I shoot one round or 1000 rounds, I clean my gun at the end of the day, but we all know those people who are lucky if they clean their guns once or twice a year. While the latter example is, in my opinion, a poor choice as far as cleaning frequency is concerned, there is no one true correct way or formula for cleaning your shotgun. Cleaning your gun is the most important part of shotgun maintenance. Shotgun owners need to recognize the reasons why frequent cleaning of a shotgun is necessary and what supplies are needed in order to effectively complete the task and not damage your gun in the process. This will go a long way towards keeping a shotgun working at its maximum potential for many years.

After a couple of clean, dry passes I wrap a cloth or fiber patch around the bore brush and apply some cleaning solvent, the brand used is up to you but I would suggest one designed for gun cleaning and pass it through again. I have had a few people I shoot with tell me that they use dryer sheets to clean their barrels both for the dry pass and the solvent pass. I don't know if it cleans any better than a paper towel or cloth patch but it does have a nice clean smell.

SAFETY FIRST

I think that safety is the most important step in the gun cleaning process and one that should become second nature. How many people have you heard or read about who were accidentally shot or otherwise injured while cleaning an empty gun? An over/under allows you to clearly see that the barrels are empty when the gun is broken open. But that is not always the case with a semi automatic or a pump gun. In the case of a semi automatic or pump gun it is imperative to take the time to check the magazine several times while having the gun pointed in a safe non- hazardous direction. After confirming the gun is unloaded then remove the barrels from the receiver with the bolt open and clear. Take your time to check before you clean. Don't be the person that the anti-gun lobbyists use as an example for gun control.

CLEANING THE SHOTGUN

After removing the barrel, you need to make sure that any springs or small parts are kept in a cup or tray where they can be easily located when it's time to reassemble. I always start with a few passes of a cleaning rod and bore brush to get the loose debris from the plastic wads and powder residue removed. I have one shooting buddy who has his cleaning rod attached to his power drill in order to get that extra boost. This is entirely personal preference but one that I think adds too much extra time to the process. The bore brushes should match the gauge of the shotgun and are most commonly made from phosphor bronze. Some of the premium brushes have a nickel coating on the bristles. Either one will work fine just make sure that the brush is stiff enough to remove debris from the barrel's bore without damaging it.





Here again this is personal preference so that will be up to you to decide. After you have run your barrel(s) a few times and are satisfied with the clean then you need to clean your choke tubes. Remove your screw in choke tubes. Choke tubes that are left in the bore uncleaned can over time seize tight making it next to impossible to remove thus turning your multi-choke gun into a fixed choke gun. I have always found that cleaning the choke tubes every time is best, always making sure to clean the threads of the choke and the inside of the choke. There are some

formulas on popular shooting websites that do a good job of cleaning the chokes as well as removing the fingerprints from your fingers, so wear appropriate hand and eye protection when using. I can state from experience that forgetting to remove choke tubes from some of these concoctions can damage the choke tubes. Some manufacturers recommend applying a small amount of anti-seize to the threads which I remove during cleaning and replace on a regular basis. Now that the bore of the barrels and choke tubes are clean the next step is to wipe down

the outside of the barrels and apply a little gun oil. This will remove any grease from your hands and outside residue that can promote rust while adding that pleasant shine to the barrels. Now that the barrels are done, do a quick visual inspection checking the outside as well as the inside. If you notice any dark rings starting to appear down the barrels it is recommended that you have a gunsmith look at it as soon as possible as this could be a sign of barrel bulges. After your barrels are clean be sure to give some attention to the forearm. A wipe down and cleaning of the locking mechanism is recommended to remove old grease and grit.



Every type of gun has some specific cleaning considerations. Semiautos can be a bit more complex in large part because of their operating systems. Inertia operated shotguns use recoil energy to cycle the action. Because of this, fouling is usually expelled through the muzzle of the barrel. Gas operated guns pose a little more of a maintenance requirement as almost all utilize a piston system and gas ports. Both the piston and the gas ports should be cleaned on

a regular basis. Based on their design fouling can block gas ports and cause the pistons to malfunction. I have found that the pistons need to have buildup removed with a knife or dental cleaning tool that can be purchased at a hardware store or gun show. Make a point to inspect the O-Rings regularly as these tend to dry rot and cause the gun to malfunction.

Now that the barrels are clean it's time to move on to the receiver. The main focus should be the firing pins. A quick wipe down where the shell comes in contact with the firing pins is usually sufficient. With an over/under time should be given to thoroughly clean the cocking mechanism as well as the hinge pins. Every place on the gun that was lubricated prior to using such as your action bars on a pump gun, hinge on a break action as well as bolt lugs should be cleaned to prevent excess wear.

EXTERIOR CLEANING

How you clean the exterior of your gun is based primarily on what material the gun is made from. Since many of the guns used for clay shooting have varying levels of the grade of wood used it is always best to check with the manufacturer as to their suggestion for cleaning. I have found that a high-grade furniture polish meets the manufacturer's standards and provides protection from the elements along with a good shine. The same applies with cleaning of the outside of the receiver as solvent used on the inside of the barrels would not be good for the wood or the engraved portion of the receiver. With diligent care and common sense, you can keep your gun looking new and maintaining its value for many years.