

# 48 RELOADING FOR WESTERN ACTION SH

By William "La Vista Bill" Bell

I've been involved in Western Action Shooting (WAS) for quite a few years now (SASS #11869, NCOWS #3300) and there's one thing that's a given; you're going to burn up quite a bit of ammunition during matches and/or practice. I don't know what the percentage is of "cow folks" that use .45 Colt, but my guess is it's pretty high – anyway it's one of my favorites; so let's do some calculating. I did a little "surfing" on the web and checked the prices out at one of the big Internet sporting goods sites for .45 Colt factory "cowboy" ammunition. I found five popular brands, the prices ranged from \$32.99 – \$43.99 for a 50-round box. Using an average price of \$36.79 per box, that would make one cartridge 74 cents. Now you go to a WAS match that has six stages and use factory ammo for your revolvers and rifle; you'll most likely use 10 rounds for the two handguns and 10 for the rifle, that's 20 cartridges per stage or 120 for the whole match. This amounts to around \$89 worth of factory ammunition...WOW!

I used the same site to see how much a .45 Colt handload would cost using all-new factory components; brass, primers, smokeless powder, and lead bullets. New brass ran about 30 cents per cartridge case; 250-grain bullets were 13 cents each; large pistol primers an estimated 3 cents each and powder (in this case IMR Trail Boss) we'll say 1 cent per charge (SWAG). This comes to 47 cents per cartridge, a savings of 27 cents per shot over factory ammo or a total of about \$56 worth of ammo. Of course, this is assuming you already have all the reloading gear to put that handloaded ammunition together. That in itself is a sizeable investment, but to save an average of \$33 per match on ammunition, your initial investment in equipment will quickly pay for itself and will become the proverbial "gift that keeps on giving." Besides, after the initial outlay for components, the brass for the next reload will be free (brass cases can last 10 or more reloads depending on a number of factors), so when you knock off that 30 cents, you'll end up with a handload costing only 17 cents per shot!

I started handloading handgun ammunition when I was in my late teens, and until very recently, I used a single-stage press and reloaded my ammunition the "slow-but-sure" way. I saved some time using a hand-operated priming tool and

going in stages; de-cap/size all my brass at one time (per caliber), prime all the brass, expand the neck (or bell) the cases, throw the powder charges (50 cases at a time), then seat and crimp all the bullets. It took time, but I wasn't shooting but a couple of hundred rounds per session, so it worked out OK. When I was with the Kentucky Army National Guard combat pistol team, they supplied the ammo; later as a deputy sheriff shooting PPC, the department gave me some .38 wad-cutter ammo, but for the majority of the shooting I "rolled my own." Later, shooting steel targets on action-oriented courses, I used some agency

ammo and some of my own reloads. Then along came Western Action Shooting.

As an Old West aficionado, with a special interest in outlaws and lawmen, this definitely was my kind of game! However, all of a sudden, I was burning a lot of powder and slinging a passel of lead down range. I continued to manage with my single-stage press; so I suppose ignorance is bliss. I've always believed in the KISS principle and I'll admit I'm somewhat overawed by complex-looking mechanical and electronic devices, so I hung on to what I knew for sure how to use, even though it was time consuming. But like a sinner at a revival meeting, my eyes were opened and I saw the true pathway to enlightenment, courtesy of Dillon Precision.

I have long admired Dillon reloaders and wanted one of my very own, but as I have already admitted, I was a bit scared of the technology. I'll face down a "bad guy" any old day, but a machine that looks like it would take a PhD in engineering to put together...now that's an altogether different subject. Regard-

less, I had a conversation with *Blue Press* editor Mark Pixler at the 2010 SHOT Show and I walked away having ordered an RL 550B and the necessities to reload cartridges in .45 Colt. What came to my door was a big white box and a couple of other smaller ones containing the RL 550B, .45 Colt dies and a caliber conversion kit, an instructional DVD, plus, on the advise of a good friend, I also ordered a Strong Mount, which not only spreads the stresses of reloading over a larger surface on your bench top, it also raises the press about 6 - 8" making reloading more comfortable, especially for those who like to reload standing.

The RL 550B comes with a one caliber conversion set (shellplate, locator buttons, powder funnel)



**The RL 550B is ideal for Western Action Shooters who want to get into handloading using a progressive reloading press.**

**The author found it fairly simple to assemble and set up; it's also very affordable when you consider the cost savings over factory loaded "Cowboy" ammo.**