As many of you know my tastes run to exotic calibers of the older variety. Some might even say “odd tastes”.

I’d always admired the Model 1907 .351 Winchester Self Loading and several years back, one of the board members gave me a big bag of .351 brass and a set of RCBS .35 Winchester Self Loading dies. These are not the same as the .351 SL dies and are a tad shorter, but they will work. An Ideal #350319 mould came with the deal. A year or so later, I picked up an Ideal #350293 HP mould and it joined the “future project” pile as well.

Shell holders for the .351 are elusive and some research is required but RCBS calls out the #19 and it works with both factory brass and fired, reworked, .357 Maximum brass from ammunition that is sold by The Old Western Scrounger and other firms making reformed brass.

Buffalo Arms at the site below advertised .351 WSL brass but, it is pricey.  

Sizers are not off the shelf items for the .348”-.352” diameter bullets so I had my shooting partner ream a couple. One to .3505” for the .348 Winchester and the other to .352” for the .351 SL.

Stillwell Tool and Die down in Texas makes custom sizers. If you aren’t mechanically inclined, or have someone who is, this is the way to go for a sizer.  
http://www.sizingdie.com/

The .351 SL is not kind to brass. Most looks like it hit the ground and has been stepped on. I normally take a .50 caliber machine gun bullet and iron out the case mouth and then run an expander die in it to make it more or less round before sizing.

Since the .351 brass I have is aged, I annealed the necks down to just below where the base of the bullet would come.

Last weekend at the gun show, I was looking for a rifle. We’re fortunate here in Kentucky as the Indiana Prison system armed it’s guards with the .351 and a few years back sold them to the public. Because of the non-availability of ammunition, except at collector’s prices, one finds the prices for “plain Jane” guns very reasonable. The Winchester Deluxe models go for higher prices but I was looking for a shooter.

Most of the Model 1907s will have stock cracks and cracks in the forearm. Another thing to be on the lookout for are weak magazine catches.

I walked up to a guy at the show and he had a Model 1907 over his shoulder. I asked and it was a .401. Darn, I was wanting a .351. He then pulled a .351 off the other shoulder. It had been re-blued, had the usual hairline stock cracks, a few pits on the receiver but the original sights were on it and the magazine looked good. The barrel was good and the magazine catch was positive. A shooter….just what I was looking for. A deal was made and I walked away with the .351 and a box of ammo with reformed cases.

I went home and cleaned it and checked it out. It looked just fine. It should shoot.

Sunday morning, I hit the range and loaded a round and squeezed off. What a crack and a surprising amount of recoil for a little cartridge. I looked to see if it had ejected. It had…about 20 feet away.

Then I loaded three and got next to the range house and popped them off. It shot pretty good at 100 yards but a little low. I adjusted the sights and looked for the brass. It was all over the place. I definitely have positive ejection on it...
but it shot fine, functioned fine, and appeared to be accurate.

This morning, I loaded some cast and ignored the warning about loading to maximum and I hope the cases don’t eject so I can keep track of them.

The bullets above are the two bullets I have to work with.

The #350293 HP weighs 167.2 grains and is a plain base.

The #350319 weighs 176.7 grains. It is the original bullet Ideal/Lyman lists in the older manuals.

I currently have a sizer, which sizes bullets to .3522”. If either of the bullets above are not available, you should be able to downsize a bullet of an appropriate nose design to load in the .351 by using an intermediate die of .354” or .355”. Size lubricated bullets so that the bands are supported during downsizing. The #358311 comes to mind as a design that may work in this manner and it is readily available. Due to the plain base of the #358311, a powdered buffer, a Dacron wad, or card wad may have to be used to protect the base.

Cases

Cases for the .351 are at a premium. If old loaded ammunition is found, I’d pull the bullets, deprime and anneal the necks prior to firing as most is quite old and age hardened.

New, formed cases, in the form of loaded ammunition can be bought from companies such as the Old Western Scrounger at a fairly high price. Unfired cases can be bought from Buffalo Arms. These are normally .357 Maximum cases that have been resized and trimmed to length. The rim diameter is reduced and a extractor cut is made on a lathe. This can be done at home on a lathe, but it’s time consuming and labor intensive. However, it may be worth the effort if you have the lathe, brass, and plenty of time.
Test Loads .351 Self Loading

These loads fire safely in my rifle. Use data at your own risk.

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<th>Powder</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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HSR=Herter’s Small Rifle

Note – 1 - I believed that this bullet was suffering from base erosion so I added .2 CC of powdered buffer material over the powder. This resulted in a compressed load and much better accuracy than when the plain base was exposed.

I initially started this project with a set of .35 Winchester Self Loading dies made by Lyman. Then, one of the board members tipped me off that he was using a .38 Special/.357 Magnum tungsten carbide die to neck size. I started looking at dimensions and trying things and now, I use the .38 Special/.357 Magnum set for all of the loading operations. The only way you’ll know is to see if a case that has been full length resized will chamber readily in your rifle. A #311 seating stem was used in the seating die.

Based on my previous comments on using .38 bullets in the .351 SL, I ran 30 bullets from a #358156 HP mould. These dropped from the mould about .361”. I nose first sized to .358” and seated the gas check. I then ran them nose first through a .355” die to take them down to an intermediate size and completed the process by running them through my .352” die. They were then lubed in my Lyman #450 using the .352 die.

These bullets were loaded over some WC820 and seated to crimp in the top crimp groove on the #358156. I chose the top groove as the “downsizing” process makes the lube groove smaller and I though I might need the extra lube so I lubed the bottom crimp groove as well. It’s a nice looking round and I’m hoping it will feed in the .351 SL.

The downsized bullets fed and fired just fine. One round hesitated during feeding and the case was bent but it continued on and fed by itself and fired normally. I detected the bend during resizing after the range session. I believe that the SWC design hung slightly during feeding. If a downsized .358 bullet is desired. I believe a round nose or truncated design should be chosen.

A “this winter’s” project is restocking the .351 SL. Utility grade wood is available from Boyd’s, [http://www.boydboys.com/BrowseEbus/2piecewin.asp](http://www.boydboys.com/BrowseEbus/2piecewin.asp). Most of the .351s and .401s I’ve encountered have cracked stocks and fore ends and this old rifle deserves sound wood and it will be ready for another 100 years of service.

John Goins/akabeagle