

Playing Hard Ball

Heavy .45 ACP Bullets in Revolvers

It seems as if someone's always asking a question on one of the talk sites about a good, heavy carry bullet and load for the .45 ACP cylinder in the Ruger Blackhawk convertible. Several folks have fitted a .45 ACP cylinder to their Vaqueros and are on the hunt for this magical load also.

The answer is invariably the Lyman/Ideal #452423 over 6.0 grains of Unique. Now, I've shot that load and it isn't too bad. It runs 1005 FPS out of my Blackhawk in milspec cases seated to 1.130" overall length. Not bad for a 246 grain bullet. The accuracy is pretty good for 100 yard plinking and a man should be satisfied with it. I shot a box last Sunday of mixed solids and hollow points and the hollow points won the accuracy test hands down. They run 232 grains and that takes us right back to the old 230 grain round nose standby, the #452374 and its various clones.

For some reason, I've never been satisfied with old Elmer's .45 ACP bullet design. It's pretty short and stubby and you have to drive it fast to get good accuracy at longer ranges. It has the aerodynamics of a brick and I think this works against it when accuracy and range is what you're after.

I started looking through my mould cabinet for the various heavy .45 bullets that I had moulds for that might be suitable. Several emerged that are favorites in the .45 Colt. Then I got really interested with all of the possibilities and decided that I'd test these, get some workable data once and for all.



L – R: 452309, 454485 HP, 452423, 454190, 452400, 454424, and 452490

There's the big brother to the #452423, the #454424. I pulled that one out.

Elmer once shot this in guns chambered for the .45 ACP and I've played with it off and on over the years in various .45s including the M1911A1. I've even shot Elmer's old load in the M1911A1 when I was younger and had less ... wisdom. It worked after a fashion but I'd not shoot that load again in an old Army M1911A1 unless it had special springs and I'd not dare to publish that load here. If you want it, look in Sixguns, by Keith, and blow up your own pistol.

I recall once when I was maybe 16 years old fishing a pond in North Carolina. This was down in the sandy tobacco country and I was easing around the pond with a cane pole with a short line and catching blue gills through holes in the willows. I came to one place with grass about a foot high and this Blacksnake stood up out of the grass like a Cobra and looked at me. Now, I'm deathly scared of snakes. I pulled a M1917 Colt that I had that was loaded with the #452424 and too much Unique in .45 ACP cases in half moon clips and proceeded to plop six of these big bruisers in the grass where he was. After the dirt clods stopped falling from the impact on the soft pond bank, I found myself in the middle of a sandy road about 12 feet away from the site of the shooting and I don't remember going there. As far as I know, the snake is still alive and well and proliferating in NC. There's no doubt that the #454424 is a great .45 bullet because of the wide, flat meplat that absorbs the energy of the round upon impact.

Then there's the #452490. This is Ray Thompson's .45 Auto Rim bullet design and one of my favorites in the .45 Colt. Then I grabbed a #454190 as I've always had good results with that in the .45 Colt. Then I spied a #454485HP

that I picked up in a trade with a fellow in California. I have already tested the #454309 and the #452400 in the .45 ACP and know that they work well so I decided to stick with moulds that I knew would be available.

I'm not fond of gas checks on revolver bullets. In my opinion, they're about as useless as the proverbial appendages on a boar hog. Last winter, I was in a mould modifying mood and me and my shooting partner "dehorned" the #452490 (which has one cavity hollow pointed) and the #454485HP. Both modifications turned out well and both shoot accurately in the .45 Colt.

Now, before I get into this too far, I'm talking about .45 ACP loads for a Ruger Blackhawk with a .45 ACP cylinder. These loads may or may not work in your .45 auto and probably won't due to overall length and the pressures involved. On the other hand, they may work as Speer lists data for a jacketed 260 grain bullet. Approach their use in a .45 Auto with caution.

The chambers on my Ruger .45 ACP cylinder are short. That means that I'm unable to get any longer seating depth to lessen the pressure problems. In this situation, I start low and kind of ease into the level of loads that I want based on past experience and existing data.

Accuracy testing is done at 100 yards using some reference point on our 100 yard backstop. If bullets impact in the close vicinity as called, they're accurate. If I see bullets that impact outside my "called shot" zone, I know I have problems. Not terribly accurate but the system works well for developing field loads.

These are loads that I've previously used and tested.

Remember, these are my loads in my revolver and they fire safe for me. If you choose to use the data as is, it's your revolver and your responsibility. Again, remember that seating depth is critical on a small capacity case like the .45 ACP so make changes carefully and expect changes in pressure.

Bullet	Weight	Powder	Weight	Av Vel	SD	Szd Diam	Primer	Seat Depth	Comments	
452400	251.5	Unique	6.0	929	8.5	.451	WLP	1.164 AOL	Good Acc	
452400HP	221.0	Unique	6.0	854	26.9	.452	RLP	1.164 OAL	Good Acc	
452423	246.0	Unique	6.0	1005	41.8	.451	WLP	1.130 OAL	Good Acc	RA milspec cases
454309	235.0	Unique	6.0	985	45.7	.452	HLP	1.175 OAL	Good Acc	

WLP – Winchester Large Pistol RLP – Remington Large Pistol HLP – Herter's Large Pistol

Armed with this knowledge, I put together 8 test lots using 4 different bullets to kind of test the waters with.

Initial testing:

Bullet	Weight	Powder	Weight	Av Vel	SD	Szd Diam	Primer	Seat Depth	Comments
452424	254.0	Unique	6.0	958	18.5	.452	HLP	1.190 OAL	Fair Acc
452490	260.0	Unique	6.0	925	5.4	.451	HLP	1.238 OAL	Good Acc
454190HP	238.3	Unique	6.0	887	19.2	.451	HLP	1.258 OAL	Good Acc
454485HP	237.8	Unique	6.0	949	11.2	.451	HLP	1.216	Good

452423	246.0	Herco	6.5	993	18.0	.452	HLP	1.123	Fair Acc
452423	246.0	Unique	6.5	1009	13.9	.452	HLP	1.123	Not Acc
454190HP	238.3	Herco	6.5	950	16.1	.451	HLP	1.250	Acc

This will be the end of my testing. I have achieved the goals that I set and that was to identify loads that were safe in my Blackhawk .45 ACP cylinder with bullets in the 240-260 grain range that were accurate and in the neighborhood of 1,000 FPS for field use. I also captured the “recipes” for putting them together with recorded seating depths that is lacking in many manuals and I identified readily available powders for use in them.

None of these loads exceeded published data for jacketed bullets but we just didn’t have much for cast bullets. Now, I think we have. None of these bullets showed signs of excess pressure in my Blackhawk and I think most of them could be tweaked up a little more but I’m satisfied with the performance.

From my testing, with the moulds normally available to casters, either Lyman’s #454190 or #454424 look to be the best bullet choices. The #452423 was disappointing to me as I was expecting more out of it. I obtained good accuracy out of the hollow point version but many of you won’t be blessed with a HP mould. The “solid” version proved very unstable at 100 yards with some flyers “out of the pattern” as much as 6 feet with some powder combinations. In my opinion, if it’s unstable at 100 yards, it will be off at 25 or 50 as well. In the future, I’ll use the HP version for any of my shooting in the Blackhawk.

Bear in mind, these results were obtained with my pistol. Yours may handle any of the bullets differently than mine.

I’ll now ship this data and a big heavy box of bullets to AnthonyB and he’ll use it to develop loads in this range for the .45 autos.

It’s been a fun project.

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