Lyman Mold Numbers FAQ

#1 What are the letters before or after the mold #?
Example I just picked up a 358429AX. What does the AX stand for?

"A brief summary of current Lyman mould markings. Of the six-digit numbers, the first three are the (very!) nominal size-to diameters, and the last three started in a chronological sequence in 1896-7; we call the latter ones "cherry numbers", as that is how Ideal's John Barlow kept track of his mould cherries. For the low numbers, what used to be #3118 is now #311008 - six digits to keep the computers happy. But many of the cherry numbers from dropped designs were recycled; an old short-range #3089 for the .30-30 was dropped early-on, and was revived many years later as #3589, the .35 caliber "hammerhead" of lamented memory, then as #358009 until it, too, was dropped. In a very few cases, Lyman was able to pick a "cherry number" from the scrap heap that matched the bullet weight; an example is the Thompson SWC gas-check #358156, but this was not normal practice. Cherry numbers in the -400's and above are Lyman designs from 1925 on; the -500's were reserved for special - mostly custom - designs like the Harvey zinc-washer-based "Prot-X-Bores" and cores for his "Half-Jacketed Jugulars"; they are now into the high -600's.

Second, there should be matching one-, two- or three-digit numbers on each block; these - as I said above - are to keep the block pairs together after cherrying (a cherry is a contoured, fluted, hardened steel cutter of the shape of the intended bullet, rotated with heavy lubricant flow as the block halves are squeezed together in a double-acting vise, to form the cavity).

Other letters preceding or following the bullet number can be an identifier for a particular cherry of several for a specific bullet (like #311291AV), or can indicate "undersized": U- or -ES: "extra-small"; or, sometimes -S for "small"; "S" is also occasionally used for "short", where a shorter version of a particular bullet is made by inserting the cherry less deeply) . Where a bullet is available in multiple lengths/weights, the weight is also sometimes given in grains; I have a DC mould for #311241 cut - and marked - for the 125 and 150-gr. versions of this round-nose, plain-base .30-30 bullet.

A small, single number or number/letter combination may identify a particular tool operator; another letter which I can't recall just now ("C", "X" ???) indicates a mould that for some reason did not pass inspection and was sold as a "second"; a bunch of these came on the market in 1982-3, and those of us who have tried them generally have found them quite serviceable. The Lyman-made loose-block moulds from 1925 on (earlier "Ideal" moulds had the blocks integral with the handles) were marked "IDEAL" until around 1964, when Lyman decided casting and reloading tools were a major part of their business (formerly, they focussed on sights and Cutts Compensators) and changed the stamp to "LYMAN". In 1995, the factory moved a few miles, and the address changed from Middlefield to Middletown, CT. Starting in 1997, they began to add a stamped month/year date, eg,: 7/98 for July, 1998. Lots of information there, some of it still not fully understood.

That's just for the Lyman/Ideal moulds, my main specialty; other makers used different numbering schemes, a few of which have still not been fully "decoded". Modern-Bond had a truly weird system, but I won't go into that until you stumble across one."

The "AX" stamped in yours identified the specific cherrying cutter used on your mold (they probably have a couple on hand).

#2 I still find a few missing bullets from Lyman on the cast pics. Is there some
place I can find these? Example, 314299.

On #314299, this started as a #311299 for the .303 British, one of the early gas-check designs, in 1907 (Ideal Handbook No. 18) and was made until Marlin's Ideal production was shut down at the run-up to WW I, in 1916. It was picked up by Lyman in 1925-26 when they took over the Ideal line, and continued until 1980 when it was dropped, but

with the influx of surplus military arms, was resumed in 1992 and is still in the line. The #314299 you have was added, as a new, larger version for the oversize bores of the .303's, 7.62 x 54R Russians, etc., in 1991, and is also still in the line, alongside the original #311299. The CASTPICS posting was made from the 1973 Second Edition of the Lyman "Cast Bullet Handbook", and is thus prior to the introduction of #314299. (Note that two pages, covering the bullets in the #313... to #321... range are missing from the CASTPICS page; unless Sundog has added them in the last few weeks.) The #311299 and #314299 are visually identical, except for (a) the 0.003" (nominal) difference in diameter; and (b) the slight (but very annoying!) cherry-to-cherry variations due to final hand-sharpening.

Answers posted by Floodgate 12/16/2006