The Geezer Load for the .45ACP

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I started shooting practical pistol in 1977 at the Fort Harmar Rifle Club in Marietta, Ohio. The practical shooting program at Fort Harmar was started and run by Ken Hachathorn and Carl Heinrich (original IPSC founders). Throughout the equipment race years, this club, under Ken's influence, was the last bastion of the 5 inch 1911 in 45ACP. Other notables who shot at this club were Rick Miller, Charlie Kelsey (Devel), Wayne Novak, Steve Nastoff, and a host of others. All of us older IPSC shooters shot a lot of hardball, and equivalent hand loads, over the years and many of us have paid the price for that abuse.

My buddy Ken and I had talked about our lack of tolerance for recoil often before his recent move to Idaho. At this point in our lives, we no longer feel that “making major” is a big deal or that shooting Keith loads through 44 Magnums is mandatory for maintaining our manly image.

At the 2011 SHOT Show I mentioned to Jay Phillips that I had been working on a 45ACP load for us older guys. The primary attribute of this load was to be soft recoil; if it could make IDPA major (165,000) so be it. If not, it would at least allow those of us with beat up joints to continue to use and enjoy our 45ACP handguns.

I had tried heavy, 255gr., cast bullets at low velocity in the past and found reliability to be OK, but all the loads I tried were extremely dirty. Using 200gr. H&G 68 cast semi-wadcutters, I tried just cutting my charges of Winchester 231 to reduce velocity, and thus recoil, but found that even with lighter recoil springs the reliability I was looking for was not there. These loads also were dirty, left lots of unburned powder in the action, and, as pressures decreased, left serious carbon deposits on the fired cases.

Back to the SHOT show and Jay Phillips who suggested I try some of Berrys’ 185gr. HBRN double struck plated bullets. I tried some of these bullets with normal Win. 231 charges and found I could get good reliability and some reduction in felt recoil, but not enough of the latter.

Fast forward to the NRA show, Jay again, and the same conversation. To make a long story short between Jay, Ken, Chris Hodgdon, and a couple of other folks, it was decided that some other powders needed to be tried with the Berrys’ 185 round nosed bullets.

I’ll spare you all the sordid details of experimentation. I do however have to extend a big thank you to my son Brock, son-in-law Emmitt, and Matt Pyle (all young guys with good joints) for doing some of the shooting/evaluation of a fair number of loads.

So, here’s the scoop on the Geezer Load. Using mixed cases, with Winchester large pistol primers, and Berry’ 185gr. HBRN bullet, a charge of 4.3-4.4 grains of Hodgdon’s Clays gives a velocity 758fps. The finished rounds are loaded to an OAL of 1.250” and are crimped to .468”. The load is as close to 100% reliable as it can be in my full size 1911 Government model pistols when they are run with 16lb. recoil springs. POA/POI with fixed sight guns is pretty much the same as with hard ball or a 200gr.SWC equivalent loading out to 20 yards. The load is certainly minute of IDPA or bad guy. And, the recoil is SOFT! Bumping the powder charge up to 5.2 or 5.4 will get you close to the 165,000 power factor with not too much of an increase the recoil impulse. If making major is your goal you know what you are doing, I assume.

Almost as soft as the 4.3/4.4gr. Clays load, is 5.0gr of Winchester WST super target, again behind the Berry’s HBRN bullet. With a velocity of 770fps, this load was also reliable in my guns with 16 pound springs.

I have used a charge of 5.4gr. of Winchester 231 with a 200gr. H&G 68 as my practice load for IPSC/IDPA for many years and, although it is not a major load, even it was getting pretty hard on the old wrists and elbows. I started this project by just substituting the Berrys’ HBRN for the lead SWC and did notice a slight reduction in recoil. Velocity of the 185gr. HBRN over 5.4 of W231 is 811fps.. As mentioned above, reducing the W231 charges did not work out very well.

Is my Geezer load the final answer in a light recoiling 45ACP load? I think not, as the bullseye shooters have been “loading light” for years. Maybe we’ll hear from one of them. For now though, I’ll be loading Berrys’ 185grain HBRN over a charge of 4.3/4.4gr. of Hodgdon’s Clays and once again this old Geezer will enjoy shooting the great 45ACP.