



Barrel Break In

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Let's start by discussing the particular nature of the inside of a barrel in a modern firearm. There are practically no standards of barrel material (which may be carbon steel or stainless), nor are there very many standards in the methods of producing the rifling inside. With this in mind it is easy to understand why there are not many "givens" in the process of barrel break in. Most of the barrels produced fall into two classes. "Factory barrels" are those that come your major brand complete firearm. "Custom barrels" produced by independent custom manufacturers, that offer a wider range of selection and generally a much higher degree of quality. The "Custom barrel" is usually installed by your favorite gunsmith or custom rifle maker.

The rifling process starts with thru-drilling a blank of barrel steel. The straightness of this primary hole drilling is just as important as the following methods of rifling are. Barrel makers have a varied number of grooves in the rifling they can produce. This process is usually achieved by either one of three methods. The way most barrels were made for centuries was to "Cut" rifling in the barrel by the means of a Hook and Broach. Today most barrels produced by this method are called "Cut Rifle Barrels". The second method of producing rifling in a barrel is called "Button Rifled Barrels". A button made usually of a carbide steel alloy, is forced thru the barrel to produce a "Button Rifle Barrel". Lastly is the "Hammer-forged barrel" which is produced by first thru-drilling an oversize hole, placing a mandrel inside which has the rifling on its exterior. The barrel blank is then "hammered" with tremendous pressure in a 360° manner to shrink the barrel down around the mandrel. All of these processes are capable of producing barrels that can produce incredible accuracy.

Let's get a couple of things straight in our thinking. You probably have heard about "rough" barrels, and very "smooth" barrels. I can tell you for a certainty that there are both "rough barrels" and "smooth barrels" that have great accuracy. The "rough barrel" will, however, generally allow fouling to build up quicker. You have to be aware of this fact when you are breaking in your new barrel. You will be looking for factors that will help you determine which of the two groups this new barrel is going fit in. If it's going to be in the "rough barrel" group you're just going to have to clean more often. "Custom barrels" generally have been lapped to one degree or the other before they leave the factory. It's a good idea to find out from the maker if this is part of their practice because lapping will start the break in process. "Factory barrels" have no general rule either when it comes to lapping. You need to check this out in every instance. Lapping can smooth the barrel and help to minimize the build-up of fouling. Lapping by the way is achieved by using a mild abrasive on a patch and "working" on the rough spots, a process done exclusively by feel.

Just what the heck comprises fouling? Well fouling in a barrel really could be considered anything that is deposited after a round has been fired. Fouling build-up is what causes a barrel to lose accuracy. Fouling is found in three major categories, and several minor ones. Lets look the "majors" first!

1. Powder and primer fouling leave a gritty greyish black residue. Powder fouling generally has some degree of corrosive nature on any type of steel. Black powder fouling is highly corrosive and needs to be removed

immediately. Shooting a black powder firearm can give you a much better understanding of what the negative nature of fouling is, because a black powder firearm will lose accuracy due to fouling after a very few shots (4 or 5 shots usually) Smokeless powder fouling is not as pronounced because it produces less residue than black powder. Clean burning powder is a good thing ! There is still a lot of military ammunition around that uses highly corrosive primers and powder. This fouling like black powder needs to be cleaned and neutralized immediately. You also need to know what the fouling threshold is on any particular firearm. This is part of the education you receive in barrel break in. By the way powder fouling is deposited over most the inner barrel surface.

An ugly sub-species of fouling is the particular propensity of the deterrent coating on ball powder. This fouling is normally present in the area directly ahead of the throat. It is one of the most difficult form of fouling to remove. It is powder fouling, but leaves a particularly nasty form of hard carbon fouling that is almost crystalline in nature.

2. Carbon fouling is caused by the by products of burning powder. Carbon fouling can also be caused by the burning oil you left in the barrel. Carbon will always look brown on a patch, and it is distinctly different in color from powder fouling. Carbon is usually deposited in the rear 20 percent of the barrel You can see lots of carbon build-up in the”throat area of the barrel. The throat is just forward of the chamber. A bore scope will also show you just what the flame temperature of the powder will do to the throat. You will see a lot of fissures and cracks in the steel, and these are generally filled with carbon. When the “throat “ is gone or “shot out”, so is the accuracy of the barrel. Carbon fouling is probably the most difficult to remove, because it has a great”cling” factor. Cool burning powders are a “good thing.”

3. Copper fouling in general has been one of the most over-looked areas of barrel fouling. Most of the old traditional “Powder Solvents”, are just that. They get rid of most of the powder fouling, some of the carbon, and NONE of the copper fouling. I personally have seen many rifles that had as many as 6 or 7 distinct layers of fouling, just like a “Black Forest Torte”. There are many firearms, the dealers tell me; are traded in because the owner believes the rifle is “shot out.” In most cases they are badly copper fouled, and are in need of a good cleaning. When the copper is removed these rifles return to their previous accuracy. Copper fouling is generally found in the last 20 percent of the barrel. The reason for this is that this portion of the barrel is where the bullet has achieved maximum velocity, and maximum friction. Believe it or not, most of the barrel heat is caused by bullet friction. Flame temperatures from burning powder can be felt in the chamber area. Bullet friction is felt at the end of the barrel. You should notice that the mid portion of the barrel is a bit cooler than either one of the previously mentioned. Rifle target shooters and varmint hunters for the most part have been long been aware of problems caused by copper fouling. If copper fouling is present it is easily visible to the naked eye. Look down the muzzle end of the rifle using a strong light. If it’s there,there will be pronounced copper streaks on the rifling. In the past the only way to remove copper has been with strong solutions containing lots of ammonia. The removal always required lots and lots of brushing. Along with that there have been lots of rifles that were not “shot out” they were “cleaned out.” Just count the number of passes you take thru a barrel using this stuff. Then multiply that number times the number of cleanings, and finally multiply that number times the age. The product is thousands of strokes through a barrel. There is NO way you can pass a cleaning rod thru a barrel that many times and “NOT” compromise the quality of the barrel. Brushing is not a “good thing.”

GETTING DOWN TO NUTS & BOLTS

With all this in mind we now can turn to the task itself of breaking in a new barrel. Generally we can say that most new barrels are “broken in” somewhere between 50 and 100 rounds. In my personal experience I have seen some factory barrels that would not settle down in to shooting good groups until 200 or so rounds had been fired. You should be able to see a marked improvement in grouping as the barrel “breaks in”.

BEGINNING THE BREAK IN PROCESS

Firstly you need to make sure that your new barrel is dead clean. Apply Wipe-Out™ or Patch-Out™ and let it sit for an 20 minutes. Patch out the barrel and re-apply Wipe-Out ,or Patch-Out™ letting the second application sit of at least 10 minutes. This second application is a “Proof Test”. It will ‘ prove’ if the first application really got the barrel clean. Twenty minutes is long enough for the chemicals in Wipe-Out to react if there is any fouling left in the barrel. Remember that copper will leave a blue patch. Powder fouling will leave a patch greyish black. Carbon will always leave a brown color on the patch. If, after the second application of Wipe-Out or Patch-Out™ there is still color on the patch, you will need to re-apply Wipe-Out or Patch-Out™ and let it set overnight. When you get a clean white patch, using Wipe-Out, that means that the barrel is “dead clean”.

THE ACTUAL BREAK IN PROCESS

We can now start the ” break in” process. What we want is to let the barrel tell us how far we are in the “break in “ process. I also recommend using a good coated one piece cleaning rod and a bore guide in the cleaning process. Be sure to use a caliber specific jag and good 100% cotton patches.

What we are going to do is to always shoot for a group. It is group size that is a major factor in determining if your barrel is breaking in. The groups should get progressively smaller as the barrel is breaking in. You would have no idea of your progress if you were pinned to the old method of “one shot and clean’. Most good modern barrels will be “broken in” in somewhere between 25 and 100 rounds.

Step # 1

With a clean barrel the first thing I recommend is to fire three shots, using ammunition that I know is accurate in this cartridge. Remember that we are shooting for the best grouping possible. The concentration of shots into a small group will also tell us how far along the barrel is in the “break in “ process. I then apply Wipe-Ou or Patch-Out™ t and let the bore cleaner sit for approximately 20 minutes. Pay close attention to the color left on the patches, because the color will tell you what is going on in the barrel with regard to fouling.

Step#2 (no evidence of copper on the patch)

Apply the second application of Wipe-Out or Patch-Out™the “proof test” application, and let it set another 20 minutes. If you do not get any color on the patch after this second application, you then know that the initial application really did clean the barrel. You may the proceed shooting groups of three shots, cleaning after each group of three. I normally will fire around 10 groups of three shots. I am interested to see if the groups are tightening The barrel will tell you if it is copper fouling by the patch color. If I am not getting blue on the patch, I normally will increase to four shot groups, cleaning in between each fired group. If I still have no evidence of copper on the patch after a four shot group, I will then progress to five shot groups. The barrel will tell you if it is copper fouling by the evidence left on the patch.

Step #2A (Patch has blue on the patch)

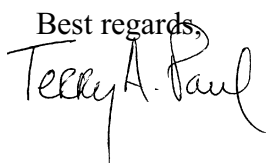
If I get evidence of copper on the patch after the second application, it will probably be best to drop down to shooting groups with 2 shots. Make sure that the barrel is clean, with no color on the patches. Then begin shooting two shot groups. If the barrel is showing lots of copper (blue) on the patch with two shot groups, then it is time to use Wipe-Out or Patch-Out™ and Accelerator. This will speed the time it takes to remove the copper. Also it will speed up the time between firings. Repeat two shot groups cleaning between each group firing. When you get very little evidence of copper blue color on the patch, it is time to go to three shot groups.

The barrel may still show evidence of copper after total 100 rounds has been fired in groups of two, three, four or five . That is not indicative of anything other than the fact that this barrel will copper foul easily and it will need to be cleaned more often.

Many custom barrels will show little or no copper during the “break in” period. What is most important is that the barrel is clean between each group firing. As the barrel is breaking in you will be able to realize a definite improvement in group size. Smaller for a change, is always better. The beauty using Wipe-Out or Patch-Out™ in the “break in “ process is the fact that the barrel quality has not been compromised by endless amounts of brushing. Nor are you using a witches brew of 4 or 5 chemical products, each accompanied by more and more brushing.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to call. I will be happy to help you with any questions you may have.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terry A. Paul". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'T'.

Terry Paul
Sharp Shoot R Precision Products
785-883-4444 Phone
785-883-2525 Fax
E-MAIL = gethelp@sharpshootr.com
Web site: www.sharpshootr.com