

# CLEANING YOUR GUN



Photo courtesy of



■ By Michael Ware

**“To clean or not to clean, that is the question.”** I was hoping for something Hamlet-like, but I’ll settle for mildly Shakespearian. Questions about cleaning are pretty common around our shop. We’re asked this often and sometimes the answers may surprise you. I think most people already assume that cleaning is required with all weapons all the time, and ask just because it pops out of their mouth. I always enjoy saying “nope, I never do it” just to watch their reactions. There’s no reason owning a custom gun shop can’t be fun folks...

There are several weapons that I prefer to see cleaned routinely. The trick can sometimes be when and why we clean them, more so than the fact they are simply cleaned. For years I would pack up my deer hunting gear, a couple rifles, an ATV, and head to the family farms in North West Missouri for the deer opener. My entire family would want all their weapons cleaned and polished up on the season eve. After a dozen or so weapons over the course of several hours each year, I was glad to finally have the light bulb pop on. Not only why was I doing this for everyone else, but also more importantly, why are we destroying ‘seasoned’ barrels and lathering on stinky oil the night before we creep out into the wild for all to smell? It was time for a family discussion. The fact is ‘fouling’ is necessary in many weapons. After shooting just a few rounds of ammunition through a spit polished rifle barrel it isn’t uncommon to see groups settle into a distinct area. This is especially true with box stock rifles. My family would shoot their rifles all year long and enjoy consistent accuracy and then I would clean them up and essentially shift the zero of the weapon due to an ultra clean barrel. So while I prefer a clean rifle for the purposes of reliability, when you clean it and why makes a difference on performance.

What about a carry gun? This might be another consideration all together. We sometimes hear complaints of weapons

going ‘click’ instead of ‘bang’ at the range under practice conditions. This is bad. The last thing I want somebody to worry about when carrying is the reliability and durability of their weapon. After all, it is a tool of last resort, so we need it to work if it is actually drawn and activated. We see a lot of debris in carry weapons. You name it and I’ve seen it. Snickers bars, peanuts, bobby pins, a dime, pen lids, etc. have all come out of carry guns dropped at our shop for problems. Most look like they’ve been used as the lint screen of my wife’s dryer too. In cases like this, I want to see tip top reliability, period. Thus, cleanliness is next to Godliness in this case.

What about that old Mauser your Dad gave you? Or that ratty SKS in the back of the gun cabinet you only shoot every other Thanksgiving when the family shows up for a weekend of overeating? Those sometimes need the most urgent care. Surplus ammunition is used routinely in those types of weapons. The majority of surplus ammo is of corrosive nature. It isn’t like you’ll lose an eye using it, or your trigger finger will fall off, but whether you shoot just one shot or several, the salts left

behind will eat away at metal like you can’t imagine. Thorough cleaning is good, but even just a light cleaning will go a long ways to avoid problems with corrosive ammo. Regardless of the product, if you can apply something to neutralize the salts and rinse them out it will help a lot. When out of an agent, we have even boiled water and poured it through the weapon to suspend and rinse out the corrosive salts until we can get to clean them the following day.

I tend to let my tactical precision rifles go a bit. Since I’m not shooting bench rest with them, I let the groups settle in and don’t clean the stick until I see a drop in accuracy. Sometimes this covers as many as 700 rounds between cleanings. If there isn’t a chunk of dirt in the barrel or action, I don’t get too worried about it. Modern propellants are excellent and pretty clean, so I’m ok to leave it for a bit. ...And in case you were wondering, my family figured me out. They now opt to wait until after the hunt and then ask me to clean all the rifles. Family – I read somewhere you have to love them... 🤔



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