

CLEANING YOUR MOUNTED SHOOTING '73 RIFLE

By **DENNY CHAPMAN**

There are now more than 150 CMSA rifle shooters in the 2011 points race. With all these black powder blank cartridges being shot out of our trusted long guns we're left with a lot of dirty barrels and actions. It's important to maintain our guns properly and mounted shooting rifles can be particularly finicky if not kept clean. They need more than just a bore snake through the barrel after a match, so this article addresses the cleaning and maintenance of the most popular mounted shooting rifle in CMSA - the '73 Winchester replica.

There are many products on the market for cleaning black powder firearms. The main ingredients you'll find in my mounted shooting cleaning kit include fitted screwdrivers, a concentrated general purpose spray cleaner and disposable wipes, .45 caliber brushes and jags, nylon toothbrushes, .45 caliber patches and a Teflon®-based gun oil spray and dry rags (PHOTO 1).

TAYLOR'S & CO., INC.



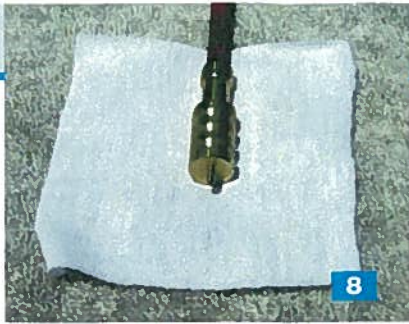
One of the most important things about cleaning the mounted shooting rifle is making sure that your rifle's inner workings are slick and free from the "black sludge" that builds up from black powder fouling and oil, along with other lubricants. This not only attracts dirt, but can affect the timing of your rifle. A dirty rifle will have a slow action, and may eventually lock up, and/or not feed or eject ammo properly.

Before you clean your rifle, make sure that it is unloaded! The 1873 rifle is particularly easy to clean, as there are two removable side-plates exposing the action (PHOTO 2). Take care when removing the plates, as the toggle links and pin will easily fall out. Remove both plates, toggle links and toggle pin (PHOTO 3). Pull the lever tension springs out to the side. This is easily done by inserting the blade of your flathead screwdriver between the spring and lifter and gently twisting until the springs slide off each side the lifter (PHOTO 4). By doing this, you are not changing the adjustment on the tension springs since you're not unscrewing them, keeping the proper timing and feel of your action.

Next, cock the hammer and pull the bolt back to the rear. Remove the lever screw, slide the lever down and out of the action and remove the lifter. At this point, the elevator will fall free from the action and can be cleaned separately (PHOTO 5). In addition, this will give you more room to clean the chamber and bore of the rifle barrel (PHOTO 6). This is the extent of disassembly recommended for routing cleaning.

Hot, soapy water does a great job of breaking down the black powder fouling experienced in our mounted shooting rifles. You can also use a general purpose household cleaner or commercial black powder cleaning solution. Moisten the dirty areas, such as the barrel and action (and disassembled parts) with your desired solution, and wipe clean. Some scrubbing with a nylon or brass brush may be necessary, depending on the extent of fouling (PHOTO 7). A fitted





jag with a treated .45 caliber patch does a great job of pushing fouling out of the barrel (PHOTO 8). Keep in mind that the chamber of your rifle barrel will get particularly dirty as we're shooting blanks that are shorter and are tapered down a bit smaller than our rifle's original caliber, so take special care to remove fouling from this area. You can also rig up a drill with a rifle rod and brush for quick work down a barrel or magazine tube (PHOTO 9).

You should make sure your magazine tube is free from corrosion (PHOTO 10) and use stainless steel springs and followers. Inspect your magazine tube every few months, depending on how much you shoot. Remove the screw-cap at the muzzle end of the magazine tube, allowing the spring and follower to slide out as you tip the rifle muzzle down. Clean the magazine tube as you would the barrel. I like to replace my magazine spring and follower every year, as these parts can corrode and weaken over time (PHOTO 11).

Make sure your gun is completely dry after cleaning and before oiling. A Teflon®-based gun oil is recommended on all moving parts (PHOTO 12). Take care not to overuse grease, as it will attract the heavy fouling of our black powder blanks. Reassemble your rifle in reverse order as mentioned above and store your rifle in a low-humidity environment. I recommend cycling a few rounds and test firing your rifle before a match to make sure you won't have any surprises waiting for you.

Our mounted shooting rifle is an important tool. With proper care and shooting technique, it won't let you down! By the way, be sure to check out Phil Spangenberg's historical look at the 1873 Winchester on page 24 of this issue. ♦

