

Notes on the Care and Feeding of Lever Guns #2

Tube magazine lever guns have some good points. They are easy to load and top off, impossible to lose and usually unnecessary to clean. They also have one glaring deficiency. They won't allow the use of sharply pointed spritzer type bullets.

Pointed bullets are a problem due to the fact that the point rests on the primer of the cartridge behind it in the magazine. This configuration acts like a separate firing pin for each cartridge. During recoil, the cartridges in the magazine move back and forth, similar to the shooter's body. This motion, when using pointed bullets, can and often does cause a chain firing effect for all of the cartridges in the magazine, igniting the primers and powder. Since this occurs in a relatively confined space, the results are generally disastrous.

The magazine commonly explodes, along with the wood forend, miscellaneous gun parts and the shooter's support hand. This is generally not a good thing for the shooter and anyone who may be nearby.

How does one avoid this? Various methods have been executed. Big Horn Armory's experience using their Model 89 lever gun chambered in 500 S&W shows several solutions. Barnes enlarges the hollow point on their 275 grain XPB bullet so that it is larger than the primer. These cycle and fly very well. Barnes' 325 grain and 375 grain XPB bullets do not conform to this concept. The points of these bullets DO contact the primer. While they are great bullets in a revolver, they are unsafe to use in a tube magazine gun.

This creates a safe condition where the bullet tip never can contact the primer of the next round. Hornady takes a different approach with their 300 grain FTX bullet. They use a flexible tip that deforms during recoil so almost no impact is transmitted to the primer of the next round. This seems to work very well. This does impact feeding of the round through a Browning style action, but proper working of the lever can and does mitigate this drawback.

Lever gun users should be aware of this common issue with certain ammunition and consult with the manufacturer of their firearm to make sure that the intended ammunition is suitable for use in tube magazine guns.