

# Notes on the Care and Feeding of Lever Guns #3

Having been a lever gun aficionado and owner of Big Horn Armory for many years, I figured I knew just about everything there is to know about lever guns. A recent trip to Gunsite proved the foolishness of that statement.

This year Gunsite introduced a new class, “Craft of the Lever Gun.” Lead instructor Lew Gosnell and Rangemaster Ed Head taught the students proper techniques for carrying, cycling, single feeding and others for these marvelous repeating rifles. They taught us to work the action as the rifle is brought to the shoulder, chambering a round. African and American carry methods for quickly bringing the rifle to the ready were worked on. Working the action should always be done briskly to ensure proper cycling. Many other ideas were part of the curriculum.

My real revelation came when they got around to what I will call tactical reloading. The concept is simple. With the rifle always mounted to the shoulder, take a shot, cycle the action to chamber a new round, then immediately top off the magazine with a fresh round using your trigger hand. Or take two shots, cycle the action, top off the magazine with two rounds. Repeat as necessary. Marvelous!

It is clumsy at first, but repeated practice makes it a quick and automatic procedure that always leaves you with a full magazine. Keeping the rifle in the shoulder mount makes all of these actions remarkably easy and swift. A butt cuff with a cartridge keeper installed allows quick access to additional rounds.

You might think, “I have a Model 89 with seven rounds of 500 S&W in the magazine, why would I need to reload?” The utility of the tactical reload did not become apparent until we ran the moving target drills.

Moving targets are challenging. The elk of a lifetime who is wounded and moving will require one or more solid hits to bring down. It is difficult to score a solid hit on a moving target and you may miss more than you hit, especially as the range increases. The tactical reload can help here as you always have a full magazine to finish the job at hand. If you use a lever gun as your home defense firearm, having a full magazine is always a good thing.

Ed Head wrote an excellent drill for the tactical reload of lever guns in the August 2018 issue of Shooting Illustrated. I suggest practicing this drill on a regular basis. I know I will. And I will make sure to sign up for the “Craft of the Lever Gun” class next year at Gunsite.

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