

WORCESTER NORTON SHOOTING CLUB

GALLERY (UNDERLEVER) RIFLE SHOOTING

When handgun ownership was banned, following the Dunblane tragedy, many turned to gallery rifles as a 'substitute'. These rifles fire pistol calibre rounds (.38/.357magnum and .44 magnum are the most common) and many of the old pistol competition courses of fire could be used, sometimes with modifications, for matches. In addition, many pistol shooters used to load their own ammunition so switching to gallery rifle allowed them to continue using their reloading equipment.

The guns.

Gallery rifles are underlever action and the uninitiated usually call them 'cowboy' or 'John Wayne' rifles. The classic action design is by far the most common but there are modern variations on the underlever theme used by some. They are very specialist, quite expensive and outside the scope of these notes.

The most commonly used calibre is .38/.357mag., with .44mag running a close second. A range of other calibres is available but again these are outside the scope of these notes.

There are two popular brands of rifle in general use - Winchester and Marlin, both with their advantages and disadvantages. There's one other make reasonably common in the UK - Rossi.



The rifle pictured belongs to the author and is a Rossi, chambered for .38/.357 magnum with stainless steel barrel and action. It has a 24" heavyweight octagonal 'bull' barrel and the magazine holds 12 rounds (.357 mag). It's top eject and has 'Truglo' open sights.

Being a top eject (spent cases are ejected from the top of the action, straight upwards) means that fitting a scope or red dot sight is not easy - the only way to do it is with a side mount. Hence the 'Truglo' open sights. These pick up ambient light and show two green dots in the rear sight and a red dot at the foresight - helps a bit with aiming in bright light but make little difference in low light.

Winchester and Marlin both produce side eject models, solving the problems with mounting a scope or red dot if you really must. Some think that using these rifles with anything other than open sights, as originally intended, is sacrilege!

One important consideration when buying one of these rifles is barrel length. A shorter barrel means less magazine capacity and many competitions require 10 rounds to be loaded at the start. If you cannot get ten rounds into the gun you can still shoot but you will not be competitive in against the clock events as you'll waste time reloading.

A brand new rifle will cost £500 or so (depending on specification) but good used examples can be picked up from £200 upwards. Gun Mart magazine is a good place to look for current prices. Check out the club shop too - you may just be lucky and find a bargain.

Equipment.

No extra equipment above and beyond the rifle is needed to start competitive shooting. Some invest in a looped belt for their cartridges but at club level spare ammo in a pocket is more usual.

Running costs.

The only real consideration is ammunition, with a small outlay needed for cleaning equipment.

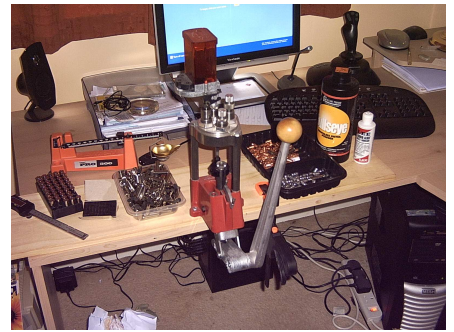
.357 magnum commercial ammunition is around £12 per box of 50. .38 a little less, .44 magnum a little more.

Bear in mind though that in a typical Sunday morning monthly club competition you'll only use 20 or 30 rounds or so. Even with some practice in between events you aren't going to use that much - it's not like blatting away with a .22 semi-auto rimfire!

To cut ammunition costs dramatically you could consider reloading - yours truly reloads .357 magnum ammunition for under £4 per 50.

There's a separate sheet in this set on reloading, which explains in more detail what's involved. The picture on the right is an example of a reloaders set up.

As for cleaning equipment, a rod and brushes or a 'bore snake' and some solvents and lubricants shouldn't set you back more than around £20 - £25.



Competitions.

There's a club competition for underlevers on the first Sunday of every month, held on the Farrington Range. Start time 10:00 or thereabouts.

Courses of fire are many and varied, sometimes using turning targets (derivations of the old Police Pistol routines) and sometimes 'practical style', involving shooter movement and a variety of targets, some static, some moving.

Although there are prizes at the end of the year for the best performers the atmosphere at these competitions is totally informal. Entry fee is just £1, to cover the cost of targets and trophies.

Bob Croxton is the man in charge and Bob has a reputation for putting together 'challenging' courses of fire. Some members use a word other than 'challenging' to describe them!

A typical turning target routine (shot at 25m) might be:

Load 10 rounds. Gun in shoulder but barrel pointed downwards at 45 degrees. Target turns and faces you for two seconds, fire one round. Target faces away for four seconds, then faces you again for two seconds - fire one round. This sequence continues until 10 rounds have been fired. Using the same targets, the second stage starts with the rifle in the same condition as before - loaded with 10 rounds etc., pointed down at 45 degrees. This time the targets face you for four seconds, during which time you fire two rounds, then turn away for four seconds. Continue until 10 rounds fired.

A typical 'practical style' routine might be:

Rifle loaded (chamber empty) and placed on chair beside you, on the left hand side of the range. Distance from backstop around 15m. On start signal (electronic beep) retrieve rifle, rack round into chamber and pull string which activates hidden moving target. Shoot at least 1 round at mover before it disappears from view (not long!). From the same position, engage and knock down the six skittles standing on the sand backstop. Reload as necessary. Apply safety and move to right hand side of the range (gun barrel pointed down range all the time, or you'll be disqualified), with strong hand pull string which activates another mover and engage with a minimum of two rounds. From the same position engage and knock down six baton rounds standing on the sand back stop, reloading as necessary. Using the same safety rules as when moving before, move to centre of range and engage four paper targets with one shot on each through the opening in the door in front of you - kneel if you need to. This is just a rough example. Throughout the stage reloading takes place as and when required. This type of shooting is against the clock and your score on the targets is divided by the time taken to arrive at a 'hit factor'. So, slow and accurate or fast and less accurate? You choose! Either way, great fun.

If there happen to be five Sundays in a month then there's a 'log chop' for underlever rifles held on the fourth Sunday. Two wooden posts, two competing shooters side by side. The objective is simply to be the first to chop your post in half. Bring plenty of ammunition if you want to try this - easy it isn't!

As well as club competitions there are more and more gallery rifle events being held at other venues. At the Phoenix weekend (Bisley) in 2005, for example, there was a whole range of different disciplines available, including a steel plate shoot (hit 5 steel plates with one round each as quickly as you can - your score is your time). There are various web sites which will give you details as to what's going on and where - find them through the links on the club site. Target Sports magazine is another useful source of information.