

Art, Science and...Magic!

that beautiful, tightly crimped finished product. Let's explore the anatomy of a shotshell loader.

When I'm teaching someone how to execute a clay or wing shot, I start with foot position as the foundation. With reloading on this particular machine, I'm going to start at the top. The Casefeeder.

This model used for review has an optional Casefeeder. This means there is no manual input from the operator to place an empty hull in the first stage, aside from standard operation of the handle. The case feeder is mounted on a sturdy post (Casefeed Post) toward the back of the machine and is crowned with a large, Dillon blue bowl. Inside of this is a plastic plate (Shotshell Disc) on a tilted axis with detents for empty hulls to drop down the Casefeed Tube as the plate rotates at operator set speed.

The Casefeeder is equipped with a motor that can be adjusted to the comfort and pace of the reloader. A caveat here: don't turn it up too fast. If the Shotshell Disc rotates too quickly, empty shells may start flying over your head.... Ask me how I know.

Pull

The handle is pulled down in a smooth, complete cycle. It must be brought up in the same controlled manner. The handle actuating speed directly correlates to shellplate rotation speed, so watch carefully. Too fast and you can have BBs flying out of your yet-to-be-crimped shells.

On the up stroke, it is very important to push the handle firmly forward (away from you) once the top of the stroke is reached. This brings us to our next step. Like with shooting, a lot of things happen at once when reloading shotshells.

As the handle is pulled down, an empty hull is deposited on the shellplate via the casefeed tube. At the same time, a primer is sent down the primer drop tube and whisked into the recess under Stage Two in the shellplate. The firm forward push at the top of the handle cycle seats the newly deposited primer into the now de-primed hull.

Stage Three. That's where things get interesting. Our powder has been dropped in our newly primed shell on the downward pull and we are now rotating to Stage Three. It's time for a wad and shot.

If you recall, we are working in a 28-gauge platform. That means everything is smaller, pickier and possessing less wiggle room for error. The wads are slender with long petals that can get easily mis-aligned. While attention to detail is critical in all types of shotshell loading, it is especially important with sub gauges.

Micro adjustments can result in massive impact on loading precision.

Let's discuss some of those adjustments. A shotgun shell, like its metal counterparts, requires an ideal balance of several variables. Things like powder burn rate, construction and volume are just as critical in shotshell loading as rifle/pistol processes. Instead of a solid projectile, we have a premeasured quantity of shot. And, instead of neck tension and seating depth, we have wad pressure and wad seating depth.

On the SL900, the wad segment is orchestrated by the Wad Guide and Swing Arm Assembly. On the firm forward push of the handle at the top of the stroke, the Wad Swing Arm tilts out in wait for the wad to be placed in the Wad Guide by the operator. Sounds simple, right?


It is, but some finesse is required. Are you seeing a theme here? Successful shotshell loading requires a lovers' intuitive touch, an engineering mind and next-level multi-tasking capabilities.

The wad is placed by hand in the Wad Guide with a firm push down on the spring-loaded sleeve. Too hard and the wad is expelled through the guide. Too soft and the wad is too high to consistently clear the Shot Drop Tube, thus making a mess.... Have your shop vac close at hand until you get this one figured out.

The wad is pressed into the primed and powdered hull and the shot is deposited with a satisfying "swish." It's time for the Starter Crimp in Stage Four. Stages Four and Five are easily adjusted with the included tools and standard size wrenches. This feature is particularly valuable when setting up as well as navigating between different hull lengths.

Stage Five completes the crimp and deposits the now finished shell in the blue bucket on the side with a delightful "clunk." If you hear something that sounds like a salt-shaker or a waterfall, you did something wrong and need to go back to the drawing board.

Shotshell loading, like shotgun shooting, requires many moving parts working in concert to achieve the desired result. With a gun in hand, it is things like foot placement, keeping your head on the gun, hard focus on the target and smooth, intentional gun movement. With that iconic blue handle in hand, it is things like feeling the primer seat, watching the shellplate rotate cleanly, seeing the shot fill the waiting hull and observing the crimp for consistency.

There is art, science and a little bit of magic when all pieces come together in perfect harmony at the "Pull." The Dillon SL900 is a towering blue tribute to the trifecta needed in the journey of successful shotshell loading. 



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