

A load off your mind

Longthorne Gunmakers impart a little practical knowledge on the hows, whens and when-nots of safely removing stuck cartridges when out in the field

Thankfully, accidents in the field seem to be few and far between, and most will enjoy their shooting pursuits without ever encountering one. However, rare as they may be, accidents can and do occasionally happen. We are, after all, working in close proximity with loaded guns. The most common of all mishaps tends to involve a stuck cartridge. These can be extremely dangerous if handled incorrectly, yet present little challenge to shooters with the right knowledge. This article provides a concise guide to safely removing the various forms of stuck cartridge ensuring that, should this fate befall you, it can be dealt with swiftly, safely and with minimal disruption to your day.

There are several situations that may result in a cartridge becoming lodged in the barrel. The most

common, and simplest to resolve, happens as a result of the cartridge having excessively expanded in the chamber. This is also common in older guns where the ejector has been worn and has slipped past the rim of the cartridge. Since the cartridge is not live, this issue is easily resolved. The best way is to insert a cleaning rod down the muzzle end and push the offending cartridge out.

The situation becomes altogether more volatile if a live cartridge has passed the ejector and become stuck in the chamber of the gun. First things first – do not attempt to close the gun as this will damage the cartridge more and, potentially, the ejector. Secondly, ensure that there are no other live cartridges in the neighbouring chamber/s. Remove the fore-end, if possible, and remove the barrels from the action.

The gun is now as safe as it can be – you have removed the risk of accidentally firing the cartridge. Now the live cartridge can be carefully removed by inserting a cleaning rod into the muzzle end of the gun and gently pushing it out. If in doubt, always ask an experienced person to help, such as the safety officer or shoot organiser.

A still more perilous circumstance can arise when you have a gun with live cartridges in it; the gun is closed; you may or may not have fired one barrel; you try to open the gun; and it is stuck firmly shut. One possible cause is that the first barrel firing pin is buried in the primer, preventing the gun from opening or, more rarely, the top lever shaft has broken leaving the bite engaged without any way of unlocking it. When in doubt as to whether one or two barrels have been fired, always assume the worst. You are now working with a potentially dangerous gun that cannot be opened. Firstly, ensure the gun is pointing in a safe direction. Then, and only then, should you try to discharge the first or second barrel.

If you can discharge the second barrel, but still the gun is stuck tight shut, it is very important to continue treating the gun as potentially live. We would not recommend that a member of the shooting public attempt to check if the cartridge contained in the gun has been fired, as to do so would involve inserting a cleaning rod or similar into the muzzle end of the gun, and exposing yourself and others to very serious risk. Instead, switch on the safety catch (this blocks the trigger but does not prevent the gun from being discharged), and leave or store it somewhere safe (i.e. not pointing towards anyone!).

Next, in our opinion, the best option would be to leave the gun at the shooting ground and have it collected or repaired in situ by a gunsmith. It is quite possible that the gunsmith will have a ballistic bag, used for the safe transportation of live firearms where there is a risk of accidental discharge, allowing him to take the offending weapon away if needs be.

The onus of responsibility lies with yourself for the safe use and safe transportation of your gun. Accidents don't so much 'happen' as are caused, and acquiring the correct knowledge and practices will help to ensure your safety, and, of course, the safety of your fellow shooters. Our sport is mercifully untarnished by regular fatalities or serious accidents, so let's keep it that way. Oh, and don't forget to take your cleaning rods with you the next time you go shooting!

Many thanks to Paul Dancer, CPSA Course Tutor for Safety (www.clayshooting-coach.co.uk) for his advice in writing this article. ■

A ballistic bag allows the safe transportaion of a gun that could accidentally discharge



PICTURES: LONGTHORNE / DAVID MULLANY (FULL PAGE)



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CONTACT DETAILS

To contact Longthorne Gunmakers:

■ Web: www.longthorneguns.com

■ Tel: 01772 811215

■ Email: admin@longthorneguns.com

■ You can also follow them on Facebook and Twitter: @longthorneguns