

# Cheapskate Ways Of Saving Your Shooting Dollars

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**The cloth bags that shotgun shot is often purchased in make excellent benchrest shooting bags.**

It would be nice to never have to worry about how much something cost or whether you can afford to purchase it, but I have always fallen into the category of limited finances and I don't see that status changing in the near ... or distant ... future. Unfortunately, I don't think that old Mossberg hidden away in the back of my gun cabinet is likely to be declared a valuable, limited edition, collector's item worth a huge sum of money. Nor do I have any wealthy relatives who are so enamored with my "unmatched virtues" that they will be making me the sole beneficiary of their vast and far-reaching fortunes. Nope, those things aren't likely to happen and I figure saving money wherever I can is my destiny in life.

My love of shooting and hunting came early in life, at a time when my hand-me-down Remington .22 single-shot was nearly as long as I was tall. In those days the only thing between my family's name and the bottom of the community's financial register was possibly a fly that had wandered off the barn yard to land on the paper. Money was lacking for the whole family and what little that came in my direction was primarily the result of either picking strawberries a few weeks in the summer, or from selling nightcrawlers at a penny apiece to the local gas station owner for fish bait. Because of this, obtaining enough ammunition to even shoot



**Fingernail polish comes in a variety of colors and has many uses for a shooter.**

rats at the local garbage dump became a major hurdle in my life.

I often dreamed of the day when I could walk into a store and lay down enough money to purchase an entire box of ammunition, but that didn't come until much later in life. In the interim I had to be satisfied with only a few shells at a time, and even that often required assistance from my dad. Even though I normally wouldn't characterize my father as a sympathetic man, he must have felt just a little bit sorry for my shooting dilemma and sometimes would come to my aid. No, it wasn't in the form of money; it was by asking the local storeowner if he would be willing to "break a box of cartridges" and sell me five or six at a time. Surprisingly enough, quite often the owner of the tiny local store would sympathize with me and agree to the sale. I still remember how happy it made me as I walked out of the store clutching those few rounds of ammunition.

Those days were more decades ago than I would prefer to acknowledge, but I suppose you never shed yourself of such life-altering experiences. Even though I find a little more cash in my pockets these days I still look for ways to get the most out of my shooting dollars. I figure if I save in one area it might allow me to do more, shoot more, and even be able to expand my hunting destinations a little. The



***Too much oil on a firearm can be a bad thing. But keeping an oil-soaked rag in a sealed container allows a shooter to easily rub down a firearm without using an excess amount of oil.***

following are a few ways that I have found over the years to cut my shooting costs. Maybe some of these ideas can help you to do the same.

#### **HOMEMADE BORE CLEANING SOLVENT**

If you think gasoline is high priced you might find that it is pretty darned reasonable when you compare the cost of it to how much you are actually paying for those tiny 2-ounce bottles of bore cleaning solvent. If gasoline were sold in similarly sized bottles as bore cleaner, that "more than three-buck a gallon gas" would cost less than a nickel a bottle. On the other hand, that \$5.00 per bottle of bore cleaner could actually be costing you as much as \$320.00 per gallon. Sure, no one uses as much bore cleaner as they do gasoline, but nevertheless this is one place to save some money. All you have to do is mix up a batch of your own homemade bore cleaner.

Ed's Red has been used for decades and is recognized by many shooters as one of the best bore cleaning solvents ever produced. Even the U.S. military uses a similar type product to clean and protect their firearms. The original formula for Ed's Red was adapted from Hatcher's "Frankford Arsenal Cleaner No. 18," but in recent years some of the component chemicals in the formula have become both difficult to obtain and expensive to purchase. This has resulted in a modified recipe that uses more commonly available ingredients while still maintaining the same level of cleaning ability. For the modified formula the component chemicals consist of: automatic transmission fluid, kerosene, mineral spirits, acetone, and in some cases, lanolin. You can find the entire recipe, mixing instructions, as well as the appropriate precautionary warnings on the following Web site: [www.building-tux.com/dsmjd/tech/eds\\_red.htm](http://www.building-tux.com/dsmjd/tech/eds_red.htm).



***Self-sticking 3/4" paper spots are available for sale at most office supply stores. When placed on a piece of plain paper these work great as a cheap shooting target.***

While Ed's Red is not normally considered effective at fast removal of existing heavy copper buildup, many shooters believe that with regular and frequent use it actually discourages the initial accumulation of jacket material in the bore. This is accomplished because Ed's Red is so effective at removing old impacted powder fouling which many other solvents fail to completely eradicate. Powder fouling is abrasive and as such copper contamination has the tendency to adhere to it. By more effectively removing powder residue, Ed's Red helps to prevent copper from becoming deposited in the first place.

If you have an existing copper contamination problem, don't get discouraged. There also is an expanded recipe that might help you called "Ed's Red Plus." In order to make that cleaner you add a measured amount of industrial strength ammonia, cutting oil, and Murphy's oil soap to the Ed's Red. You can find this formula as well, and a wealth of other homemade shooting product information, on the following Web site: [www.frfrogspad.com/homemade.htm](http://www.frfrogspad.com/homemade.htm).

One of the major problems associated with mixing your own bore solvent is the fact that some of the component chemicals may be readily available only in gallon-sized containers. Because of this you may find it appropriate to split both the initial cost and final product with some of your shooting buddies. By doing so everyone can share in the cost-saving benefits of mixing your own.

#### **HOMEMADE CLEANING PATCHES**

Like bore cleaning solvent, a shooter pays a premium price for a very small amount of product when he buys a packet of cleaning patches. An alternative to paying these prices is waiting for you in your underwear drawer. Those

worn-out T-shirts headed for the rag bin can be cut into very good substitute cleaning patches. T-shirt material is soft and nonabrasive and as such it provides a great substitute for the real thing. And best of all it is virtually free.

#### **A SHOOTER'S BEST FRIEND — FINGERNAIL POLISH**

Many times you can find fingernail polish priced at around a buck a bottle at discount and variety stores. While the ladies may not find this cheaper stuff up to their desired expectations, for a shooter it works great. No, I'm not going to encourage you to paint your fingernails and toenails before heading out on your next coyote hunt. In fact, I would surely discourage you from doing so. But fingernail polish has a lot of great uses that are seldom considered or recognized. A dab of polish on the threads of screws and bolts works great as a substitute for thread locking fluid. Fingernail polish generally does not hold quite as well as the real stuff, but I've never had a bolt or screw work loose when coated in this manner, and sometimes I actually prefer to use something that doesn't hold quite so securely. If you use either black or clear polish it likely will be less noticeable than the typical red or blue of the real thread locking material. In addition, you might find that the brighter colored polishes work great if you want to brighten up sight blades or beads on any of your firearms.

Some shooters use products produced and marketed by Birchwood Casey in order to touch-up worn metal surfaces on their firearms. Both Presto® Instant Black Touch-Up for Steel and Super Blue™ Liquid Gun Blue work great for this purpose. However, an alternative for blending-in the worn areas on anodized aluminum gun parts, such as trigger guards, scope rings, magazine floorplates, and so forth, is to apply a bit of black-colored fingernail polish.

I shoot a lot of different firearms and occasionally I have the need to remove and store the bolts separately from the rifles, particularly when I'm traveling on the airlines. In the past this has resulted in some minor confusion when it came to matching up the proper bolts to the respective actions. I solved that problem through color coding. Simply placing a tiny spot of the same-colored fingernail polish on each component totally eliminates confusion. By carefully selecting the areas to apply the spots of polish, usually you can keep them hidden from view when reassembled. Color-coding in this manner also works great to match keys to gun case locks, or anything else that has a tendency to get mismatched or mixed up. And, if the ends of your hunting boot strings have become a bit frayed, you might try painting them with a little fingernail polish to stiffen them up.

#### **CHEAP PAPER TARGETS**

Paper targets are more expensive than in the past and if you shoot a lot it certainly is worthwhile to look for a substitute for this expense. Various computer programs are available for printing your own targets and you can even find some downloadable images on the Web. But another method that I like much better involves simply sticking colored dots

on a piece of plain white paper. Most variety, office supply, or stationery stores carry packets of self-sticking dots. Most of these are about 3/4-inch in diameter and come in a variety of colors. I personally prefer either red or fluorescent orange colors for points of aim. This size and coloration shows up very well on the 100-yard range even when using scopes as low powered as 4x. Placing four to six of these spots on a single piece of 8x11 paper allows you to get a lot of shooting out of a single piece of paper. Sometimes these self-sticking spots are available only in multicolor packets, with some colors too light to be effective as target dots. In this case I usually use the less-desirable colored spots to cover over bullet holes. This allows me to stretch out the usefulness of a target even more. In addition, like fingernail polish, these dots can be used for color-coding various shooting items. I own several rifles that are chambered for the same cartridge, but I often prefer to shoot different loads of each one. An easy way to keep the ammunition from getting mixed up is to place a colored spot on the outside of the ammunition box and a similarly colored spot on the stock of the rifle.

#### **OIL SOAKED RAG**

Most shooters use some form of spray oil like WD-40, but sometimes spray oils have a tendency to deposit too much lubricant on a firearm, and an excess amount of oil can be a very bad thing in many situations. A heavy layer of oil can become a sticky mess after the hydrocarbons in the oil have evaporated. And, if the oil should work its way into the grain of a wood gunstock, it can cause the wood to begin to soften and deteriorate. A much better way is to keep an oil-soaked rag nearby specifically for the purpose of rubbing down your guns. Much less oil will be consumed in this way, which will save you money, and will be better for your guns at the same time.

It will be necessary for you to store your oil soaked rag in some sort of an airtight, resealable container. Otherwise, the volatile hydrocarbons within the oil eventually will evaporate. A metal peanut can, small coffee can, or even a Tupperware-type container usually will work fine for this purpose as long as the chemical makeup of the oil does not attack the surface of the container. After use the container should be stored away from any heat source and out of the direct rays of the sun. You will have to replenish the oil from time to time, but overall you will use much less oil than if you simply sprayed down your firearm.

#### **MAKING YOUR OWN SANDBAGS**

The bags that shotshell shot often is sold in make excellent benchrest shooting bags. Trap or skeet shooters may have an ample supply of these lying about and may share a few with a fellow shooter when asked. Some of the newer bags are made of a plastic material, similar to that used for livestock feed bags. Bags made of this material aren't suitable for use as benchrest bags, but the cloth bags are perfect. If you don't run in shotgunning circles, another idea is to use the legs of



***The chemicals needed to mix your own homemade batch of Ed's Red bore solvent may come in fairly large quantities. For this reason it might be best to split the cost of both the ingredients and the final product with your shooting buddies. That way everyone can enjoy the cost-saving benefits.***

a pair of old jeans that are headed to the rag bin. Simply cut them to whatever length you prefer and stitch up the ends. For the stuffing material many shooters use the traditional sand, but I prefer some type of grain or livestock feed because it isn't quite as abrasive and is less likely to work through the weave of the fabric. Even rice or dried beans will suffice. No matter what material you choose to use for stuffing it is advisable to first seal the material in a plastic bag prior to placing it inside the cloth bag. This will provide a vapor barrier in the event you are caught in a rainstorm.

#### **PURCHASE IN VOLUME AND SPLIT IT**

Volume buying almost always will save you money when purchasing any commodity or product, and that includes shooting supplies. This is particularly true when it comes to reloading components, but even buying in large lots of factory-loaded cartridges can save you money. But while some shooters may never envision having a need for 5,000 rounds of 22 LR shells, 5,000 primers, or brass in lots of a thousand rather than a box of 20, or a bag of 50, you still can share in the cost-saving

benefits of volume buying by banding together with fellow shooters, then splitting up the purchase.

#### **REPAIRING WORN STOCK FINISH**

If you use your firearms at all, eventually the stock may develop a few mars, scratches, and worn spots. Having a professional completely refinish the stock can be costly, and a tremendous amount of work if you do it yourself. The job may require a spray gun, or you may be able to get the job done with a spray can of finish ... if the spray nozzle doesn't plug midstream. There is, however, a product on the market that works great no matter whether you are refinishing the entire stock or simply touching up scratches. Best of all, it requires no spray gun or even a brush to apply the finish and there is no nozzle to plug, either. To apply it you use only your fingertips. The product is called Tru-Oil® Gunstock Finish, marketed by Birchwood Casey. Because so little is used a three-ounce bottle may refinish an entire stock and possibly touch up all your other firearms as well.

Tru-Oil is a blend of linseed and other natural oils. It is quick drying

and produces a tough, hard finish that seems to match the vast majority of gunstock finishes remarkably well. It comes in 3, 8, or 128-ounce (gallon) sized containers ... and even in aerosol cans. Whether you are doing an entire stock or simply touching up a small scratch or mar, the best way to apply the finish is by placing a drop or two on the end of your index finger, then rub it with the grain into the wood. Unlike most other finishes where you apply a liberal amount, then set the wood aside to dry, Tru-Oil is best applied by rubbing a very small amount into the wood until the finish has almost entirely been absorbed. The most common mistake gun owners make is to apply too much Tru-Oil to the wood. An excess of oil may leave the stock tacky and the finish will end up appearing uneven and blotchy.

Dents in a wood stock sometimes can be raised to the surface by steaming them out prior to applying the finish. To do this you should fold a small piece of cotton cloth material half a dozen times, forming a pad. The pad then should be saturated with water and placed on top of the dent. Place the hot tip of a soldering iron directly on the pad. The steaming effect caused by the iron often will cause the wood surface to swell, bringing the dent back level with the surface. It is important that you be very careful to not allow the pad to dry out, or the wood underneath will become overheated and scorched. Once the dent has been raised you may have to lightly sand the area before touching up the surface with a little Tru-Oil.

No question about it, all shooting activities are costly. Perhaps some shooters have no need to worry about how to finance the next shooting expedition or get that expensive new rifle. But if you are like most shooters there never is a surplus of dollars to go around. I hope some of these tips will help you get the most out of your shooting for the least amount of money spent.

