

.45 Webley Cartridge

Submitted by Chris Punnett

One of the problems with collecting .450 Short Revolver cartridges (apart from the fact that people think I'm nuts) is that many collectors don't recognize them. As a result I am often handed small bags of assorted .45-caliber cartridges with the comment "Here, you collect these don't you?" I am touched by their generosity and I have accumulated a bunch of the .45 Webley cartridges, which I hide in case people think I have started to collect them!

Then I did something rather silly: I asked myself why the .45 Webley existed at all if everyone says it was a useless cartridge.



Figure 1. .45 Webley and the .450 Short Revolver

Like most people I started off by looking in *Cartridges of the World* and *Ammo Encyclopedia*. I don't recommend these as definitive reference works but they are a useful place to start and can indicate where else to look.

Most sources, including those noted above, state that the .45 Webley cartridge was for use in British and continental revolvers chambered for the .450 Short cartridge. This does make sense as the .450 Short/Boxer cartridge first appeared in 1867 and rose to fame shortly thereafter when it was adopted by the British Government as the .450 Adams Mark I in December 1868. From 1867 onwards it was

chambered in a variety of commercial revolvers from the likes of Tranter, Webley and Adams. This was quickly followed by the European revolver manufacturers who, with their British counterparts, were only too happy to supply the burgeoning export markets as places like the USA expanded westwards during the 1870s. The end result was that a considerable number of revolvers chambered for the .450 Short revolver cartridge ended up in the US but with a shortage of ammunition (it wasn't until 1880 that any of the US manufacturers actually loaded the .450 Short revolver cartridge). So in stepped the US cartridge manufacturers: U.M.C., Remington, U.S.C.Co. and Winchester with the .45 Webley cartridge. The earliest references that I have found for the .45 Webley date from about 1875. So the question as to why the .45 Webley existed at all was answered. Or was it?

UMC, Remington and Winchester list it with a 230-grain bullet and 20 grains of blackpowder. USCCo has the same weight of bullet but with 22 grains of powder.

The *Cartridges of the World* states "In power it is in the same class as the .41 Short Colt" and goes on to give the factory load as 20 grains of blackpowder behind a 230-grain bullet giving it 550fps at the muzzle.

The *Ammo Encyclopedia* states "The .45 Webley was substantially less powerful than the .450 revolver cartridge." Again, it gives a 230-grain bullet at 550fps as the factory load.

While many of the early US cartridge manufacturers did not provide ballistics in their ammunition catalogues, later figures from Remington do confirm that they list the .45 Webley as having a 230-grain bullet backed by 20 grains of blackpowder for a velocity of only 550fps.

The .450 Short Revolver cartridge was notoriously underpowered so why would the US manufacturers develop and market a cartridge of such pathetic performance that it was even worse than the round which it was supposed to replace. Or did they?

According to British Government literature, the .450 Short Revolver round used 13 grains of blackpowder giving the 225-grain bullet a muzzle



Figure 2. .45 Webley cartridges.

The left-hand unheadstamped cartridge is possibly by the American Metallic Cartridge Co.; The copper-wash case one is from USCCo.

velocity of 650fps. The US manufacturers give it 13 grains of blackpowder with a 226-grain bullet and a velocity of 590fps. How could the .45 Webley with 20-22 grains of blackpowder behind a 230-grain bullet only get 550fps? Even allowing for variations in powder-grain size and quality, these figures do not hold up. So are the figures from Remington an error upon which future cartridge books based their assessment that the .45 Webley was a pretty useless cartridge? You tell me.



Figure 3. Board dummies, Left: WRACo; Right: REM-UMC

Further misinformation about the .45 Webley exists amongst otherwise respected sources. White & Munhall's *Pistol & Revolver Cartridges* and Chuck Suydam's *US Cartridges and Their Handguns* state that the .45 Webley used a longer case than the .450 Revolver cartridge so as to cover the lubricating grooves and make it more pleasant to handle [than the .450 revolver cartridge]. However, the .450 revolver cartridge is also inside lubricated. I think the .45 Webley case was longer to give it a bit more "oomph"!



Figure 4. Blanks. Right hand one by REM-UMC, others by UMC.

My admittedly superficial research on the .45 Webley certainly improved my respect for the cartridge. I suspect it was an interim solution but with a much better performance than some sources would have you believe. It was made from about 1875 until 1939 – a period of production that would not have occurred had the cartridge had the poor performance some say it had – especially when,

from 1880, those same manufacturers were making the .450 Revolver cartridge.

As a footnote, I should point out that there is one North American manufacturer who made a cartridge headstamped as a .45 Webley which is, in fact, a .450 Short Revolver cartridge. Why the Dominion Cartridge Company did this isn't clear though I suspect it was with an eye on the US market.



Figure 5. DCCo .450 Short headstamped as .45 Webley.

I would be delighted to receive feedback and corrections both in terms of data and assumptions but, please, do not send me any .45 Webley cartridges!

And to fill the page (from Jim B and others).....

