

The Lee Breech Lock Challenger reloading kit

by Simon Wilson



The kit includes a tube of case lube, a hand primer, box of shell-holders, powder thrower, primer pocket cleaner, case mouth chamfer, small piston for priming on a press, powder funnel, beam balance, case trimmer and the press.

When getting started with reloading, it can be difficult to know whether it's best to buy a kit and get everything all at once, or, as Johnny Cash once sang, get your equipment 'one piece at a time'. I had cut my reloading teeth with the Lee Loader with kits for reloading .243 and .308 ammunition. Then I purchased a .30-30 lever-action rifle and I wanted to start reloading for that calibre too.

It soon became evident that a press was going to be much quicker and allow the use of full-length sizing dies than a Lee Loader could offer. However, this led to deciding whether I should purchase a kit or individual components and which brand I should buy. I knew that I wanted a simple C or O design single-stage press. I found the Lee Loader to be well made, so decided to order the Lee Breech Lock Challenger kit through a local gunshop.

The press requires some simple putting together of the handle with a spanner and the spent primer catching tube with a screwdriver. The powder thrower also requires screwing into its metal stand. These can then be bolted to a workbench. The Challenger kit is advertised with the tagline 'everything you need to start reloading except the dies' and this is really the case - just look at the accompanying photo to see everything you get in the kit!

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Walking through each stage of reloading will demonstrate the kit's effectiveness:

1. Depriming old cases and sizing cases. Using Lee dies, the ram will easily deprime and size the cases (the dies are not included). There is a tube of Lee sizing lubricant included in the kit. Spent primers are collected in the vertical plastic tube.

2. Cleaning the primer pocket, chamfer mouth of case and trim. The kit comes with a primer pocket cleaner and a mouth chamfer to ease the introduction of the bullet base. A universal case trimmer base comes with the case, but you need calibre-specific case trimmer mandrels to trim, which are also available from Lee.

3. Priming. The hand primer is excellent and gives good feel and reliable feeding of new primers into the primer pocket. The Challenger kit also comes with two metal pistons, which attach to the press ram for priming on the press. I found this much more fiddly and slower than using the hand primer, as each primer needs to be picked up and placed on the ram. However, with the hand primer, you can just dump the primers onto the plate of the hand primer, give a quick jiggle to get them all face (anvil) up and click on the clear cover and then you can start priming the cases.

4. Filling with powder. The powder thrower was easy to set up and get throwing reliable loads. I settled into a habit of weighing every fifth load to ensure safe amounts of powder. As per instruction, I also ran a hopper of powder through to coat internals with graphite for smooth running.

5. Inserting and seating a new bullet. Putting the charged case back onto the press ram, you can place a bullet in the case mouth and then raise the case into the bullet seating die (not included in the kit). All standard 7/8-14 reloading dies by other manufacturers will fit, but larger 1¼-12 dies will not.

I had previously purchased a Dillon beam balance and I use this in preference to Lee scales, as I found the scales to be the only item in the kit that I did not like. In comparison to the Dillon beam balance, they are too light, finicky and I found the numbers more difficult to read accurately. The Dillon product has magnetic dampening, which allows the beam to settle quickly. Of course, many people now prefer the electronic scales, either stand-alone or incorporated into a powder dispenser. The kit also comes with a powder funnel to get this down into the case.

Apart from using my set of scales, the Lee Challenger kit really had nearly everything I needed to get reloading, other than the dies and shell-holder. The kit comes with all the shell-holders needed for the hand primer, but not for the press - this will need to come with the dies. The instructions for assembling the hand primer and initial set-up were simple to follow. Though I would add a set of Vernier scales for measuring case length and overall length to ensure the newly created cartridges are the correct length for firearm chambers.

The Lee Breech Lock Challenger is a great beginner's kit with pretty much everything to get started. Apart from my above caveat about the included beam balance that I did not use, everything in the kit was useful and has worked well for 18 months now. It is a good introduction to the art and science of reloading for turning out rifle and pistol cartridges. The single-stage press means having to understand each step initially, and possibly later in your reloading career, you would move on to turret or progressive presses.

For more information about Lee reloading kits and products, speak to your local gunshop. ●