



Improved Obatex Black Powder

Superior ingredients optimise performance

South Africa's locally made black powder, Obatex, introduced last year, has since undergone a series of improvements thanks to close co-operation between the manufacturer and leading lights at the Black Powder Shooting Union of South Africa (BPSU).

BPSU's vice-chairman, Johan De Beer, says that transport and storage costs of imported powders like Wano and Swiss had made them almost prohibitively expensive. To keep the sport alive in SA, a cheaper, home-grown product was essential. Obatex is a true black powder, equivalent to the current Swiss and Wano powders, or the G-20 powders of former years. Obatex should not be confused with substitute powders like Sannadex which are not made from traditional black powder ingredients and are hence disqualified from use in national and international competitions. Being a true black powder, Obatex is officially classified as an explosive, meaning shooters are required to have the 'Permit for Acquisition' from the chief inspector of explosives and, in terms of Section 10 of the FCA, a muzzle-loading competency certificate.

After initial small-scale trials in 2015, the first full-scale batch was introduced in May 2016. Early testing showed up a number of problems, but solutions were found in the selection of the right local ingredients. One problem lay in finding the correct wood to use for the charcoal as the qualities needed for consistent and clean burning are very specific.

PROBLEMS IN ACHIEVING reliable and consistent ignition were overcome by adjusting the locally available ingredients to obtain optimum results. Consequently a second production run has proved very satisfactory, making it popular with the black powder fraternity. However, the manufacturer and the BPSU are striving for a world-class standard, so shooters can expect further improvements in future production runs.

Obatex is made to be less dense than the equivalent Swiss or Wano powders, so the loading data you have recorded for these powders won't apply. It is better to work by the weight of the charge until you are familiar with the loads and the ballistics they produce. Obatex is manufactured in the familiar



'F' granulations with 1½ F, 2F and 3F being the most common. Obatex gives its best results at about 50% compared to 'normal' charges of Swiss and Wano powder, measured by weight. Measured by volume they are very roughly the same but check your measures to make sure. The really good news is that Obatex produces low quantities of soft fouling, ranking this powder equal in quality to the Swiss powder, if not better.

As for loads, the juniors currently undergoing the BPSU training programme, loading as little as 28 grains of Obatex in .451" Gibbs rifles, shoot scores at 50m and 100m which equate or better those achieved with Swiss powder. In the .577 rifles, charges of between 30 and 35 grains work very well. Even with patch and ball in Hawken rifles, no more than 32 grains are required. Less data is available for cartridge loads such as the .577/.450 Martini Henry, but thus far, 26 to 30 grains as a starting point with the remainder of the case filled with corn starch, gives acceptable results.

One area requires special attention: since Obatex is less dense than normal powders, it is very sensitive to compression. Bullet seating has to be very consistent otherwise velocities and barrel fouling will fluctuate, affecting grouping. It is all a question of finding a load that works and then being consistent about how you load it.

Since Obatex is less than half the price of imported powder, and the charge weight is likewise half, it is proving very economical to shoot. We in South Africa are indeed fortunate and privileged to have a manufacturer who heeds positive feedback and is prepared to continue developing this powder to attain the highest possible quality. 