



Unlimited Half-Size

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I became interested in the Unlimited Half-Size game back in 1987. This was an NRA silhouette category then, and it seemed like it would be a lot of fun. Although our club was not NRA certified, we had the targets and decided to set them up as a fun match. At that time, Crittenden was shooting a two-day match so we could only use the targets on Sunday after 3PM. Those half-size targets looked pretty small way out there on the Big Bore stands...definitely a challenge.

My unlimited gun at the time was a Bond Custom XP-100 in .30DC that I purchased from a friend. The .30DC is very similar to a .30BR, only it has a 35 degree shoulder and a slightly longer neck due to the sharper shoulder. Case length is the same at 1.5 inches. This was an extremely accurate gun and very mild to shoot. Standard loads were Sierra 150 gr. MatchKings over 20 grains of SR-4759, going 2000 fps. I shot my first ever 40x40 with this gun.

At first I just used my regular loads, but I soon started experimenting with lighter bullets. The Speer 130 gr. HP shot very well, so that became my Half-Size load for almost all my shooting. We shot this for a couple of years, but gradually the club dropped it due to lack of participation. Only about 4 or 5 of us ever tried it...the rest were too intimidated by the small target size.

A couple of clubs in Indiana decided to offer both IHMSA and NRA silhouette competition the following year, so I was able to keep shooting Half-Size, only now it was an official event. My first Half-Size 40 was shot at the Sycamore Valley Gun Club in Indiana, after a couple of 37's and 38's. My second and last half-size 40 was shot at the Indiana Gun Club, the site of the 1982 Internationals, Fortville, Indiana.

That was a rather unusual entry for me. I had already shot a few guns that day, so I wasn't counting on a good score. Besides, I was only going to fire-form some new brass for the .30DC. I wasn't convinced that fire-forming loads shot as well as normal loads, and I didn't want to risk losing targets. So, I had loaded these new cases with some old 150 grain round-nose bullets for the .30-30 rifle. This was the oddest-looking round, with the short, fat case and stubby RN bullets sticking out. With no spotter, using my same 130 grain sight settings, all the targets fell! I was pretty thrilled, but I never tried that again, sticking to my normal, pointed bullets.

After a couple of years, both the Indiana clubs shut down, and NRA half-size was no more around here. It would be a few years before IHMSA would sanction the new

category. In the mean time, I occasionally played with the half-size targets on practice days. With the new IHMSA approval, interest is picking up again.

Many years ago, our club at Crittenden began converting to auto-reset targets. We have them for Big Bore, .22 and Field Pistol. Now that Half-Scale was an official category, we didn't have the room for them. I own a complete set of Half-Scale targets, so we set them out for each match. Unfortunately, these 40 are not auto reset...we have to place them in strategic positions wherever we have room, and they are manually reset. At least they aren't as heavy as the full-size ones, so the target setters (me) don't get tired as quickly.

In the mean time, I have pondered the question of the perfect gun for Unlimited Half-Size. Many are going the route of smaller, lighter recoiling calibers. This makes perfect sense, as the targets can easily be knocked down...no more heavy ram loads required. Many shooters are trying the game with the guns they already have, perhaps using lighter bullets and powder charges. Here, the 7 TCU and 7BR work very well with lighter bullets in the 100-130 grain range. Others are resurrecting some of the older guns they may have, chambered in .223, .221 Fireball, .222 Remington, etc. The only consideration is keeping the loads from damaging the targets, which is usually not a problem.

Many shooters are building new guns specifically for this game. My good friend Ed just had an XP built in .223 with a fast-twist for the little targets. Calibers such as the 6.5 TCU, 6 TCU, 6.5BR and 6BR, plus the PPC chamberings will become very popular. After careful consideration, and a review of my safe, I believe I've found the ultimate Half-Size gun...an XP-100 in .350 Remington Magnum. This was one of the last Custom Shop repeaters made before they were discontinued in 1994, and came equipped with a Bomar rear sight.



Go ahead and scoff...I know it's not a glamorous PPC or BR case, but who needs those? If that's what you want, that's fine with me, but you can do no better than a real magnum. After all, that's how this game originated, as an avenue for real magnum shooters.

When I first got it, I looked in the Hornady manual for some load data...of course, there was none in the handgun section. These manufacturers are always behind getting current data in their books. Looking in the rifle section and comparing to what powders I

had on hand, I just pulled a load using a 200 grain Remington bulk bullet and 47 grains of REL-7 powder, sparked by a CCI 200 primer. I figured since this would work in a Remington 660 carbine with 20" barrel, it should be okay in the XP with 14.5" barrel...close enough!. I loaded up 60 rounds and went to Anderson County, KY for their May Big Bore match. I was only able to find the pig on my last sighter shot. Guessing from there, we proceeded to shoot for score. Unfortunately, a burr under the extractor gave me trouble chambering 2 or 3 rounds out of every 5, but I was mainly getting sight settings and wasn't too concerned. I used every last second on each bank, but was able to blast out a 40 and win the Unlimited shootoffs.

The gun was sent to Ralph Bond, who fixed the extractor, installed one of his fine three-lever triggers, a front hood and glass-bedded the action. I then turned to working up loads for half-size, since it shot so well. The Remington bulk bullet was very accurate, so I stayed with it during testing. Tried a couple of powders, including H-322, AA-2015BR, and they shot fairly well. Recoil was stout, to say the least. I still wasn't satisfied, though.

Since I use BLC-2 in my 7 TCU, I went searching for load data using this powder. I like it in my TC because the fireball is huge and the muzzle blast sounds like a stick of dynamite going off...it's my Intimidation Load. I figure if I'm going to have problems hitting my targets, so will the shooters on both sides of me! My 7 TCU load uses 27.5 grains of BLC-2, so when I found the .350 Remington Magnum data, I was elated! The 200 grain bullet would take 60 grains of this stuff! After loading up 100 rounds, I headed to the range to try it out.

Needless to say, the results were spectacular, especially on a humid day. If you missed a chicken, the fireball would burn the paint right off of it, and the concussion sounded like 2 sticks of dynamite going off. The roof rattled, dust and debris came falling down, and all the shooters on the line were lifted off their mats...now this was fun! After about a half hour, the U.S. Geology Department came by, saying they registered 6.8 on the Richter scale in the vicinity of our range. Recoil on the rear grip XP is pretty impressive, standing the barrel up about 75 degrees from horizontal. For some inexplicable reason, no other shooters wanted to try this gun, and it wasn't too long before I had the range all to myself. The only other person to shoot this gun was my friend Ed from Indy...he really enjoys it. In fact, he went out and purchased a Bond center-grip XP with a muzzle break...that should provide a substantial increase in muzzle blast! Can't wait to try it!

Now that I had proper sight settings for all the half-size targets, I felt it was necessary to come up with a good ram load. I settled on the 250 grain Hornady Spire Point over 58 grains BLC-2 for those pesky, hard-set half-size rams...shouldn't have any problem ringing any of them anymore. Next on the agenda was a good shoot-off load, just in case any shooters remained at the range after I had completed shooting my entry. The best bullet, and one that I have come to really like for this gun, is the new Nosler 225 grain Ballistic Tip. It took every shootoff target I correctly pointed the gun at. I may have to switch to this bullet for all 40 targets, reserving the Hornady 250's for those difficult ranges. Besides, it looks really cool in the ammo box with those white polycarbonate tips...after all, being cool is very important part of this game.



Match directors may be wondering about potential target damage from this slightly larger than normal chambering. We're not really sure yet, as we haven't found any of the targets that have been hit so far.

Well, that's my recommendation for Unlimited Half Size. Stay away from those weenie small calibers and get yourself a manly gun...you won't be disappointed!