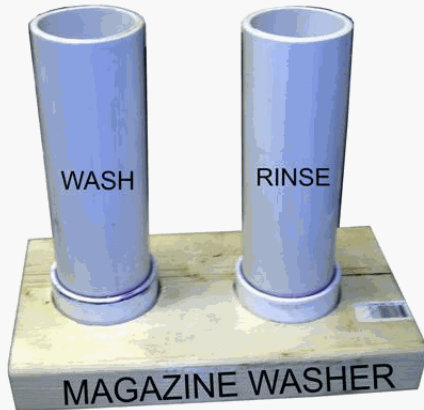


Thompson Magazine Washing Machine

By Jay DIY



When I go to the range with my Thompson, I like to have my ammunition loaded into my magazines so I do not have to fumble around at the range loading magazines. I typically shoot at least 320 rounds since I can conveniently fit sixteen, 20 round magazines in my standard military-surplus ammo can. The ammo can is a standard military style that I have modified to accept a padlock. Anyway, shooting 11 magazines results in 11 dirty magazines! I used to meticulously disassemble each magazine to clean it. This was a lot of work, and it always offered the opportunity to break something. It occurred to me that there was a better

way to clean the magazine after a days shooting. There are washing machines for everything else, why not Thompson Magazines? I knew from clothes washers there were separate wash and rinse cycles. Get rid of most of the dirt in the first cycle, and catch any remaining dirt in the rinse cycle. But I wanted a simple device, not something with valves and pumps. So there would be two containers for the separate processes of wash and rinse. Oh, did I mention that "CHEAP" was real important? PVC pipe fits the bill. It is a cheap durable material that is easy to work. It is soft enough to not scratch the magazines, and comes in a variety of sizes that are readily available. A 2-inch diameter pipe fits the magazines with a little room left over for cleaning fluid movement. I settled on 8-inch long sections for my 20 round magazines and about 11 inches for the 30 round magazines. Since the PVC is so cheap, I decided to make both lengths. I did not want to go fishing way down in the 30 round units for a shorter 20 round magazine. I glued a cap on one end of each and left the other end open. I could only find caps that have a rounded end. I have seen flat-ended caps that would be better, if available. To hold the two "wash tubs" a piece of 2" x 6" lumber fit the cheap concept of the project. I measured the outside diameter of the cap and put two holes in the board using a saber saw. Be careful to make the holes a tight fit. A lose fit will let the PVC pipes tilt back and forth as you are washing the magazines.



Cut the hole a little small, and work it bigger to fit with a wood rasp. Although hot soapy water might be good for clothes, I personally do not like it for cleaning metal. Water on ferrous metal starts rust quickly unless immediately dried and coated with a rust preventative. I prefer a low volatility cleaning fluid such as mineral spirits for general purpose cleaning. However, in addition to the obvious ventilation and safety problems that come with such solvents, one problem particular

to this system arises. Since we are trying to not disassemble the magazines to clean them, getting all the cleaning fluid out of the magazines is problematic. If we can however use the same fluid for wash, rinse, and rust preventative, our problem is solved. I have found such an answer in a product called Clenzoil. I discovered it last year at the TCA Show and Shoot, and now swear by it. I fill each "wash tub" with enough Clenzoil to cover the magazine with 1/2 inch of the fluid.



Too much leads to spills and difficulty retrieving the magazines from the tubs. To lower the magazines into the washer I fashioned a hook out of sturdy wire. The hook is about 3 1/4 inches long, and the bent end for hooking onto the magazine is about 1/2 inch long. I slide the hook into the top of the follower. It can also be hooked under the lip of the magazine if you are having trouble retrieving the magazine, but this is not very secure. Insert and retrieve the magazines slowly to keep the fluid from spilling. If you drop a magazine into the tub, it will splash out and make a mess. I always use some sort of containment vessel since you can never be too careful. I needed an agitator for my washing machine and found some leftover clean paint stirring sticks. One meant for a gallon size can of paint is just the right size and the soft wood will not damage the surface of the follower. With the magazine in the

fluid filled tub, use the agitator stick to gently press down the follower to its full extent. Then slowly retract the stick letting the follower return to its full up position. I repeat the down/up cycle 10 to 15 times. I take about 1 second for the down stroke and the same for the up stroke. Keep a firm grip on the stick, for the spring in the magazine can give you a nice "oil well gusher" effect if it should slip. Most of the time the slow strokes will be enough. Some times I will do a series of about 10 to 20 rapid short 1-inch strokes if the follower still looks dirty.

Before removing the magazine from the tub, wait a few seconds for the dirt particles in the fluid to settle. When I remove the magazine with the hook, I wave the magazine back and forth several times in the tub while making sure the top of the magazine is still covered. I have found that this will flush off the few heavy particles that have settled on top of the magazine. By just moving the magazine from side-to-side, and not up and down, the sediment in the bottom is not stirred up. I use the same process for both the wash and rinse cycles. I let the magazines set upright in a drip pan for about 30 to 60 seconds between wash and rinse to keep the rinse fluid as clean as possible. The wash fluid will periodically need to be topped off due to losses from the fluid clinging to the metal. This effect is much more pronounced in the washtub than in the rinse tub. To a certain extent, refilling the washtub renews the washing fluid.



Before fully removing the magazine from a tub, hold the magazine at a slight angle above fluid level to drain off the bulk of the fluid. This can be accomplished with just the hook by holding the magazine against the lip of the tub. Chamfering the inner edge of the tub lip will permit fluid running down the sides of the magazine to return into the tub instead of down over the outside.

Before final storage of the cleaned magazines, I let them "drip dry" overnight. I store the used wash cycle and rinse cycle fluids in separate containers for future use. It is amazing how much gunk comes off the magazines. The larger heavy particles will settle out and can be strained when next processing a batch of dirty magazines. After a while the wash fluid can be used for rust prevention on garden tools and the rinse fluid can be migrated to the washtub.

Besides eliminating the possible damage and self inflicted screwdriver wounds from magazine disassembly, the washing machine gets the cleaner and preservative into all the nooks and crannies of the magazines. Washday for me is a little easier now that I have my brand new Magazine Washing Machine.