



Cleaning Brass with a Liquid Cleaner

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Everyone talks about vibratory cleaners and discusses the benefits of crushed walnut shells vice corncob as the preferred cleaning media. But how many folks use a liquid cleaner in a tumbler to clean their cases?



I was recently introduced to the Thumlers Model B rotating barrel tumbler, ([Cabelas \\$128 vs list of approx \\$186](#)) initially made for rock polishing. It is a good sized drum w/a rubber liner and a lid on the end held on w/six washers and wing nuts. Also has a rubber gasket. No leaks with the liquid.

I had tried the liquid cleaner in my Thumler's UltraVibe 18 vibratory tumbler but it did not do the job. The cases did not tumble, and they did not vibrate. I think that the vibrator type machines MUST be used with a dry media for the vibrating and rotating action to occur.

When I brought "my" liquid cleaning method to an on-line forum, someone wrote: "When I started reloading I bought the RCBS tumbler that is specifically designed for using liquid because I THOUGHT it would be easier and cleaner than traditional media tumbling. In practice, the rinsing and drying made the whole process take longer, was messier, and did not do as good a job as the media tumbler." This is true and shows that the liquid brass cleaning process is not for everyone. So, read on and find out if there is any benefit for you.

Although I am writing about "my process" I have to give credit to another loader, Mike P. from NH, who showed me his Thumler (*without the b*) rotating barrel tumblers and told me of his cleaning mixture. His brass was so sparkling that you could not tell that it was OLD.

There is some benefit to using a liquid cleaner to clean your brass.

However, there is quite a bit more to the process than one encounters using a vibratory cleaner with dry media. There is a commercial liquid cleaner that is easy to use made by IOSSO which has been written about elsewhere. I tried this process, but it is critical to stay with the chemicals or they will severely etch, and may weaken, your brass. Since I am prone to jump from one task to another, I could not use this product. So, that said, my current liquid brass cleaning process seems to be much less critical.

Cleaning with liquid is a multi-step process.

First, place the cases (*all of the same caliber ONLY or smaller cases will nest inside the larger ones*) into the drum, add water to cover, and the secret cleaner (revealed later) in the tumbler (*Thumlers Model B tumbler; \$128 from Cabelas*), so the barrel is about one-half full. I didn't want to overload the motor so limited the content to approx 200 .45 ACP cases. Fasten the end cap (*six wing nuts*) and place the drum onto the rollers and turn on the unit.

After approximately one hour, slightly more if the brass is REALLY tarnished or dingy, stop the process and dump the contents of the drum thru a strainer into a bucket.

DO NOT TO USE KITCHEN UTENSILS!!! NEVER use anything for case cleaning that will be used for food preparation or eating. I use a cheap plastic kitchen strainer that I bought for 99 cents. My drain bucket is a five gallon pail that wall plaster came in. (*NOTE: Here is where I forgot the tumbler was running and left it for four or five hours! No damage to cases, but did they ever sparkle!*)

Next, rinse the cases with clean water. Swish them around to get any residual cleaner and soap off and rinse them some more. Cases can be left out in the sun to dry, or placed on an old towel near the furnace, or you can put them on a cookie sheet or flat pan in the oven on low heat, below 200 degrees for an hour or so. (*Again, use this old cookie sheet/pan ONLY for this process.*) **YOU CANNOT LOAD THESE CASES UNTIL THEY ARE COMPLETELY DRY!** This is one reason that many prefer the faster dry media method.

From the moment you take the cases out of the tumbler, you can see that they sparkle. They will continue to sparkle as long as you have rinsed them thoroughly. I think that using this process from the first time a case is fired will retain its interior cleanliness throughout its life. Failure to rinse thoroughly may result in some tarnishing, although this has not happened to me as yet.

I removed the primer before liquid cleaning on a test lot of cases and find that the primer pockets will be much cleaner than with the dry media, and there will be no media to plug the flash hole. I am thinking of setting up a single stage press with a universal depriming die and do this step first. At the same time, I could segregate cases by headstamp.

There is no question that this process will benefit rifle shooters much more than those who shoot and reload primarily for handguns.

The inside of the case is much cleaner than with the dry media process, which means less grit to go down the barrel and wear the leade ahead of the chamber.

This process takes from a few hours to a day or two to accomplish, but again, most of the

time is background time while you are doing other things. Drying the cases is the longest part. Patience is a virtue, one that I have just a little of, but I am working at it.

I suppose that you want to know what secret cleaner I use? Well, here it is:

- Water to cover cases in the drum (*about one-half full*).
- One quarter cup of lemon juice. (*\$1.39 qt at the local grocery.*)
- Dash of dish detergent -- just a few drops; a little goes a very long way.

Well, that's the whole deal. Simple and inexpensive for ingredients, but expensive for the one-time cost of the tumbler. The process does take more time. OTOH, my cases really shine. Oh, and another benefit is that I have no toxic dust to ingest lead from as I separate the cases from the dry media. You will, of course, have to dispose of the used liquid cleaner in a safe manner.

The bottom line of this process is that it takes longer, requires more time and space which I have. I generally process cases in groups of 200 to 400 anyway, so this is no burden to me. I always have several hundred .45 ACPs ready to load at a moments notice, so hundreds more drying near the furnace is no problem. At present, I have done approximately 6,000 cases and all are still shining brightly.

Hope that more reloaders come out of the closet with their recipes for liquid cleaners.

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