

## Colt .36 Caliber to .38 Caliber Conversion Dilema

When using a .38 Colt conversion cylinder on a .36 caliber replica revolver, to attain accuracy with a modern .38 caliber cartridge, in your reproduction .36 caliber percussion revolver, you must shoot soft lead .38 Special, hollow base wad cutters, .38 Colt hollow base or .38 Colt healed ammunition. Both Howell Conversions and Kirst Konverter offer a cartridge conversion cylinder for both the 1851 and the 1861 Colt Navy revolvers manufactured by either Uberti or Pietta. The conversion cylinders are available in .38 Long Colt caliber, as a six shot cylinder. So why must one shoot soft lead .38 Special, hollow base wad cutters, .38 Colt hollow base or .38 Colt healed ammunition..



Fig. 1. 1851 and 1861 Colt .36 caliber replicas



Fig. 2. .355 barrel crown measurement

The .36 caliber percussion revolver barrel has a bore diameter that is supposed to be .375 inches, and, more important, is the fact that today's .38 caliber cartridges are loaded with .357-inch diameter bullets. But not all the barrels measure out to exactly .375 inches. As you can see in Fig. 2, my '51 Pietta Colt Navy measures at the crown at .355.5 and at the forcing cone .375. The Howell cylinder I have is at .374. Yet, to attain accuracy with a modern .38 Long Colt caliber cartridge in the reproduction .36 caliber percussion revolver, you must shoot soft lead .38 Special, hollow base wad cutters, .38 Long Colt hollow base or .38 Long Colt healed ammunition so as to compensate for the .375 measurement. The soft lead hollow base bullet will "bump up" to the .375-inch bore diameter through obturation, the result of a bullet or pellet expanding or upsetting to fit the bore, and shoot very accurately.

The chambers will actually accept .38 Special hollow base wad cutter cartridges; however the cylinder is too short and is not intended for use of the standard .38 Special cartridge. They must be hollow base wad cutter cartridges. The cylinder has been made this way so that the shooter can use commercially loaded hollow base, soft lead bullet ammunition. It is very important to remember that the cylinder it is not intended for the standard .38 Special cartridge.



Another option is to get the barrel lined to .357. Lining the barrel to .357 will increase accuracy and any standard .38 caliber Long Colt bullet may be used. Howell Conversions charges \$85 for lining the barrel and you send the entire revolver to them including the conversion cylinder and the percussion cap cylinder as they will set the head space for the conversion cylinder and the cylinder gap for the cap & ball cylinder to assure a proper fit once the barrel is lined.