

Rovatec Bullite's Way to Effective Dry Practice Sessions

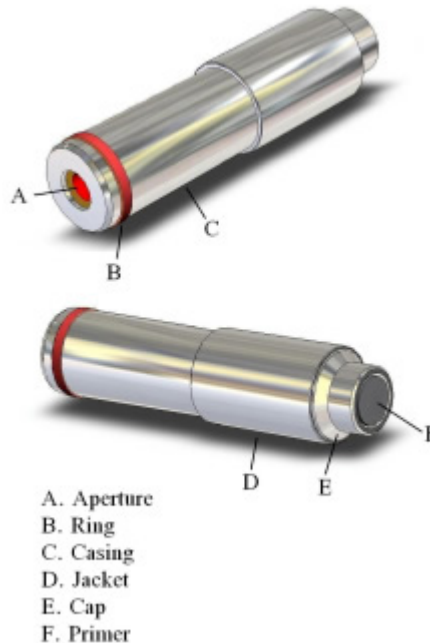
By: Bruce N. Eimer, Ph.D

We learn through feedback. We can only correct our mistakes if we see them
- Teacher of the Deaf

No matter how far liberal relativists twist reality, there are still some reality-based absolutes in this world. One such absolute is that if you're going to sit and pose for a photo shoot on the back of a Bengal tiger, chances are good that you're volunteering to be his next meal. Likewise, another absolute is that if you're learning a new skill, or practicing a learned one (like shooting), you'll progress faster with corrective feedback than you will without it.

In a previous article in this magazine, I discussed the benefits of dry practice sessions. You can practice most of your marksmanship and gun handling skills with an empty handgun. This saves you time and money, and helps to keep your skills sharp. With that said, in the last several years, a number of innovative companies have manufactured laser-equipped devices for sharpening your dry fire training drills through the provision of corrective visual feedback after each shot. One such company is Rovatec of Israel (800-506-1252 www.rovatec.com). Their proprietary Bullite Laser Training System is the subject of this review.

I had the pleasure of meeting the nice folks from Rovatec at the 2005 SHOT Show in Las Vegas. They are all battle-hardened Israeli warriors. They were kind enough to give me a Bullite unit of my own to evaluate and report on. Initially, they sent me one for a .40 S&W caliber pistol, and subsequently at my request, they lent me one for a 9mm pistol, so I could evaluate Bullite with some of my small 9mm pocket pistols. I've had the opportunity to live with these Bullites since the SHOT Show in January, and I've had a good time playing!



Product Description

Bullite is a dry practice training tool in the form of an inert laser bullet. It's the size and shape of a standard ammunition cartridge that fits into the chamber of any personal firearm, from pistols to shotguns to assault rifles. As of this writing, Rovatec makes Bullites in .38 Special, 9mm, .40 S&W, .45 ACP and 12 gauge shotgun. When you press the trigger and release the firing pin, it strikes and activates the Bullite bullet in the chamber which projects a precise laser pulse to the gun's point of impact. The Bullite tool enables you to practice shooting your handgun without live ammunition--anytime and anywhere, when it's appropriate to engage in dry practice sessions.

You don't get the benefits of recoil, but you can practice your movement, gun handling, aiming, sighting and trigger control skills. You get that all important corrective feedback when you pull the trigger. The laser dot flashes right on the point of impact of your shot.

So, if it doesn't flash where you were aiming, you know you didn't execute an accurate shot; and if it does, well, then you know you did. This is instant corrective feedback for quicker learning.

The Bullite system provides the missing component of standard dry fire practice sessions. Without the laser, there's no indication you hit your target where you were aiming. By making it possible for you to see your actual point of impact through the visual feedback of the laser pulse, Bullite enables you to self-correct—the basic principle of learning.

The Bullite comes with a well-written user's manual that contains instructions on how to insert the unit into the chamber of your handgun, how to employ the unit and how to remove it. The manual also contains dry practice drills, a section on care and maintenance and a section of FAQs. The attractive Bullite kit comes in a neat, metal box with foam inserts for the system components which include: (1) the Bullite laser bullet, (2) an "optional" metal safety pipe and safety nut for screwing the safety pipe into the barrel, (3) a plastic screw-on, safety pipe extension for longer barrels, and (4) a set of 2.5 inch diameter sticky targets. The suggested retail price of the kit is \$179.95.



Performance Test Results

I tested the 9mm Bullite with my 9mm Glock 26, Glock 19, Kahr Arms PM9, Rohrbaugh R9S and Kel-Tec P-11. I tested the .40 S&W Bullite with my .40 caliber Glock 27, Glock 23, Smith and Wesson 4013TSW, SIG 239 and SIG 229. I found that I prefer to use Bullite without the optional safety pipe. I found the pipe to be an impediment. First, it took away the natural feel of the gun. Second, the safety nut that's supposed to secure the safety pipe in the barrel came loose each time I cycled the slide to

reset the trigger on the double action only (DAO) striker fired pistols. Also, I found that the nut didn't want to screw all the way to the crown of the muzzle as it said it would in the user manual.

Interestingly, as would likely happen to me, and the fact I had two kits (in 9mm and .40 S&W), I mixed up the parts on my work desk. While the laser bullets are distinguishable by their size, it would be nice if Rovatec marked the caliber on their laser bullets as is the common practice with all commercial cartridges. Also, the optional safety pipes and safety nuts were indistinguishable. To me, it looked like they were interchangeable. I think they should be marked with the caliber they go with.

Rohrbaugh R9S. The drill is that you lock back the slide on your semi-auto and then insert the laser bullet into the chamber of the barrel. This wouldn't work with my small 9mm Rohrbaugh R9S for two reasons. The first reason is that the slide doesn't lock back on this pistol. The second is that there just wasn't enough space in the slide's ejection port between the barrel chamber and the breech end of the slide to insert the Bullite. So, I couldn't use the Bullite with my little Rohrbaugh.

Kahr Arms PM9. Next, I worked with my slightly larger 9mm Kahr Arms PM9. I was able to insert the Bullite. However, since this is a DAO striker fired pistol, after each shot, I

had to hand cycle the slide to reset the trigger. The Bullite tended to be ejected, or tended to jam in the gun.

The Glock Family. With my Glocks, which are also striker fired DAO pistols, I didn't have these problems. Both the 9mm and .40 caliber Bullite worked well with my 9mm Glock Models 26 and 19 and my .40 caliber Glock Models 27 and 23. As I mentioned in my previous article on dry practice (Concealed Carry Magazine Volume 02-Issue 05), I modified and marked as training magazines, several of my Glock magazines by removing the follower, spring and magazine insert, and then replacing the floor plate. This modification allowed me to keep a magazine in the pistol and still be able to rack the slide after each shot without the slide locking back. Thus, after each dry shot with the Glock, I could rack the slide to re-engage the trigger bar with the striker. Also, this modification permitted me to know that these magazines can not hold ammunition, although for safety, I still status check the gun anyway each time I pick it up.

Smith and Wesson 4013TSW. With my traditional double action (DA/SA: double action/single action) 40 caliber Smith and Wesson 4013TSW pistol, the drill was different. Smith and Wesson semi-autos will not fire without a magazine because of their magazine disconnect. So, there were two ways to practice with the Bullite:

I could keep pressing the trigger in DAO mode without cycling the slide. Alternatively, I could fire the first dry shot double action, and then drop the magazine, rack the slide, re-insert the magazine, and then fire the next dry shot single action—too complicated!

The upshot is that with this type of DA/SA semi-auto, Bullite dry fire training is realistic for single dry shot drills only, as the first shot has a longer and heavier trigger pull than subsequent shots. However, you can not practice transitioning from the initial double action dry shot to the second single action dry shot without thumb cocking the hammer following the first double action dry shot.

The 1911. I did not have a 45 caliber Bullite, so I could not play with one in my 1911s. But I did have the opportunity to test the Bullite with a 1911 at the SHOT Show. Here the drill is to thumb cock the hammer and dry fire the gun with the Bullite. You can then re-cock the hammer manually, or hand cycle the slide. By performing the latter drill, you should be able to practice your trigger resets, as I was able to do with my Glocks.

Trigger Cocking DAO Pistols. Unlike with the slide cocking, striker fired DAO Glocks and Kahrs, with the trigger cocking DAO pistol, you don't have to manually cycle the slide after dry firing to reset the trigger mechanism and recock the pistol. I tested the Bullite with three trigger cocking DAO pistols--my SIG P239 DAO in .40 S&W 9mm, my SIG P229 DAK in .40 S&W, and my 9mm Kel-Tec P-11.

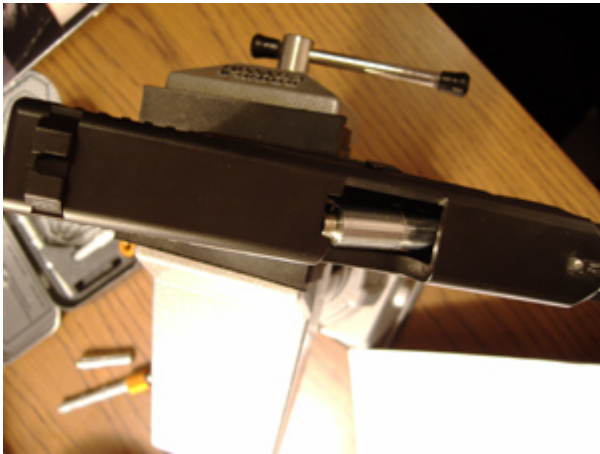
Bullite really shines with the trigger cocking DAO pistol. As with a revolver, you get the real feel of the trigger dry shot after dry shot. Long DAO triggers, such as that of the Sig Sauer P-239 in DAO, and that of the Kel-Tec P-11, make precise marksmanship with repeated rapid fire a skill that requires lots of trigger practice to master. Bullite makes dry firing the Sig DAO P-239 fun because the laser lets you see where you are hitting. Having fun means practicing with a long heavy trigger is less tiring, so you want to practice with it and you can master it. It is even more fun to work with Bullite in the Sig Sauer P-229 with the DAK trigger.

Unfortunately, Bullite is not usable with the Kel-Tec for the same reason it was unusable with the Rohrbaugh R9S-- there just wasn't enough space in the slide's ejection port

between the barrel chamber and the breech end of the slide to insert the Bullite into the Kel-Tec P-11.

Like a Snap Cap! Also, the Bullite is like a snap cap. It protects the firing pin or striker so you need not worry while dry firing with a Bullite bullet in your chamber. With a Bullite in the pipe of my much smoother trigger cocking DAO SIG P239, and ultra-smooth SIG P229 DAK, dry fire practice was a dream. I imagine that the Rovatec Bullite is also made to order for a DAO revolver; but unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to test a .38 Special Bullite. If I can get one in the future, I'll report on it.

Changing the Battery. Unfortunately, you can not change the battery on the Bullite unit yourself. You need to send it back to the company. When you're spending almost \$200. for the kit to begin with, it would be nice to know that it will last. The company states that you will get approximately 10,000 dry shots with the unit. After that, you will need to have the battery replaced. I know that 10,000 shots is ten times more than 1000 rounds of FMJ target ammunition, but I don't really think it is valid to compare the cost of live ammunition with the number of shots you can get from a dry fire practice tool. It would be nice if the product was made such that you could swap the battery yourself.



Conclusions

I've had a lot of fun playing with my Bullites. They are accurate. Point of aim equals point of impact. Bullite is so accurate you can use it to zero your sights! My test and evaluation units functioned without a glitch. They shot to point of aim with a center hold, or six-o'clock hold sight picture, depending on the gun. Bullite is also very simple and easy to use--you just drop the Bullite bullet in the chamber and close the action.

On my trips to the range for live fire practice with the guns I used with the Bullite, I found that I was noticeably more on target in both accuracy and speed. After all, that is the purpose of dry practice.

Interestingly, I also found that when practicing with my Bullites, I could catch myself when I jerked the trigger or anticipated the shot—yes even with dry fire! This feedback enabled me to self-correct the problem and stroke the trigger more softly and smoothly.

It's been approximately eight months since I received my units. I don't know how many shots I've taken, but my lasers are still flashing. However, my Bullites' batteries may die any time now, and I'll have to send them back to Israel for replacement. Guess the uncertainty won't kill me, but I'm a more accurate shooter as a result of all the fun practice I've gotten.

Unfortunately, Bullite is not suitable for the small 9mm semi-automatic pistols I tested for the reasons I explained above. Rovatec should state this on their web site and in their Bullite user manual.

Given the vision and technological ingenuity of the people at Rovatec, you can now buy an affordable tool to make your dry practice sessions more effective. Rovatec projects dry

fire practice into the 21st Century with Bullite. In my opinion, it should be standard issue with every duty sidearm. You can bet that the Rovatec folks are working right now on ways to improve their innovative product.

My Bullite Dry Fire Exercise Routine

1. Facing the target, draw from the holster and fire one shot.
2. Facing the target, draw and fire three shots (with the trigger cocking DAO pistols).
3. Same as #1 from the ready position.
4. Same as #2 from the ready.
5. Same as #1 while moving to cover.
6. Practice shooting from behind cover (i.e., a barricade).
7. Facing away from the target, turn 180 degrees, draw from holster and fire at target.

This article was written in August, 2005. Please check www.rovatec.com for further updates.

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