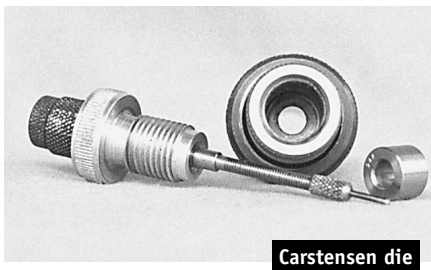


Here's a Redding® "S" full length die. Redding® didn't invent it but has made it more popular. It takes Wilson® or Redding® bushings and is, otherwise, a standard Redding® sizer. The Redding® S dies are available in a few models, but the one the most of us will order is the full length die as shown. Run it with or without an expander (get the retaining nut that replaces the expander to secure the decapping pin if you go sans expander). The Redding® is the easiest way to get "custom."

Hornady® has one too but it uses proprietary bushings available in only 0.002 increments. Nice expander design, and the bushings size all the neck.

Redding® "S" die Jim Carstensen has been modifying dies for years to accept LE Wilson® bushings. I've had him do Forster-Bonanza® sizers and they are very good. Here is one in .223 Remington. This modification retains the stock decapping stem and pin so the expander assembly can be used if wanted. That's the reason I chose to use Forster® for these dies: F-B® has the best expander assembly on the market. He can do just about any die brand. Like the Redding®, since it's a neck bushing, it can't do a thing about shoulder bump except through die body adjustment. The amount of neck being sized can be controlled but that is of (usually) very little utility to a High Power shooter.



Hornady® die

Carstensen die

decent out of the box. From a design standpoint, I like either Forster-Bonanza® due to its expander ball design, and also Redding®, especially some of their newer designs. I've had my best luck with Forster-Bonanza® on qualities of die to die consistency, interior finish, and demonstrated good alignment. But don't trust nary a one. Good luck comes with many, but not with all, so judge a sizing die by its results, not its make.

Better sizing dies are very hard, which is to say hardened. Something with a Rockwell C of 55 plus is very good. The harder the die is the less likely it is to leave anything on the case but its dimensions. Durability isn't really much issue, but function is. Harder against softer makes for smoother function. Finish is also important, and the smoother the better for the same reasons. A well polished surface also makes better use of case lube — it stays on the case. Dies from custom makers are usually harder and better finished

than what comes from the big makers — a little more about what we pay for, and what it's worth. Coated (usually titanium-nitride) parts help too.

The better big name dies are manufactured using a process wherein the body, shoulder, and neck areas are produced with a single reamer rather than by the separate operations used by many other manufacturers. That's good, in theory at least. In execution, quality machine work doesn't care how many steps are involved. Again, buy it (which is to say "keep it") based on what it shows.

The best things going are full length sizing dies with interchangeable neck bushings. We used to have to get these made up but some big makers offer them as stock parts now, and I'm sure others will follow suit. Two things that make these dies worth the extra are being able to reduce the amount of takedown in the neck so the expander will work nicer, and the option to run without



I strongly recommend decapping cases in a separate operation. A decapping die like this Lee® doesn't cost much and can easily be run on a cheaper-than-anything Lee® press dedicated to this function. Doing so keeps primer grit off the press ram (the "good press" ram) and associated parts and even takes a little stress away from the decapping stem the expander rides on. It also lets the tumbling media get a shot at the primer pocket (not that big a deal, but a deal).

This is a punch and base set from LE Wilson®. Faster than a press run die.

Lee® decapper

LE Wilson® punch and base

I have had folks ask about "high tech" sizing dies like the RCBS® "X"-die (and I'm sure there will be more). This is the one they say occludes case trimming. I discount it, for the sake of its features, and say its performance must be judged with impartial tools. My understanding of this device is that there's a swaging button sort of deal that limits stretching of the case during sizing. Brass, however, still flows, and this die isn't putting any of it back. They say it won't cause a neck doughnut (much more elsewhere on these debbils), and maybe it won't, but it adds no life or performance benefits to the case or to the sizing operation. Big deal is that trimming is just not that big a deal. Would I replace my Harrell's or Neil Jones with an RCBS® "X"-die just so I don't have to trim cases? No! Get a Gracey and three minutes and trim a hundred cases, and then size them in a die made to size.



RCBS® "X"-die

inside sizing (no expander) if wanted. Shoulder set back is still controlled as it always was by threading down the die body until whatever hit is delivered. There's a best way to go and that's found somewhere nearby this paragraph.

Two things after the fact (of purchase). One is, please, to find out what we got! Size cases and measure the results — don't take for granted much of anything about the purchase. Two is accept no seconds: if a die is bad, get something done about it. If someone happens, for instance, to come up with a maximum dimension die and his rifle has a minimum dimension chamber, he can call himself a victim of tolerance, but this purchase can't be hit or miss because the die is really the only thing anyone can do anything about right then.

Related to case sizing is depriming. Some dies develop terminal conditions of destroying primer punches. The best solution is to set up a separate decapping station to perform this operation. Stand alone decappers range from inexpensive punch and base sets to only slightly more expensive 7/8-14 thread-in designs. Use of these assemblies saves the die decapping rod from ever being flexed or bent, which is connected, or may be, to the expander, and keeps the primer residue out of the press, the major cause of fouling up its works. A separate decapper also makes it really easy to run dirty brass through prior to case cleaning and any other time it's necessary to knock a cap without firing up a sizing die.