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Solid Pilot Vs. Removable Pilot

Which is Best?

Both solid and removable pilots do an equally good job—assuming proper clearance with the bore—and therein lies the problem. Solid pilots are ground to one size which is usually slightly smaller than minimum industry bore size; they will fit most commercial barrels closely enough to produce good results. Because there is less work to make a solid pilot reamer, they're also less expensive.

Removable piloted reamers are made with a journal (spindle) on the front end that allows precision bushings of varying sizes to be fitted to the reamer. The gunsmith can then select a pilot bushing that fits the bore of a particular barrel with exactly the clearance he wishes. Although the reamer with removable pilot costs more initially, and buying a selection of pilot bushings adds to the expense, this arrangement allows fine-tuning of the barrel/pilot fit.

Years ago, we used to sell about five solid pilot reamers for every one fitted with a removable pilot. This ratio has changed to approximately one for one. Firearms tooling—other than reamers—that uses pilot bushings (indicating rods, specialized form cutters, etc.) has become more popular and it makes sense to have a selection of bushings that can be used on both a chamber reamer and another piloted cutter that will be used on the same build.

In the end, your budget and needs will decide which system is “best”.

