

April 2002 - Gimmicks

I have been asked by many shooters to expand on an article I previously wrote for the Australian Shooter regarding gimmicks and shotguns. I will define the difference between a quick fix gimmick and a beneficial aid to a shotgun by stating that the former only serves as a distraction to the fundamental basics of pointing and shooting the firearm.

One of the best examples of a useless gimmick I have seen in recent times was at this past year's Grand American Trapshooting Tournament in the United States. There was a new device being widely promoted that was little more than a telescopic sight, without the magnification, for shotguns. You were supposed to fix this gadget to the rib of your shotgun and, within the few seconds you have to shoot a ten-centimetre clay target flying away from you at 100 kilometres an hour, align the centre circle of your sight over the top of the tiny orange, rapidly getting smaller target and pull the trigger.

All the device was doing was teaching the user to look at the foresight and not the target, probably the biggest fundamental fault in shotgun shooting. Throughout the few days I spent at the tournament, I noticed dozens of similar gimmicks that, to me, just encouraged bad technique. I guess when you have 5000 shooters in one place you only have to convince a small percentage to try something to make a buck or two.

Now, to give you an idea of a few things that I personally use, which I have found to be more than beneficial, I will discuss the aspects of my own shotgun. My shotgun of preference is a Beretta SO5. I guess this firearm would be described as the Formula One of Beretta's competition shotguns. Because I shoot more than one event with the one gun, I need to set the gun up differently each time to optimise my performance.

For double trap events, I use a configuration that has the stock three millimetres higher in comb height than that of which I use for Olympic trap. Obviously, to do this I need an adjustable comb and this year I had Beretta's new Memory System comb fitted to the stock.

When I am competing in the Australian disciplines of trap shooting, I use a 32" set of barrels as compared to the 29½" barrels used in international events. I do this mainly because in our domestic events the targets are much slower and the extra sighting plane improves my accuracy. Both barrels weigh 1.6kg, so the balance of the gun never changes.

The distance at which I shoot targets changes greatly between events. On average, the first target in double trap is taken at 23 metres and the second at 25 metres. In Olympic trap, the variance is much greater, with the range being an average of 27 metres for the first and up to 35 metres for the second.

For doubles I use a ¼ choke in the bottom and a ½ in the top. For Olympic trap I use a tight ½ in the bottom and a loose full in the top. To have this choice and versatility in my

chokes, I either had to get two complete sets of 29½" barrels made or get screw-in chokes fitted. That choice was easy, as I believe the best changeable chokes available are the American Briley system and we are lucky enough to have an agent in Australia who fits them through Miall's Gun Shop in Frankston, Victoria. Brileys are my personal preference due to their light weight and perfect flush fit inside the barrels.

For the record, I also have had my 32 barrels Briley choked, as in DTL shooting I have a handicap of 25 metres as opposed to the common mark championship distance of 15 metres. Obviously, in handicap events, where some of the targets are at 40 metres when hit, a very tight, full choke is preferred over a ½ choke used for 15-metre events.

In regard to the porting of barrels for trap and double trap events, the International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF) changed their rules on January 1, 2001. The only reason I didn't get my barrels ported the next day was that the rule was very ambiguous. It was unclear whether or not the porting had to be done by the manufacturer of the barrel or by a reputable manufacturer of porting. After a ruling from the Shotgun Committee from the ISSF, which clarified the rule in favour of the latter, I had my barrels ported immediately.

It must be noted that if the barrels are ported by anyone other than the manufacturer of the shotgun, then the person carrying out the barrel work must issue a certificate guaranteeing the barrels' safety. This certificate puts the onus of safety on the gunsmith and away from the ISSF. In the age of legal litigation, this will become commonplace.

Interestingly, Beretta and Perazzi don't currently port any of their trap barrels as an option, so again the choice for me was simple. Briley does a fantastic job in this area also. There is an ample amount of scientific evidence that barrel porting, if done correctly, will reduce muzzle flip. Anything that can reduce the amount of muzzle movement after the first shot can only enhance your chances of hitting anything on the second barrel.

Hopefully this will help clarify what I would consider to be helpful aids when it comes to shotgunning - as compared to money-wasting gimmicks. As I mentioned in the Jan/Feb 2002 issue, there is no single shotgun that is perfect for all disciplines of shooting. However, with the technology that is now available through adjustable combs and chokes, a stock standard shotgun can be made to be far more versatile than it once was, but there will never be any substitute for correct gun fit.

Before spending vast sums of money on the more technical aspects of the shotgun, make sure someone with some degree of gun fitting experience takes a look at the basics of the gun to make sure your enjoyment can be maximised.