

## **January/February 2002 - Gun fit, it's your choice**

One of the most common things I am asked to do when I turn up at a shooting range is to put someone's new shotgun to my shoulder and tell them if it is any good. I may as well try their pants and shirt on as well, because proper gun fit is as personalised as buying clothes. What fits them will rarely fit me.

Often people ask me if they can mount my gun to see how it feels. I always get quite a laugh out of this because in technical terms the drop in the comb of my trap gun is very low indeed. The measurement at the front of my comb is a drop of 50mm and the rear is 55mm. Most standard trap guns from nearly all the major manufacturers will have dimensions of about 30mm at the front and 40mm at the rear. Sporting or field stocks generally come standard at about 40mm at the front and up to 60mm at the rear.

Now the first question you should be asking about now is how someone could possibly shoot rising clay targets with a shotgun that has dimensions nearly 20mm below that of a standard straight-out-of-the-box model. It all comes back to personalised gun fit and where the shooter positions the comb on his or her face. I have always found it nearly impossible to put the comb directly under my cheekbone; therefore, I have always shot with the comb of the gun virtually sitting against my jawbone. This of course means that I need the woodwork of the gun to be considerably lower than that of the average shooter.

Despite an unusually lower stock dimension, I still see plenty of the rib of the gun when I mount it to my shoulder. I pattern all my guns on a pattern board at no more than 25 metres (in a double trap event I shoot the first target at 23 metres and the second at 25 metres), at this distance I still manage to get 100 per cent of the pattern above the aiming point. In an event like double trap, where you are shooting at two very rapidly rising targets, this becomes a very important feature of the gun.

The reality is that you need to be very specific in what you are going to be using your shotgun for. Most field shooters want a gun to pattern at virtually 50 per cent of the pattern above and 50 per cent below at a range of at least 40 metres. Of course, most game that is shot is not rising vertically and is taken at more than 25 metres, so my double trap gun is not perfect by any means for field shooting.

Most trap shooters try and set their guns up to pattern at about the 70/30 per cent ratio or even 80/20 per cent. Skeet and sporting shooters are normally in the 60/40 per cent range at 25 metres. The ratio is simply a calculation of the percentage of pellets that are above and below the aiming point on the pattern sheet at a predetermined distance. Once the correct height of the gun is determined for an individual, it is just as important to make sure that the gun is shooting straight horizontally.

I have looked down the barrel and into the eyes of a number of shooters to see if they are properly aligned down the centre of the gun - you'd be amazed at how many are not. This simple check is often all that is needed to get a wayward shotgunner back on track. Obviously, before doing this you both need to be absolutely sure the gun is empty, but by

looking back through the barrel into the shooters pupil it is very easy to see whether or not they are shooting to the right or left of the target. Once again it will be the pattern board that really tell all to the doubting shooter.

Changing the amount of cast a stock has is one way of overcoming any poor horizontal alignment, but it often can simply be a matter of changing a shooters stance in relation to the target that will overcome this problem. Shooters (I am talking right hander here) that stand very open face on to their target have the problem of looking down the right hand side of the rib of their gun thus causing their shot patterns to be sprayed too far right. Shooters that turn their bodies too square on to the target often have the alternate problem. A pretty good rule of thumb when setting a shotgun up to shoot straight is to have your right foot pointing at around 90 degrees from the centre of your body and your left at about 45 degrees. This basic stance should always position your body and shoulders in the correct starting position and give you an equal amount of swing to the left and to the right. Again for the lefthanders the opposite will apply.

Many competition shooters when setting a shotgun up will have a centre bead inserted midway down their barrel so they can keep track from time to time that they are still mounting the gun correctly. This is not such a bad aid provided you do not fall in the trap of constantly doubting that you are down the centre of the gun and before you know it you are looking at the two beads of your gun instead of the target you are aiming at. I personally don't use a middle bead because I find that the red one at the end of my barrel can be distracting enough at times. It is interesting to note here that Richard Faulds, the Englishman that beat me for gold at the last Olympics, shoots with no beads at all. He has total trust in his gun mount and therefore his instincts to just see the target and shoot it. That, in a nutshell, is really all that shotgun shooting should be. See the target and shoot it. However difficult you want to make it from there is up to you.