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blog: March 15, 2005

Buying a Shotgun

Previously I have given you my take on some issues to consider before buying a [hunting rifle](#). Use the information as you wish and I hope it treats you well. There certainly are other conversations to have regarding rifles to buy, but those will cost you my outrageous consultant's fee: a Starbucks grande mocha frappuccino a la DOC. Give me a call if you want to talk.

Next, let's see what you can discover about buying the right shotgun for your needs. All the advice about budgeting and so on from my earlier blogs applies. Money is ALWAYS the factor that controls what you purchase. Quality and dollars go together in the gun game. You can pay too much for a gun but with a good knowledge base, you can have a great gun at a reasonable price. Work towards that goal. Once you have the how much figured out, now we get to the techno-weenie part.

A. What gauge? Smaller gauge shotguns do not cost less or recoil less than larger gauges. I will point you towards a 12 gauge. *"What?!"* you say. *"A 12 gauge will [pick the lie you like most and insert]: break my shoulder, knock me on my butt, cost too much to shoot..."* and many others I won't bother to relate.

The truth is that a 12 gauge will have a wider variety and lower cost of ammunition than any other gauge on the market. BTW, I know that .410 is a calibre and is included with all the gauge shotguns; 10, 12, 16, 20 and 28. Someday someone will actually get that .410 thing correct at the manufacturer's level but not today.

B. What do you want to do with this shotgun?

- a. Trap: international or domestic
- b. Skeet: international or domestic
- c. Sporting Clays
- d. Hunt upland game birds
- e. Hunt migratory water fowl
- f. Use for bear/predator protection
- g. Something else I haven't thought of?

C. What type of action do you want?

- a. Break;
 - i. Single shot: should be fine and inexpensive for bird shooting
 - ii. Over/under: arrange for a bank loan. Very neat to shoot and own but the good ones cost A LOT.
 - iii. Side by side: very British, hard to find and, like o/u, pricey. But if you gotta have one, you gotta have one.
- b. Bolt: a bit old fashioned and not as available but functional
- c. Pump: AHHH! The great standby that should be the choice of most starting shotgunners.
- d. Semi-auto: very neat and quick to follow up shots. Of course, if you learn to shoot well a fast second shot need not be a big issue.

D. What choke(s) should you have? Go and study chokes and learn what they do and when to use what. A shotgun with interchangeable chokes is very useful and allows your shotgun a wider range of use. An extra barrel for slugs/buckshot with cylinder bore is a nice touch and adds to your shotgun's versatility.

E. How long a barrel? Barrel length and accuracy are NOT connected. A barrel of 22" should burn all the powder and provide more than enough energy to accomplish what you need.

See you at the matches,
Murray "DOC" Gardner.

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blog: April 5, 2005

Shooting Your Shotgun

Now that you have answered all the questions in my previous blog and have purchased your perfect shotgun, you need to consider SHOOTING that shotgun!

If I had a dime for everytime I have been told that this shotgun and that type of shot just don't shoot well, I would be lying on a beach somewhere soaking up the sun, not writing this.

For you to get the maximum performance from your shotgun, you need to SHOOT it. Not once a year or once a month. You should be shooting it at least once a week.

Work in one or two 15 minute dry fire sessions to augment your live fire and your ability to hit with your shotgun will increase markedly. BTW, yes, dry fire. It won't hurt the gun despite the common myths you have heard.

Before you take it to the trap/skeet/sporting clays range, pattern your shotgun. If you don't know the term "pattern," then look it up. No, wait, that is what this blog should do!

To pattern your shotgun go to your local dealer and buy patterning paper. It should have a 30" circle. Put it up on the range at 30m and shoot at it. Like sighting in your rifle, you will now know where your shotgun shoots. This is usually a very eye opening experience for most shotgunners. They have sighted in their rifles but have never thought of sighting in their shotguns.

Remember, if you change the shot size, choke, ammo manufacturer or any criteria, the pattern could change. If you do make such a change, pattern your shotgun again. Yes, it is work-- but you want to hit what you shoot at, don't you?

You can enhance your shotguns sighting system with fibre optic or electronic sights. The sights don't make you shoot better but they will allow you to have a better sight alignment and make an improved sight picture which should give you more opportunity to hit the target.

If you are of average size and build, a shotgun "off the rack" should fit you fine. But if you are going to do some serious competitive shooting, get your shotgun fitted to you. This is the same as a rifle shooter would do.

A good gunsmith can take you and your shotgun and make measurements to fit the shotgun to you. This is worth every penny you spend so that you and the gun are more in harmony when working together. This is not something the average bird shooter would do but those who do competitive work will find scores increase dramatically once they have their shotgun fitted.

See you at the matches,
Murray "DOC" Gardner.

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blog: June 21, 2005

Shotgun Ammunition

Ammunition is an issue for the shotgunner. Staying only with 12 gauge, consider the following questions:

First, what chamber size do you have? Most common North American shotguns come in a minimum of 2 3/4" chambers. The popularity of 3" chambers has become very common and 3 1/2" chambers have also come upon the shotgun scene. Typically, if you have a 2 3/4" chamber you have no choice except to use shotgun shells designed for 2 3/4" chambers. Most 3" chamber guns also have a data stamp designation that confirms whether you can use both 2 3/4" and 3" shells. If your data stamp does not specify both, then only use the size shown on the barrel. *Never assume that you can use both!*

Shotguns with 3 1/2" chambers may also allow 2 3/4" and 3" but again, check the data stamp and use only the shells listed there. If in doubt, contact the manufacturer for final confirmation. **NEVER GUESS!**

Once you have the chamber size determined, then you might need to consider the shot size. This is a simple process. By looking at the manufacturer's recommendations, you will notice that small size shot is used for small game and larger shot is used for larger game. Go figure! ;-) Slugs and buck shot are used for very large game and/or for protection from dangerous animals. Do some homework here, as there is a tremendous selection of shells from which to choose.

Game regulations will determine what type of shot (lead, steel, bismuth or tungsten) you can use to hunt/shoot with. Slugs come in a wide variety and here again you want to do some research. This research will include not only reading and asking others but SHOOTING. Once you have all the theory, take it to practice and see how that ammo performs. If what you have chosen works well in your gun, buy a bunch. If it does not work in your gun, keep looking.

Remember that you must have the appropriate choke for the shot and size of shot that you have chosen. There is not enough room here for that lesson, but suffice it to say you need to confirm the choke in your barrel and make certain your choice of ammo works with that choke.

The above information should get you started in finding the correct ammunition you need for your target and the conditions in which you will be shooting it. Never stop doing your homework! What worked great today could be replaced with better materials in the near future.

See you at the matches,
Murray "DOC" Gardner.

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