

Some Things I've Learned About Shotguns

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #98 —



A pair of English shotguns should be the gold standard for trigger pulls. These were made by Thomas Boss.

As a shooter, a hunter and a gun collector, it's been my great fortune and pleasure to study and shoot an example of pretty much every popular shotgun made during the last 150 years – at both targets and birds. From those experiences, a few variables have stood out as seriously impacting the number of targets broken or birds bagged.

In the 1860s, English and European shotguns were redesigned to break-open at the breech and accommodate the new self-contained cartridges; Parker, Remington,



The choice of choke and shells (shot size, hardness, velocity and weight of shot charge) is keenly important to success.

L. C. Smith and Ithaca were among the first of the American makers. Side by side shotguns dominated for many years; then along came the pump action in the 1880s, the semi-automatic and then the over/under in the early 1900s. Regardless of which type of shotgun is preferred, performance is still more important than the type of action.

A good trigger pull is probably the most important, but least understood or appreciated variable in shotgun performance; and there are three parts to trigger pull – 1) the amount of pressure it takes to release the hammer, 2) the consistency of the amount of pressure required, shot after shot, and 3) the amount of trigger movement before the hammer is released. In all three cases, less is better. For best results, the shotgun must fire immediately when the brain says 'bang'. Remember, the target or bird is moving and so are the barrels. Crisp, consistent and less than five pounds is my personal standard.

The amount of choke in the muzzle end of the barrel determines the shot pattern size and density; however, the

shot size, hardness, velocity and weight of the shot charge also impact pattern size and density. A pattern that is too large and open may not connect with a target or a bird, when they meet. A pattern that is too tight and dense may pass beside the target or bird.

The last really critical variable is the fit of the stock – length

"...there are three parts to trigger pull..."

of pull, drop at comb and drop at heel. If the eye isn't slightly above the rib and looking straight down the center, the shot charge will not go where you are looking.

Certainly there are other important variables, like barrel length, weight and balance; but trigger pull, choke and stock fit are the most important for breaking targets and bagging birds.



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My Gunsmithing Bench
Columbia, Missouri
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These guns are turned upside down to measure drop. Drop at heel is measured from the table to heel of butt – lots of difference.