

Getting started in shooting – the ultimate Guide

- where to start
- buying second hand
- join a shooting ground
- protection
- choosing a game gun
- clay shooting
- rough shooting
- airgun shooting
- gun security
- accessories & clothing

Taking Up Shooting and Staying Safe

Graham Allen looks at the various ways in which it's possible to get involved in the best hobby of them all – shooting!

You've probably bought What Gun because you're already a shooter! If so, please don't stop reading this guide, as the following still applies to you, even though you may have been shooting for years.

New blood

For any sport to survive, it's vital that new people take it up, be it fishing, darts or tennis etc. However, with so much negativity surrounding guns and shooting and so many people thinking guns and those who use them are intrinsically bad or evil, it's even more important to fight our corner. It matters not whether a potential shooter is young or old, male or female or even disabled in some way. If all of the UK's shooters introduced just one person to the joys of the sport, we would double our numbers without any real effort at all. If they were to do that every year and those new shooters were to do the same, well, the whole country would be enjoying the sport in no time at all!

Most of us have a friend, relative, neighbour or work colleague that has taken an interest in what we do, even if it's just a passing comment or two. Taking a few minutes to chat with them to see if they actually fancy trying their hand may pay dividends and it may be the catalyst that results in a new shooter.

There are obviously some forms of shooting that are easier than others for people to try. If someone wants his or her first taste of shooting to be firing a .50 calibre, long-range target rifle, well, it's not going to be easy in the UK. A shooting holiday to the US is really the only way



anyone's going to get a .50 cal in his or her hands, without a huge chunk of paperwork and prior shooting experience.

If you are thinking of taking up the sport or helping someone else do the same, here are a few ways that it possible to get started.

The airgun

Starting off small is obviously going to be the easiest and cheapest route into shooting, so I'd recommend that any new shooter start out with an air rifle or pistol. Back garden shooting, or 'plinking' as it's often called, is the easiest way, as all you need is an air rifle or pistol, some pellets and something to shoot at. OK, you'll need to take steps to make sure that what you're doing is safe and that no pellets leave your boundary but hours of fun can be had for not a lot of money. There's no need for a state of the art, all singing-all dancing competition pre-charged pneumatic (PCP) and a diver's cylinder; a break barrel, spring piston air rifle can be bought for not a lot of money and there are package deals available that include everything you need.

I'd advise anyone starting out, to shoot with open sights first, so that the principles of sight picture, hold and trigger release are mastered first. Short-range shooting with open sights is great fun and some reactive targets (or even just a few tin cans) can be very challenging. There are a lot of great value CO2 powered pistols around these days and a tin of pellets and a handful of 12-gram capsules can provide hours of fun.

Back garden fun

Shooting in the back garden isn't always possible of course and many people live in flats, so maybe an air rifle club is the answer. There are indoor and outdoor clubs in all parts of the UK and your local gunshop should know where to go. If you do decide to go to a club and haven't



already bought an air rifle, wait until you've been, as the members will no doubt give you plenty of advice on what to buy and there's bound to be someone selling something second hand. After all, there's no point spending a lot of money on a new hobby that you may not like, so don't be too hasty in buying something that may not be suitable. Not everyone wants to buy second-hand of course, so your local gunshop will be able to advise you and be more than willing to help you spend your money.

Pest control with an air rifle is another 'in' into shooting but you'll obviously need to be good enough to despatch quarry cleanly and humanly; you owe it to the animal you are targeting and your own conscience. You will obviously need permission to shoot vermin somewhere-you can't just go down the local woods and start shooting wood pigeons or squirrels! That'll be armed trespass...



Small but perfectly formed

Not every new shooter wants to start with an air rifle of course; they may fancy a go at .22 rimfire shooting; Home Office Approved rimfire clubs shoot at 25, 50 and 100 yards, prone and standing, depending on the distance and discipline. This is obviously going to be more difficult than just popping down the local gunshop and buying a rifle, as they are controlled items and you'll need a Firearms Certificate (FAC) to be able to buy one. Smallbore rifle clubs aren't as numerous as air rifle clubs but there should be one near you but be prepared to travel. Most welcome new members and they will have club guns available for use (under supervision of course) but there may be a waiting list. You won't just be able to join straight away, as you will need to demonstrate that you're safe as well as keen and aren't someone they'd be wary of having as a member. It's a case of them vetting you as you go. You might fancy Olympic style .22 Match shooting only but a lot of clubs also have sections where people shoot semi auto rimfires, lever action, pistol calibre carbines, as well as cap and ball, black powder revolvers. You'll probably have to be a probationary member for 6 months or so and then the committee will decide if they will allow you to become a full member; after which you can decide if you'd like to apply for an FAC in order to buy your own rifle. Many rimfire clubs also have a fullbore section that use ranges such as Bisley.

Carrying out pest control with a rimfire is also another option but you'll obviously need to use someone else's rifle under supervision before you can apply for one of your own, so unless you know a farmer or someone else who shoots rabbits etc., who will take you out with him, you're unlikely to be granted an FAC just like that. To borrow a rifle and shoot under supervision, the owner of the rifle must be the 'occupier' or have permission to shoot on the land in question. If you've been out shooting and have been shown to be safe and responsible, your shooting partner can be used as a reference when you apply for an FAC.

More Bang For Your Buck

Deer stalking is another entry point into shooting for a lot of people and you can pay to stalk and receive tuition



from the person you go with. You obviously won't be allowed to point a rifle at anything living until you can demonstrate that you know what you're doing and can shoot straight and many novice stalkers pay to acquire the necessary skills. Deer need to be controlled but it must be done safely and humanly; showing that you've passed a deer stalking course is a good way of proving that you are serious about what you wish to do and the police will clearly see that you've gone about things the correct way. You can borrow what is called an 'estate rifle' as long as you are supervised.

Taking The Rough With The Smoothbore

Anyone over 18 can use a shotgun belonging to someone else, as long as they are with them and being supervised, so pigeon or rabbit shooting on a farm can be a very good way of gaining shooting experience before applying for a Shotgun Certificate. However, you'll still need to know what you're doing before pointing a 12 bore at a wood pigeon flying overhead. Clay pigeons are therefore the best things to target to begin with and anyone can shoot at a clay ground with a borrowed gun but the owners will want to make sure you know what you're doing and will be safe. Most clay grounds offer tuition and they can be a great introduction to the sport.

Lock It Or Lose It!

Security is a very important subject and even the humble air rifle or pistol needs to be secured, so that unauthorised people do not have access to it; it's also good practice to lock up any airguns to stop them being taken should you be unfortunate enough to be burgled. A purpose built gun cabinet is obviously the best solution but a locked wardrobe or cabinet is better than nothing.

Shotguns and firearms obviously need to be securely locked away by law and a Firearms Enquiry Officer (FEO) will inspect any cabinet and the way it is fixed before granting a firearm or shotgun certificate.



Safe and sound

It is vital that anyone taking up shooting should do so in a safe and responsible manner. Always check any gun as soon as you handle it, to see that it is unloaded and safe. Never point a gun at anyone, even if you think it's unloaded-many people over the years have been killed by what somebody thought was an 'unloaded' gun! If you treat a gun as though it is loaded, at all times, accidents will not happen. Muzzle awareness is important, as being 'muzzle swept' is not a nice feeling. When shooting, always know your backstop and be sure that if you miss your target, the bullet does not endanger anyone or anything. Even if you hit your target, the pellet or bullet may pass through it, so once again, a good backstop is key. Only shoot where you have a legal right to do so-shooting on public land, or private land without permission is armed trespass.

After shooting has stopped, make sure the gun is clear and that any magazines are either removed or empty. If possible get another person to check your gun as well before it is put away.

So, there's a brief guide to getting started in the various shooting sports. Enjoy your chosen discipline and shoot safely!



Sport For All

Mark Stone looks at the steps you need to take to get into shotgun shooting and describes how to apply for a Shotgun Certificate

For a vast majority of people, their road into shooting tends to be because one of their family members shoots. Be it game or clays, it's usually because they're invited to go along and watch and maybe join the beating line, attend a Sunday morning clay shoot and have a go. It's also becoming increasingly popular that corporate days or team-building exercises feature clay shooting in with the rest of the activities. Irrespective of your initial introduction, once you've broken your first clay or seen a pheasant fall out of the sky, most people are hooked.

Now, whilst there are an exceptionally small number of shooters who go through life borrowing a shotgun and as the law demands, remaining constantly in the presence of the gun's owner, most shooters want their own. So now starts the process of applying for your own Shotgun Certificate or SGC along with all the bits and pieces that the law, and therefore the police, requires of you. In the good old days you went to the Post Office and acquired your application form or contacted your local Constabulary and they'd send you the appropriate paperwork.

Linked together

Nowadays you have to download, that most depressing of impersonal pastimes and either download the form or fill it in online. If you download the form you'll also need an envelope to send it off in and four passport sized photographs of yourself, the likeness of which verified. With a new rule change, gone are the days of having to find a professional or suitable person of good standing. Providing they have known you for a minimum of two years, a friend can now countersign your application.

But before you do anything else, your first port of call is the Internet, where you need to go to www.gov.uk/shotgun-and-firearm-certificates and all will be revealed. Also, most constabularies will have a dedicated site or a link through to a generic website that will provide you with most of the information you'll need. Price wise, the first or initial SGC will cost you £79-50p for the first five year license, dropping to £49 for renewals but please bear in mind these were the prices at the time of going to press. And before you put pen to paper or drift your cursor over each section, make sure you read and re-read each question. Getting an answer wrong can seriously



complicate matters; so if you don't understand a question, ask your local Police Firearms Unit or gun shop. Both will, or should, be happy to help.

The unusual aspect of shotgun ownership and the attendant SGC is that unlike a Firearms Certificate or FAC, where you have to prove why said paperwork should be granted, in the case of a SGC, the police actually have to prove why you shouldn't have one. And it's for this reason you need to pay particular attention to Part B that relate to your health and whether you suffer from such things as epilepsy, had a stroke, stress related problems such as depression along with cancer, alcoholism and heart disease.

Similarly, Part C that deals with any convictions you may have had or still have. Not every offense will preclude you from being granted an SGC, whilst some that might may no longer be taken into account, due to the passage of



time. And make sure your countersignature is correct, by which I mean no one with a SGC or FAC, no gun dealers, no serving members or civilian members of the police, whilst a relative is strictly forbidden.

My advice is if you know someone who owns their own business or is a company director, they'll do very nicely. Just make sure they fill in and sign the appropriate parts of the form and the photograph correctly. Once you've completed the form, which I recommend you download and print off, since online can have its downside, making sure every piece of paperwork, payment and correct size and number of photographs are included, post your completed SGC application to the appropriate address. But make sure you send it Recorded Delivery, since this will also allow you to track your letter's progress. It costs slightly more but is well worth the added expense.

Join up

With your SGC application now undergoing initial scrutiny, our next piece of advice is to join either the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, better known as BASC, and/or the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association or CPSA. Many times the police will look for membership of one or the other, whilst membership gives you access to unlimited SGC advice. Membership of a local clay shooting club also carries a reasonable degree of weight, so join your nearest club.

BASC also have details of what quarry can be shot and at what time of year. Mammals such as rabbits, grey squirrels and foxes (with the correct cartridge of course) can be shot at any time of year but for birds, there are set times of year when you can and can't shoot them. For example, in England, the season for pheasant shooting is the 1st of October until the 1st of February, red grouse is the 12th of August until the 10th of December and partridge is 1st September until 1st of February. Duck and geese can be shot between the 1st of September and the 20th of February; Canada Geese can be shot all year however under the 'General License'. There are legal restrictions on using lead for wildfowl, so these need to be obeyed. Woodpigeons, crows, magpies and ring-necked parakeets are also on the General License list but

as mentioned, the BASC website has all the details and is well worth a visit.

Friendly dealer

The other important step is to visit your chosen friendly gun shop to get the next part of the ball rolling. Your dealer will be more than happy to supply you with an appropriate, fully approved cabinet that will store your new shotgun plus ammunition and should you see one you'd like, allow you to put a deposit on a shotgun and slip and hold them until your SGC arrives.

The dealer will also ensure you know exactly how and where you need to locate your cabinet within your home. Open the cabinet door and most of them will have four holes already drilled in the back and in some cases in the floor. The other items you'll need are four, or however many, expansion bolts that will allow you to attach your cabinet to the fabric of your house. The basic rule is that you need to site your cabinet as out of sight as is possible and it must be securely anchored to an outside wall.

Bolting it to a modern internal wall is no use whatsoever, since you can literally rip the cabinet and its contents off the wall, meaning an intruder will remove the job lot and sort out getting into it later on. Equally, make sure your new cabinet is already installed before the next stage of your SGC application takes place.

Knock at the door

Providing nothing has shown up when the police carried out their initial evaluation of your application, your local FEO or Firearms Enquiry Officer will give you a telephone call. This is to arrange to visit with you, check that your application form answers are still correct and carry out an inspection. Most houses are now fitted with multi-lever door locks and secure window locks, along with burglar alarms, which as a rule the FEO will check. Next they will want to see your cabinet and verify that it conforms to required standards, that it's been correctly located if possible out of sight from any of the windows and that it's been correctly attached to the fabric of the building, which as has already been mentioned, is to an outside wall.

The only possible exemption to cabinet location is if you've gone for one that looks like part of your furniture. Whilst they might look like an upright sideboard or display



stand, they still need to be securely attached to the building. What makes them different is that these types of cabinet are hidden in plain sight, whilst the wooden outer doors conceal the steel doors located behind them.

At this point, it's well worth pointing out the occasional additional requests that can be potentially made by your FEO. Providing you've followed the letter of the law and fulfilled everything required of both yourself and your security, theoretically you've nothing to worry about. However, it's not unknown for an FEO to suggest certain changes, most of which make good common sense. There are nonetheless the occasional FEO requests that don't have to be acted upon, certain of the SGC application rules open to individual FEO interpretation. In other words on occasion they overstep the mark.

You could also be asked why you want to own a shotgun. All you need to reply is that you want to be able to participate in various shooting sports, such as clay pigeon shooting. If you feel the need, you can also back this up by showing your FEO your CPSA and local clay ground membership cards. You don't actually have to but as the saying goes, every little helps. Equally, most FEO's are reasonable people and will in most instances try and help you.

Sit and wait

If all has gone well all you now have to do is sit and wait. As a rule your very first SGC should drop through your door about a week later, sometimes even sooner. Should

the Chief Officer of Police refuse the application, a letter will explain reasons for refusal, your rights and the correct procedure you'll need to follow if you elect to appeal.

Certificate granted, it's off to your dealer to collect your new shotgun and of course a safe method of transporting it. And do remember you need your new prized possession with you to buy ammunition. But even when you've got your SGC, there are still a few rules you need to obey to ensure you don't lose it. Basically, keep your nose clean, don't chance any form of drink driving, whilst only you should hold or know where your cabinet keys are and when you're out with your shotgun always have your SGC with you.

Apart from that, once you've run through the process enjoy your shooting. It's a tremendously rewarding and diverse sport that gets you out in the fresh air and generates plenty of exercise. So, be it game or clays, Practical Shotgun, Target Shotgun, or whatever takes your fancy, good shooting!



One Careful Owner?

Don Brunt takes us through the ups and downs of buying a second-hand shotgun and reckons that with a bit of knowledge there are some good bargains out there

Buying a second hand gun can be confusing to say the least, not only is there a huge choice, with different mechanisms designed for different tasks but there's also the inherent risk of buying something that might fail on you.

Before going to a gun shop think about what you want and what you intend to use it for. The over and under (O/U) has long surpassed the side by side (S/S) as the gun of choice, its inherently easier to shoot due to its improved sighting plane along the top barrel, heavier weight and, more often than not, better gun fit. More weight might not sound like a good thing but a 6 ½ lb S/S will kick you more than an O/U weighing a pound and a half more, consequently it will be much more stable allowing a quicker second shot if needed.

The days of O/Us being frowned upon by game shooters are behind us and these guns are used at all levels and disciplines. The S/S is now rarely seen in competitive shooting and very few new guns of this type are being made. The semi-auto shotgun has been widely available in the UK for more than 40 years yet is still considered beyond the pale for driven game! It is however an effective gun for many roles like pigeons, being easy to reload in the confines of a hide. It has also proved popular for wildfowlers as the action absorbs much of the recoil of the heavy loads

used when shooting flighting ducks and geese. Some clay shooters use semi-autos too and in truth they are becoming a lot more popular and are also well priced.



Fit for purpose

As already mentioned O/Us tend to fit quite well off the shelf though obviously this does depend on the individual, whilst S/S often have a lower comb (top of the butt). Semis often have quite short butts of around 14" as opposed to the 14 ½ or 14 ¾ " of the doubles, though they can be lengthened by spacers or butt pads.

Gun fit is a subject on which many books have been written. Essentially the gun should sit well in the shoulder, the comb should be high enough to give a good solid connection with the wood (just under their cheekbone) to see all the way down the rib. On sporters there are often two beads on the rib, one at the muzzle and one half way along. A good fit should see them both line up as a fig-8. Your firing hand grip should be close enough that you should be able to reach the trigger comfortably without having to use the extremity of the finger to pull it.

Pull!

All semis and most O/Us have single triggers, with most of the latter having a barrel selector incorporated into the safety catch to pick which fires first. Side by sides usually have two triggers (one for each barrel), for the novice shot this can be most confusing and an ill fitting S/S can cause painful bruising of the finger when using the back trigger. Shotguns for live quarry tend to have (with the exception of semi auto's) an automatic safety catch that engages when the gun is opened. Competition double guns tend to have non-automatic safeties though most can be converted to suit.

The 12 bore is by far the most popular, all-round calibre, with the 20 gauge being second but mainly O/U and S/S with a few semis too. The 16 bore is quite a rarity especially in O/U format, while 28 gauge is currently quite popular with game shooters but many of these have not yet filtered down to the 'used' market. The .410 is widely available in most single and double barrel forms though O/Us are not so common.

The cost of ammunition and its capabilities should be considered, 12 gauge is the cheapest followed by 20. The choice of loads in 16 bore is limited but both 28 and .410 are well served but expensive. For the all round shooter the 12 allows the widest choice of loads from light



clay to heavy magnums. The .410 has traditionally been thought of as a youngster's training gun. Some ladies and elderly shooters find that the lighter weight of the 20 is an advantage.

Take the tube

O/U's also tend to have fairly long barrels (28" minimum) the current vogue is 30 or 32" as these add to stability of swing on longer targets. But for the second hand buyer the lower residuals of 28" can prove attractive financially. Regarding side by sides; at the turn of the 20th century the recommended length was 30" but this changed thanks to the introduction of the Churchill XXV which made 25 or 26" the popular choice.

Consequently most guns available today have tubes of 25 – 28", if you get the chance try shooting a 32" O/U then try a 25" S/S, you will soon understand the meaning of muzzle flip! Unless the majority of your shooting is close range (walked- up) where the weight of the gun is paramount these very short barrels are to be avoided. Semis tend to have 28" barrels which due to the length of the action equates in overall length to a 30" O/U, but 26 and 30" are available, the latter being especially suited to wildfowling.

Built to last?

When viewing a prospective second-hand purchase it's important to look past the nice woodwork and engraving -

a pretty gun is no use to you if it breaks down. So make your choice using your head not just your heart. A quick inspection of the exterior of the barrels should show them to be free of dents and rust. Now look down the bore, it should be clean, bright and without any evidence of pitting (gouges) on the interior surface, a badly pitted barrel could lead to a burst, which could prove fatal.

With the gun still open (assuming it's a double or single break barrel) attempt to twist the barrel/forend in one direction and the stock/action in the other. If there is play close the gun to see if it's still evident. If it is then the chances are it has seen a lot of action. It can be repaired but this may not be a cheap fix. Also it could be unsafe given the severity of the symptom.

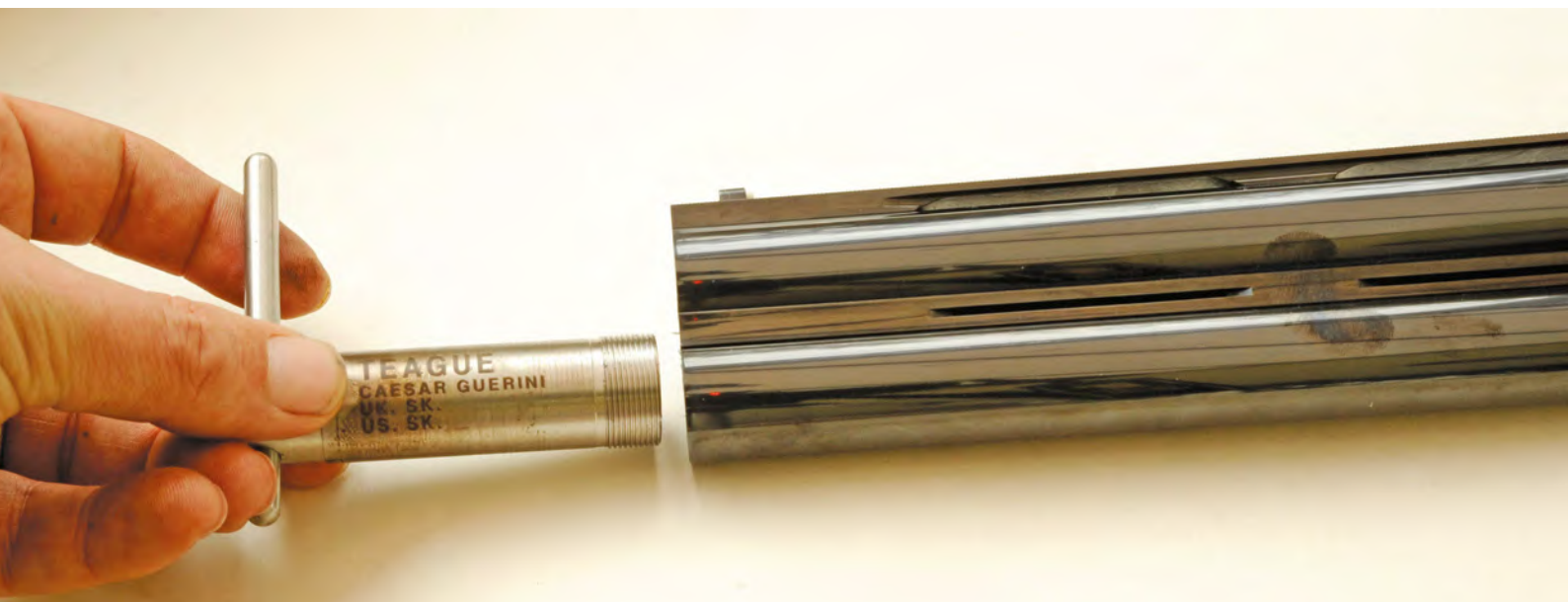
Try before you buy

Use snap caps to dry fire the gun or, even better, shoot the gun with real ammo before making your final decision. Using snap caps, mount and fire; the trigger should be smooth, any extremes of effort, either very heavy or light requires further investigation. If the gun is an ejector open it slowly and the ejectors should fire simultaneously with the caps thrown clear. If they hit the action face before it's fully opened then the timing is out and needs fixing. Or opt for a non-ejector, these are inherently more reliable as there is very little to go wrong, but they put the game shooter at a disadvantage and very few guns are made in this way today.

When looking at a semi-auto, cycle the action by hand a few times, it should be smooth and fairly easy to use. Ask the vendor to strip it down and have a look at the parts that get the most wear - springs, carriers and action bars. If anything looks badly worn or cracked then you may well be buying trouble. If possible try to shoot it using different cartridges and loads, if it constantly jams even when using the same type of shells then move onto the next gun in the rack.

Checking the exterior

On O/U and S/S guns the top lever can also be an indicator of wear, on new guns it will be aligned slightly



to the right of centre when closed, as the amount of wear increases this will creep back towards the middle and if unchecked will eventually go to the left, this also requires work. Going back to the barrels check that there is no evidence of rust where the rib joins the tubes or where they meet the monobloc. The barrel walls at the muzzle should be solid without looking thin. If they are it may have had a hard life! Though no respectable dealer should ever sell a gun whose barrels could be deemed to be so worn as to be 'out of proof'.

It is unlikely that there are any guns in circulation that have not been proofed but its worth checking that there are proof marks on the barrels. Usually found under the forend they will denote maximum proof pressure e.g. 900kg and will also confirm the chamber length e.g. 2 3/4" (70mm).

If the gun is a multi-choke check that they unscrew, if not then they may be rusted in, which may eventually cause a failure. They should unscrew easily and the vendor should have a key along with the rest of the chokes; most doubles come with a minimum of five tubes; they can be expensive to replace!

Has the rot set in?

Check the woodwork - the forend should fit snugly without any noticeable looseness when the gun is closed. The join where the action meets the stock undergoes a great deal of stress and here cracks may occur in the wood. Check thoroughly and if a crack is evident then look elsewhere as it may require restocking. Also check for a darkening of the wood in this area; guns that have been repeatedly over oiled during the cleaning process can absorb it into the timber. This can lead to a weakening of the material and cracks or failure. The stock to action join should be solid without any movement; any sign of tape or glue here should set warning bells ringing.

Caveat emptor

Though not an exhaustive guide to buying a second hand gun, if you tick the boxes on these points you will



at least be equipped to sort the wheat from the chaff. Do your research, set yourself a budget and don't be swayed solely by aesthetics, if a gun looks too cheap there's probably a reason for it.

Try to buy from an established dealer with a good reputation and only buy at auction if you know what you are doing. Buying from a friend may get you a bargain, or you may end up with a dog that costs you money. Choose well and you will have something that lasts for years but as with anything that's second-hand remember the wise words 'caveat emptor' or 'buyer beware'.



Starting Out

Despite the negative attention shooting often seems to get in the mainstream media, shooting in the UK is still very popular. Less enlightened people equate guns with violent crime in inner cities but that's a problem with criminals, not the law-abiding shooters busting a few clays, shooting targets with a rifle, shooting rabbits for the pot or controlling vermin.

Shooting gets people out into the fresh air, away from the TV, social media and computer games and promotes discipline and self-control; shooters are often the nicest people you can meet! Whatever our discipline, we all love what we do and hopefully consider that we are all to be part of one big happy family; there are unfortunately tiny, misguided factions within the sport that would see us divided, where really we should all be sticking together. If we allow the different disciplines to see themselves as being different or better than others, we will surely suffer at the hands of those who would restrict what we do, be they politicians or those dreaded 'antis' who have no concept of what we do.

The future

The best thing we can do to ensure that shooting in the UK flourishes, is to continue our shooting as we do, in a safe and responsible way and if we can, introduce as many people into the sport as possible. Outsiders may think that shooting is a closed network but clubs are usually trying to recruit new members; so, if you hear of anyone interested in taking up the sport, give them as much encouragement as you can to get involved. Take them to your local club or range on an open day, take them clay or rough shooting, to see what goes on and if they actually fancy taking part, go about it the correct way and they could be hooked for life! If you can get someone hitting what they're aiming at, even if it's only now and again to begin with, they will soon get the bug. Imagine if every shooting introduced just one new member each year! There's even a new campaign called just that and you can find out more at www.justone-newshooter.co.uk

Safe and sound

All new shooters should be given a detailed talk on what they can and cannot do and what they must and must not do, safety being the most important factor of all. Show them how the gun works (without it being loaded of course!) in a safe environment and they will know what to expect when they have a go for themselves. Hearing and eye protection should be worn and shooting gloves are also a good idea, as long as they do not interfere with the safe handling of the gun. Shooting a gun is a big responsibility, so should not be done without the necessary training; clubs will have a probationary scheme, to make sure



that any new members behave as they should, for their own safety and the safety of those around them. Guns obviously need to be stored securely, so this is another aspect that should be discussed.

Sport for all

The best way to get started in anything is when you're young and shooting is no different but people of any age can take up the sport and it doesn't matter if you're male or female, gay or straight, able bodied or less able in some way, where there's a will there's a way. Shooting is very inclusive and there are numerous organisations dedicated to the sport, so there's always a helping hand available. You might be reading What Gun? as a complete novice and if you are, welcome aboard! Shooting is a fascinating hobby and for many of us it's a way of life and a career. Starting out with an airsoft replica or airgun is often how people take up shooting, some progress to other forms of the sport, others stick with what they first used. Whatever path a shooter takes; it will lead to a lifetime of pleasure and enjoyment. Safe shooting everyone!

Going to ground

Mark Stone looks at the myriad benefits of joining your local shooting ground...

Shooting grounds come in many guises, or so it might seem. From the big, international and at times exclusive types that carry golf club sized membership fees, to smaller, more informal set-ups, the occasional mobile types and the ubiquitous Sunday morning or weekend straw bailer. They all do as a shooting ground to a greater or lesser degree and ultimately provide the same service to the shooter, it's just that the surroundings may vary.

But for the sake of the article we'll work our way around the average shooting ground that may or may not be open seven days a week. Not every ground is fulltime due in the main to the owners operating the ground on a part-time basis, the ground open just at the weekends, during holiday periods and summer evenings. In many ways it makes little or no difference, existing and potential members basing their shooting activities around the ground's opening hours. But big or small, fulltime or not, all shooting grounds will carry full insurance or should do, the certification usually displayed somewhere in the clubhouse. And a CPSA approved and registered or Clay Pigeon Shooting Association ground also has standards to meet. A shed on its last legs and a couple of past their best traps just don't hack it, whilst fanatical CPSA member shooters will often rate a ground on the quality of its bacon sandwiches so things have to be right.

Main entrance

Most shooting grounds tend to have a more rural, slightly out of the way location. This means they tend not to have

problems with noise, the 'neighbours' usually quite a distance away. One of the most significant advantages of a purpose-built shooting ground is that you can usually get to them in a car. Many small, field based grounds tend to require you to own a 4x4 to get to the parking area or park on the road and walk, not ideal when you've guns, ammunition and additional clothing to carry. A nice gravel or tarmac driveway and car park also means your extra kit can be left in the back yet accessed quickly if it starts to rain or you're running short of cartridges.

And although they tend to be of different sizes, most decent shooting grounds also have some form of clubhouse. Within you'll usually find an office or signing-on area that, as a rule, also sells cartridges, seating, maybe a shop that can sort you out with that all important piece of kit you were missing and that all important place, the café. The clubhouse is also that welcoming warm light at the end of a round of clays during the darker, colder months. It's also the place that'll give you the chance to explain where it all went wrong, clubhouse tales the equal of any fishermen.

Laid out

A major benefit of a professional shooting ground is that the layouts are permanently in place. Most grounds will have a sporting layout, the stands laid out with easy access, the targets change on a regular basis to keep the members entertained. Add in there's often a Sport Trap layout whilst those grounds physically large enough will more often than not have Skeet and possibly a Trap range. In other words, all the basic disciplines are all together in one, well organised place. And if it's a big ground, you'll have the chance to shoot in regular club and regional competitions.

Look & learn

Whether you're an out-and-out beginner or an experienced clay shooter, most grounds will have a resident shooting coach or one that visits as and when required. In theory at least, shooting is a relatively easy sport, that is until



someone asks you to load a shotgun and shatter one of those little flying orange discs and the difficulty soon becomes apparent. For the beginner, all shooting coaches especially the CPSA qualified ones, will first ensure that the shotgun you're to use for your lesson actually fits you, how to hold it, exactly what you should be looking for and as to how you handle a shotgun safely.

If you haven't got your own shotgun, most grounds have 'club guns' that beginners are provided with along with all the basic equipment. If you're likely to become a member and a regular pupil, most grounds will loan you a shotgun, skeet vest and other essentials free of charge although some do ask for a small fee.

When you decide you're ready to buy your own shotgun, the instructor will guide you through all the questions and answers you'll need to negotiate for your Shotgun Certificate help you with the application forms, the cabinet you'll need and any other security that is at times required of a shotgun owner. Equally, membership of a local or well-known shooting ground can also prove to be a considerable advantage when applying for your license.

Once you've got that all-important piece of paper, a good instructor will often help you source a suitable shotgun. It's also not unusual for someone starting out to want the exact same shotgun as the club gun they've been learning with. Your coach, more often than not, will be aware of any members who own one and might be looking to sell it, or if the club has its own gun shop, as many of them do, you'll be able to try various shotguns at the ground, your instructor able to offer advice there and then. And if you're a club member and a regular, you'll more than likely get some discount.

Practice makes...

Once you've been taught the basics, most coaches will then leave you to 'go it alone' for a week or so to allow you to put into practice all that you've learnt, progressing the lessons at a rate the coach considers right for you. And when you think you're ready to progress, your instructor will take a quick look at your shooting, correct any mistakes and take you onto the next level.



But it's not just beginners that call on their ground's coach, many of the best shooters having bad habits dialed out or seeking some advice as to why they've suddenly started missing a particular type of target, or their gun needs slightly readjusting, the instructor able to work out and apply the little tweaks that are required. Lastly, many clay shooters are often game shooters so a couple of afternoon sessions on the high tower or low driven clays help them simulate pheasants and grouse. So take note, August and September can be very busy months at a top ground and for a top instructor.

Membership of a good shooting ground also means you'll have the chance to participate in the social aspect. Many grounds have family and friends or junior days, arrange outing to participate in inter-club events whilst some grounds arrange special events where local businesses such as car dealers set up displays and allow members to try all the latest models. Another consideration is that many grounds and clubs offer their members various discounts such as a reduction on cartridge prices or a round of clays. And you don't have to be there to shoot, many full-time grounds regularly welcome members as they're passing for nothing more than a quick bite to eat or just a chat.

Ground control

So there you have it! There are numerous reasons to attend or become a member a proper shooting ground. Whether it's because you're just starting out, are a top shooter looking for some professional coaching, want all the clay disciplines in one place or just want to move about on a nice gravel path. So if you've never been to a big shooting ground, go and take a look. You might even come away as a new member!

To locate the nearest CPSA registered shooting ground, go to www.cpsa.co.uk or pay a visit to your nearest gun shop. Most shops will be able to give you a list of all the local grounds of varying sizes, so you should have any problem finding a shooting ground or club that will best suit your needs. Happy clay breaking!

Sharpened Shooting

Bruce Potts and son, Jake, spent the day getting some expert shotgun guidance at GB Shooting Shotgun and learned how to get it right first time, every time...

I wish I had shooting lessons as a teenager, I would not be so woeful with a shotgun as I am now. Rifles are fine, shotguns I have never really got to grips with until now, as my eldest son has shown an interest. I decided to start him off right and learn what I should have done and hopefully iron-out any bad traits from the off. Turns out he's far better than me any way! However, I was recently introduced to a master shot by a mutual friend and my son's interest and safe shooting techniques have vastly improved...

GB Shooting is a shotgun venue that I can highly recommend and is run by Guy Bond, an England FITASC shooting team manager whose expertise with a shotgun will repay itself in lessons tenfold in the increased game bag and averages on the clay range. Guy Bond caters for family, friends, individuals and business on a friendly, informal basis to teach clay pigeon shooting on his family farm and shooting complex based in rural Buckinghamshire, just an hour from London. Guy has a long pedigree of coaching – 1993 to 2007 he managed the unbeaten GB FITASC shooting team so is very well placed to teach you the skills you need. He caters for all abilities and his natural teaching methods are tailored to the individual and for over 25-years Guy has taught 1000s of clients, young and old to be competent with a shotgun. There's hope for me yet!

What I really like is his very friendly relaxed but authoritative style of teaching, as it makes the novice feel at ease straight away and this means a better student and



ultimately better shot. Guy is a real character of the old school with a hearty laugh and broad depth of stories that keeps you smiling and intently listening throughout the session or day.

Training tariffs

GB Shooting school and shooting lessons have a very broad range of activities to choose from and can be individual tuition right up to full blown village fetes. For those wanting a one-to-one and intense but relaxed session then Guy's master classes for 90-minutes' tuition is £130. This is a full hour and half so you get a proper coaching, unlike some hour long sessions. If you like you can have a shared, for two, master class at £170, or an introduction to shooting for 10-14 year olds, both at £90 for an hour lesson.

A half day (three-hours), can be booked for £200 and £250 for a shared half day. Parties of four can have two-hours-tuition for £300, whilst a master class and four lessons is a very good £500.

Guy also offers to coach in the field on game days and can coach 'on the fly', as it were, for £250 – your own personal shooting expert at your shoulder.

All the lessons are inclusive of tea or coffee and biscuits when you arrive at the farm and safety equipment, use of an appropriate gun and up to 75 cartridges and clays per person. Parties, corporate, juniors, half and full days and gift vouchers are all available and make an excellent present. Shooting parties from 4-12 guests are catered for with additional tuition from instructors for a more intimate session. For four guests and a two hour session which includes clays, shotgun loan and ammunition and tea and coffee is £250.

For the ultimate shooting party experience, eight people can share for £800 and includes bacon rolls and teas on arrival and a hearty home cooked lunch.

Around the course

Guy is the senior instructor but has a fully trained team for multiple bookings. You start with a nice chat and tea and biscuits in the farm house and the safety talk. Gun choice and course briefing is then explained and a walk down the field taken to the shooting complex amongst a beautiful rolling arable landscape.

First up is the eye dominance test to see which eye is your leading eye. Next is the gun fit, and for Jake a slimmer lighter 20-gauge Browning 325 was the order of the day, and correct shoulder fit for recoil damping and cheek weld to minimise recoil. Also, correct sighting of the bead sights and clay position relative to this. It is encouraged to shoot with both eyes open. Correct positioning of the feet and weight distribution is essential too and allows a correct posture to swing and naturally lead a clay in flight. You should have 75% of your weight on the left leg and the right shoulder forward.

Guy then explained about lead and how the positioning of the shotgun and bead relative to the traverse of the clay in light is relative to not only the flight trajectory but also the wind conditions that can alter it.

Starting with the going away trap, which allows Guy to judge your technique and correct hold and lead if necessary. A clay is launched from behind your left shoulder and you mount the gun correctly and have that bead just below and to the right or left depending on it going or dropping in flight. A few shots and Guy's expert eye from directly behind the shoulder can tell where you are missing. A few alterations to the posture or lead/height and soon a novice is breaking clays.

A great Guy

Next you have the clay launched towards you, and Guy explained the correct swing and lead necessary to break the clay. Jake was soon onto them and Guy now advanced a step and ran some doubles of away and towards on the first report.

What is great is Guy is very friendly and calm and encourages you to improve but at your own pace. It's a great learning environment and I for one was taking numerous notes.

At the next trap, Guy explained about correct follow through or lead. At this trap you have a clay fly from left to right and Guy talked us through how you can choose between three methods of lead. The most common is the follow through method where you swing through the clay in flight. The second is the maintain lead where you predetermine the distance necessary to hit the clay on its trajectory. And, finally, the spot shooting or snap shot was explained, but this is rarely used. However Guy shows all three techniques and smokes all the clays! That's what you pay for.

Dependent on your abilities, you can stick to these tarps and hone your technique or move on to the springing teal, high pheasant and fast oblique shots and doubles. Misses and hits are analysed and so the shooter comes away saying "I get it now!" That's a good teacher.

Conclusion

An hour and half is a very good length of time, as you spend most of that time actually shooting and learning, so it is money very well spent, learning technique correctly the first time.

There is nothing like proper tuition these days with so many so-called internet experts around. Guy is an authentic and highly experienced shot with a great teaching ethos and manner that engages the pupil and encourages safe and competent use of a shotgun.



Protection

Graham Allen looks at the important subject of safeguarding our wellbeing when taking part in the various shooting sports

Those of us lucky enough to have been born with fully functioning eyes and ears don't know how lucky we are! There are many people born with, or develop, problems with their sight and hearing and they are obviously at a disadvantage compared to the rest of us. It therefore stands to reason that as shooters, we should do everything we can to safeguard what we have. Eyesight and hearing do of course degrade as the years pass but if we can prevent any extra damage occurring, due to shooting, then that's got to be a good idea.

It's amazing how many shooters there are who think that a 'few' gunshots now and then won't cause any damage to their hearing but damage can occur instantly or slowly over time, depending on the circumstances and once damaged, that's it! A few shooters I know swear blind that their hearing is fine but after repeating myself over and over again, I know that something's not quite



right! I've even seen people shooting at Bisley with no hearing protection whatsoever and I'm sure that they're going to wonder one day why they can't hear so well anymore. Normal conversation is around 60 decibel (dB) and anything above around 80 dB can cause permanent damage; a gunshot (rifle or shotgun) can be around 160dB, so it's obvious that we must do something to alleviate the problem. Fitting a moderator to a rifle is a great way of reducing the noise levels whilst shooting, as you're reducing the problem at its source- which has to be a good thing for the shooter and those around him or her and it also helps reduce noise pollution in general.

Shooters really have no excuse for not wearing some form of hearing protection and we've never had it so good, as there are numerous products on the market that can prevent damage. It starts with basic foam plugs that are squeezed to compress the material, after which they are placed into the ear, as the foam expands, the plug fills the ear, thereby stopping a great deal of sound entering. These products aren't really a long-term solution, as there are better, more effective products out there but they're great for when you leave your normal hearing protection at home- we've all done it, I'm sure! I always have a few packs in my shooting bag and Land Rover- just in case.

Custom moulded plugs can now be made by several companies and these are made by taking an impression of the inside of the ear and then a soft rubber plug is made, so that it completely fills the ear canal.

It's in the can

However, most shooters wear some sort of ear muff style protection, often known as 'cans', 'ears' etc. and they can be very good at preventing the sound of a gunshot damaging hearing. In fact, because they are so effective, they also make it harder to hear everything else- which isn't brilliant if you're taking part in something like Civilian Service Rifle (CSR) competitions, where you need to be





able to clearly hear range commands whilst shooting. This is where electronic, noise cancelling versions really come into play, as the sound of the gunshot is cancelled by the in-built electronic circuitry but normal speech etc., is clearly audible, and in some cases, actually enhanced. These units can be so effective that bird watchers sometimes wear them whilst out in the woods, as birdsong is easier to hear due to the magnification. I've actually worn them whilst shooting squirrels, which may sound odd but it's easier to hear them scampering around up in the branches.

This technology has been miniaturised over recent years, so that it can now be fitted within the moulded plugs I mentioned earlier and the tiny hearing aid style batteries or in-built batteries can last for a long time. All this miniaturisation doesn't come cheap however but for people who may not like wearing what can be quite bulky 'cans', they are a real godsend. Companies such as CENS Digital, Ultimate Hearing Protection Systems and Plugzz etc. have a service where they can provide custom-made units that are comfortable to wear all day and cut out the sound of a gunshot. An impression obviously has to be taken of the inner ear using silicone rubber but these companies are often at Game Fairs and Shooting Shows, where they can do what is required and then post the completed items.

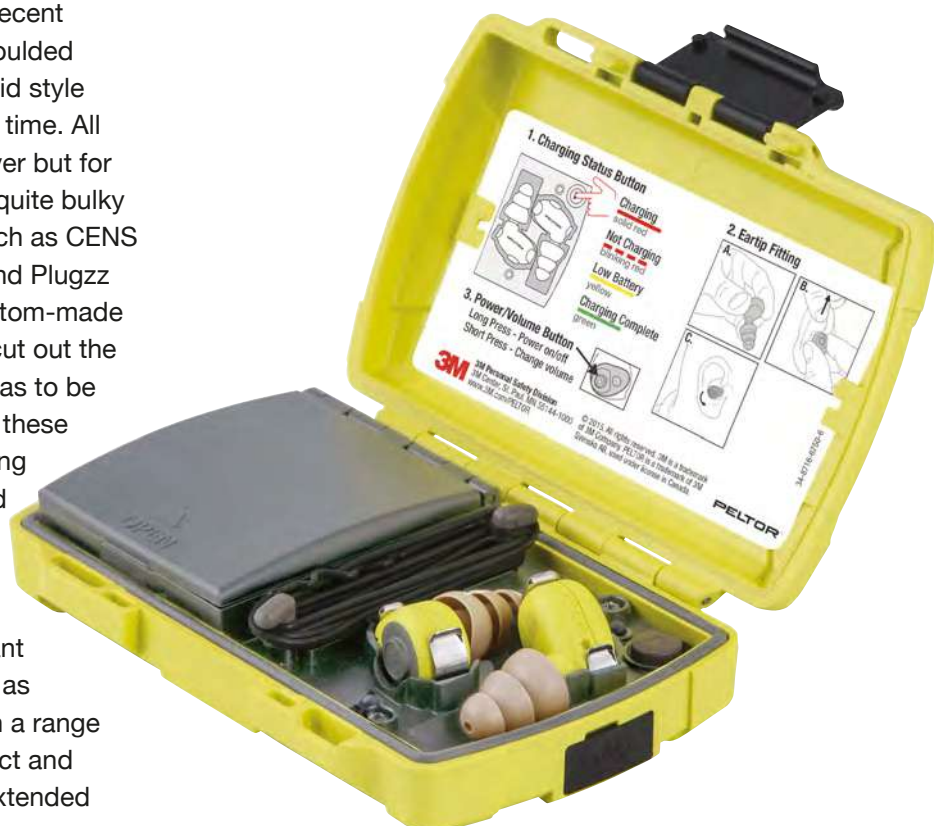
A couple of products that caught my eye recently are from Peltor, via John Rothery (Wholesale) Ltd. The first, is the Level Dependant Earplug LEP-100 that provides hearing protect as well as situational awareness, such as when on a range or hunting, like I mentioned before. The compact and lightweight design is comfortable to wear for extended

periods and come in a clever little case that protects them from damage when not being worn but also, rather cleverly, re-charges their internal batteries! Three AA batteries have enough power for up to 16 charges or they can be charged via a USB port- clever stuff indeed. A full charge lasts for up to 16 hours, so that's a lot of protection per set of batteries. These plugs are one-size-fits-all, so there's no need to have moulds taken. To take into account people's individual ear sizes and shapes, alternative rubber tips are available for minimal cost. These clever items are £359.99.

Peltor also make the ProTac Hunter and ProTac Shooter muffs. These electronic units cut out the sound of a gunshot but allow all other sounds to be heard or amplified if required. The large controls can even be used wearing gloves, which is very handy and it's possible to connect a radio or mobile phone via the 3.5mm jack socket. The ProTacs are powered by two AA batteries and they're good for up to 100 hours! Unlike a lot of similar products, these will shut off after 4 hours, so no more dead batteries when you've forgotten to turn them off last time you were shooting! The electronics are housed within a double wall, so that they are protected from moisture from rain etc. but also from perspiration. Both models are £89.99, which is very good value.

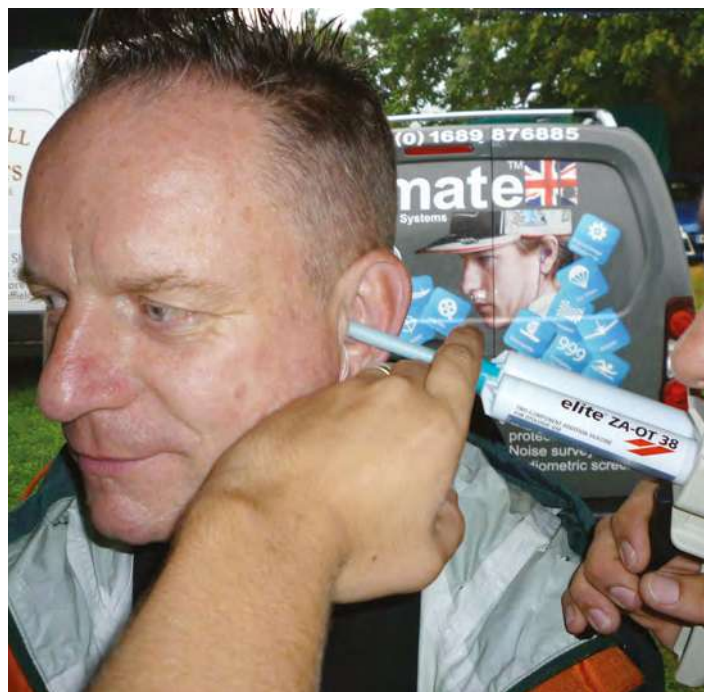
Sight for sore eyes!

Our eyes are very highly complex, yet very delicate and must be protected at all costs. Partially sighted shooters can and do enjoy their sport but I'm sure most of us would rather not join them if we can help it. A 'stray' airgun pellet, BB or shotgun pellet can obviously cause severe damage to, or even the loss of, an eye, so a decent pair of shooting glasses really is a must but a lot of us, me included, really



should wear them more often! They don't cost the earth, so we have no excuse.

One product I've been looking at lately is the new range of glasses from Sunglasses For Sport to add to their best-selling Evolution Shooting eyewear. Called Evolution Hunter, it's safety eyewear but with sports styling and they are available in four individual colours: Grey, Yellow, Clear and Grey with Blue Mirror. The lenses are Class 1 optical quality with full impact protection that comply with BS EN166FT (Independently tested & certified by INSPEC). The 7-base curve provides complete eye protection and the rimless, frameless design means totally unobscured vision. Lenses also have an anti-fog coating to both sides, so are suitable for use in all weather conditions and are UV400 rated providing the maximum protection from harmful UVR. The Hunters also have a soft, non-slip nose piece and flexible temple tips for a comfortable fit. Commenting on their new range, Denzil Lee, said, "A lot of safety eyewear is 'industrial' in appearance. We wanted to introduce safety eyewear that looks good. And most safety eyewear does not provide full UVR protection or come with anti-fog lens coatings. So, the new Evolution Hunter range, at just £14.95 (RRP), really is exceptional value. "We feel sure that Evolution Hunter will have broad appeal amongst clay shooters, game shooters, shooting ground owners, estate management staff, target sport enthusiasts and Airsoft BB enthusiasts" The Hunter models joins the



existing Evolution shooting eyewear range comprising the Chameleon, Matrix, Switch and Hawk RX (prescription) models. They are exceptional value at just £14.95 each

Hands Up!

We also need to protect our hands whilst shooting and I've been using MacWet long cuff Climatec gloves for many years now and not only have they kept my hands relatively warm, despite their lack of bulk, they've also saved me from numerous cuts and scrapes whilst out shooting. The gripping surface of the gloves are made from a fabric called Aquatec, which affords a good grip on a rifle or shotgun, even when wet but it's thin enough so that you still have a high degree of sensitivity, something you don't have with thicker gloves. The backs of the gloves are made from a wind proof, water resistant material that has a fleecy lining. The cuffs are secured with Velcro for a snug, secure fit. I'm on my second pair now (not that I wore the first pair out- I lost one!) and I can't fault them and at £29.99 they're great value and available in sizes 6 – 12 in brown, black, green and navy.

For those who require even more hand protection such as practical competition shooters and airsoft skirmishers, First Tactical have their Slash & Flash Hard Knuckle Gloves that can protect the wearer's hands from practically anything! The gloves were designed after feedback from end-users and the palms feature a Kevlar and goatskin Level2 cut resistant palm and a Nomex flame resistant back. The fingers have perforated foam knuckle padding and the fingertips have 'TouchTec' for enhanced sensitivity. The tough, hard-wearing gloves are £39.95 and are available in sizes S – XXL, black only.

Conclusion

So, as you can see, there are plenty of options available, at varying costs, so nobody has an excuse for not protecting themselves whilst shooting!

Sight & Sound

You only get one pair of each, so Mark Stone looks at how you can protect your ears and eyes

We all rather take the five major senses we're born with for granted. The ability to see, smell, taste, touch and hear all somewhat commonplace, most of us happy in the knowledge that this is how it'll be until we inevitably kick the bucket. Equally, most of us can't conceive of losing one of our senses or how others go through life if they were unfortunate enough to be born without one or more. Likewise, when we climb into a car, or go out in bright sunlight, we wear a safety belt, sunglasses and sun cream to protect ourselves, whilst at work many people have to wear a hard hat and headphones. Your sight and hearing are extremely fragile, so treat them as such, especially where shotguns are concerned.

So if that's the case, why would you use a shotgun or spend time in a location that features fast flying objects generated from an item ostensibly designed to kill or maim, wearing no protection whatsoever? Think about it, when it's being fired either by you or one you're stood close to, it can be painfully noisy; whilst lead pellets traveling at over a thousand feet per second along with shards of fast flying broken clays are passing all around you and your eyes.

One problem new shooters don't realise, is that each time a shotgun goes bang, either in their hands or a few feet away from them, is that besides the damaging noise you hear, the sound waves resonate through your skull. So basically the sound has two opportunities to damage your hearing, confirmation being the ringing in your ears along with a headache. To equate the effects of shooting without hearing protection, go to a live concert and stand near to the PA system, after an evening's full volume music, the end result is the same, semi-deafness and a throbbing head!



Surround no sound

Basing this around clay shooting, although the exact same rules and suggestions apply equally to game shooting, all gun shops and shooting ground sell or will actually give away basic hearing protection in the form of soft foam earplugs. More often than not orange or yellow; by rolling them between your fingers and pushing them into your ears, these small plugs swell up again and basically bung up your ears. And to a degree they work but only as a temporary measure, usually for the duration of a short lesson.

The two main styles of hearing protection are headphones and customised plugs, both of which can be had as either passive or active. Passive are the cheaper versions that effectively seal off your ears, the sound of a shotgun discharge being nothing more than a dull thud. But if you want to carry on a conversation, you and your companion will either have to shout, or you'll have to remove them. And it's for this reason that active protection is extremely popular, even though this type tends to be more expensive.

With headphones, it's all about fit and the need for them to perfectly cup and encapsulate the wearer's ear. To ensure this, once you've placed them over your head and adjusted the headband accordingly, run your finger around the entire diameter. One point of noise entry that's often overlooked is the area at the bottom of the ear. For a pair of headphones to work correctly, the earlobe needs to sit inside the cup, so that the entire ear is sealed off. To ensure this, try and slide your little finger underneath the bottom of each cup; if it slides easily underneath, the headphones don't fit you correctly. If however your finger connects with the padding and won't slide underneath without resistance from the padding, then they fit and will do the job you bought them to do.

In the case of headphones, they tend to draw power from either AA or AAA batteries that are installed in one of the ear cups. When turned on, the small microphones located on either side allow normal noises and speech to enter, the wearer altering the volume to a comfortable level. But when a loud noise is detected, the microphones



deactivate in a matter of microseconds, the headphones going into passive mode, the microphones reactivating once the noise has abated. And if you really must, you can buy active headphone with built in Bluetooth and a small boom microphone, so that you can make and receive telephone calls. You won't prove overly popular with your fellow shooters or the gamekeeper if you start chatting away mid-drive but I suppose it's each to their own.

Same with earplugs, the ones specifically designed for shooters are based on the hearing aid principle. You can get generic ones made of soft rubber and silicone that are best described as a universal fit but they need locating in the wearer's ear with a degree of precision, if not they're no use at all. The earplugs to be preferred are the custom moulded ones, where a cast is taken inside your ear, the resultant plug a perfect and unique fit. This means they will only fit your ears, so they're no use whatsoever to anyone else.

Like the headphone variety, these can be had as passive units, which is why they're popular with those who ride motorbikes and racing cars, since they fit inside the ear and don't foul the inside of a crash helmet. You can also get them as actives, which means they have a small electrical unit set into them that contains a very small



battery and a microphone. If you choose wisely, they'll be exceptionally comfortable to wear, to a degree that you can at times forget you're actually wearing them. The slight downside is that battery life isn't overly long and they tend to be rather expensive in the first instance. That said, this type of hearing protection is as a rule, money well spent, since they last for years, most of the makers able to service and update them.

Irrespective of whichever type you go for, what you must do is keep them clean and hygienic. Plugs or headphones, when you're wearing them, are subjected to heat, rain, sweat and of course ear wax, so keeping them free of any form of buildup or wiping them down after you've used them is essential. Most plugs come with dedicated nylon brushes for you to clean out the narrow channels, so use them and irrespective of type, remove the batteries if you're not going to be using them for a while. If the batteries corrode through lack of use, the resultant leakage will ruin the delicate electronics. Too many shooters just throw them back in their kit bag or stuff them in the soft case and back in their pocket. If your hearing protection starts to irritate you after a while, don't blame the kit; it's your fault!

Eye, eye

Whether it's a minute piece of clay, one single piece of lead shot or a twig dislodged when you or your friend shot a pheasant or a rabbit, it only takes the smallest piece of high-speed detritus to puncture your eye and your sight at least in one eye has gone forever. So wearing eye protection, just like for your hearing, is a basic safety measure to a degree, many shooting grounds won't let you on the layout without proper shooting glasses. And should you be of a style conscious nature, they can be had in a variety of cutting edge designs, along with a vast selection of lenses.

The favourite style is the wraparound using a lightweight, pliable polycarbonate or plastic skeletal frame, the single piece, blade-type lenses attaching along the top edge. And whilst the styles are numerous,

they tend to be a variation on a theme; reason being it works. Most manufacturers offer this type of shooting glasses in kit form, which means the frame in whatever colour, along with two or three lenses.

The colour variations of the lenses allow the shooter to match either yellow, orange, purple, red or whichever colour works the best in matching the lens colour to required contrast. This means the clay, usually orange, will stand out against the sky or background. Equally, sunny days will often require a different colour of lens such as purple, yellow usually better suited to overcast conditions.

Other makers produce a range of fixed lenses, meaning the shooter can at times have three or four pairs of glasses in their bag. Alternatively, photochromatic lenses change in density dependant on the brightness of the light. But whilst clay shooters tend to opt for the most fashionable looking shooting glasses, the game shooter still has the same selection of lens colours but in more traditional styles. The slight downside is that the shape doesn't wrap around the face quite the same hence leaving a gap at the sides.

For those who wear glasses, your optician should be able to offer a shooting version made up to your prescription. But whatever style or colour of eye protection you select, the one simple rule is that the lenses must be impact resistant. Usually of a polycarbonate construction, these lenses are able to withstand multiple impacts of lead shot from what are actually quite close ranges, although we wouldn't suggest you try and replicate the maker's testing procedures especially if you're wearing them!

Lots to choose from

Over recent years, the selection of hearing and eye protection has increased considerably. And whilst each manufacturer will always claim theirs are the best, the principle on which they work and the standards to which they are built are more or less the same. The best guide that can be given is to buy the best you can afford whilst buying one of the reputable brands. If you attend any of the major clay competitions have a look at what the more accomplished competitors are wearing and take



this as a guide. And whilst some of the big names tend to be at times quite expensive there's usually a good reason and that is their products work.

Lastly, make sure you select the headphones, earplugs and shooting glasses that fit correctly. If they don't, then you're wasting money, along with using safety equipment that isn't working correctly. The whole point of it all is to keep you, your hearing and your eyesight as safe and sound as is possible. Regrettably accidents happen, the world of shooting notable by just how few there are due in many ways to the diligence of those involved. So make sure you wear the correct ear and eye protection and keep shooting's exceptional safety record up and running.



Bring your a-game

BRUCE POTTS *talks a good game when it comes to choosing a good Game gun...*

The definition of a Game Gun in shotgun terms refers to the styling of the gun as compared to that of one used primarily for sporting clays, trap, skeet etc. Each style of shotgun has their own merits as regards their particular forfeit at the discipline they shoot, but many are equally good as a dual role or all-round gun. Much like a .243 rifle, it is quite capable of being a fox or deer rifle dependent on the ammunition it shoots. The same is true of a good Game gun as, although the catalogue might stipulate 'Game Special', it is you and the type of quarry you shoot that will determine the true Game gun that suits you.

It also doesn't have to be an over/under shotgun, as typically many favour these days, the good old side-by-side is your quintessence Game gun. But a classic single shot, such as a Burrows in 28-gauge, is one of the sweetest Game guns one could ask for, but certainly not the norm.

For that reason, to me it is more about how useful for Game a particular gun is, i.e. styling, weight-handling and, importantly, calibre for the game you shoot. But if you enter a gunsmiths and ask for a Game gun, you will be directed to one particular set of guns, as you would if wanting a Sporter.

Game v Sporter

A Game gun typically is lighter and smaller proportioned than a Sporter shotgun, purely because one wants speed and lightest for a quick gun at flying game. A Sporter typically used for clays can be heavier and have longer barrels for increased swing and to help soak up the recoil more. If you carry a Sporter around the game fields on a



pheasant shoot you will probably notice it, but personally it's what works for you.

Also Game guns can have a fixed choke system, but not always, whilst Sporters typically have a multi-choke system. Again, I prefer to have the option to use a multi-choke on a Game gun in case you desire to change the load and pattern density to the actual game you are shooting – walked up woodcock are very different from high pheasants. Having said that, I also love the simplistic fixed choke system which makes you just concentrate on your swing and follow through.

Also, you'll find that a Game gun has a slimmer rib than would a Sporter or trap gun, where a more visible rib is useful to guide the eye on a clay. A slimmer rib is lighter to start with and does not obscure your game. This is handy for flying game, obviously, as it allows a good vision of a flighting duck or partridge. Also, on report as the recoil kicks in, a Game gun often is set-up differently to distribute the shot pattern slightly higher above the rib as a Sporter would. It is designed to get as much of the pellets in your shot pattern on the game for a quick kill. Again, this allows the reaction of the bird to be seen to the shot column and, indeed, you may see you need more lead or less. It helps to stop you taking your head off the stock to see if you have a hit or not, thus keeping that union between cheek and stock for a fluid swing and better handling characteristics.





Game on

That's not to say a Sporter is no good for game, it is in many cases, but a lighter gun can be easier and faster to handle, although this has its downsides on more recoil felt to the shooter; especially true when larger shot sizes and larger pellet charge weights are needed for high birds.

That is why a lightweight game gun in 20-gauge or 28-gauge has become quite popular these days with lighter loads for closer birds or selected birds, with the quality of shot made outweighing the pure number of head taken at the end of the day.

A typical Game gun is usually 1.5- to 2lbs lighter than a similar Sporter gun and so recoil is more, but it is very fast and light and allows a quick on-game shot.

You also have to think about the aesthetics of the gun too; a Game gun is usually styled with a more traditional classic-looking lines, trim and elegant, all in proportion and, to me, a lot finer looking.

However, the Sporter is an excellent all-round gun, and if you shoot a mix of game and clays then a Sporter would be a better bet, as you will not get punished shooting a round of 100 clays with a lighter game gun.

It can get a bit confusing when a gun is listed as a Field model with scroll engraving and a Game model that has a game scene engraving, but both have a thin rib and are identical otherwise!

More over it is important to look at what you really want the gun for rather than saying "Oh, I like that!" and paying a small fortune for the wrong gun. A lot of makers now have range days, open days or try and see days around the country. These are often lead by gunsmith's selling the guns and also Game Fairs' have-a-go sessions are a good way to compare Game or Sporter guns in the flesh for yourself.

We are all different sizes shapes and strengths, so it is important to get it right for you. You can be helped by a good gunsmith who can make alterations to get that gun to fit you perfectly, but that costs. It is better to actually handle a Game gun and see if it shoulders perfectly for you. It needs to feel comfortable and natural in the

shoulder and come to the eye with ease. The eye needs to rest exactly along that rib, otherwise while you are looking at that fast moving pheasant you will be looking at one point and the rib pointing at another.

Also do not be seduced into getting a more expensive Game gun than you need unless money is no object. If a gun fits you perfectly and you shoot well with it then stick with it and alter the cartridges or chokes to improve you style, it's cheaper that way. Practice with that gun until you get proficient and then move up a grade as the finances dictate.

Types of Game guns

Bettinsoli X Trail 28-gauge is a good value do-anything Game gun for the beginner or someone who does not shoot that frequently or wants a good value second gun. The X Trail Evo, which is the Game version and is chambered in 28-gauge, is one of my favourites and is a very pretty light-handling little shotgun with a lot of uses. The silvered action finish is slim, but not that low profiled like many newer Game guns, and has some nice scalloped detail around the edges with machine-cut engraving to all faces, tastefully done and enhanced by some gold inlaid game, flighting pheasants to the left face and landing ducks to the right and a woodcock on the base.

It follows the typical Bettinsoli form with twin screwed in stud pins that allow the barrels to swivel and at the rear there is a full-length cross bolt locks on closure to engage the barrels and form a very sturdy union between barrels and action. The manual safety sits below this and is blacked not polished with a raised square dome. Rearward is the safe position and right position to fire the bottom barrel first and left for the top. Coil springs are used throughout and form a reliable and positive action and ejection system.

Fit and finish is surprisingly good, which is certainly a product of the modern CNC machined nature of these new Bettinsoli shotguns. The trigger is a single affair – again, pretty standard on all Game guns as you would expect, and is quite large with a slim smooth polished trigger blade that is gold plated. Barrels are typically Monobloc in construction with well-machined lumps and precise cut-outs for the swivel studs and locking cross bar to engage. This all adds up to a really tight solid feel, so plenty of life to be had in this shotgun.

Equally good is the bluing applied to the barrels, it is very even, deep and has a good blacked finish. This 28-gauge had 27.5-inch barrel lengths – well-proportioned to the cartridge it was shooting and chambered for 3-inch shells. You have a solid mid rib for jointing and a thin 6mm top rib typifying the Game gun ethos. The barrels are steel shot proofed and feature the fleur de lys proof mark, so peace of mind for flighting game on the foreshore or inland over water.

The multi-chokes are the flush fitting type, with five supplied as standard, and are quite short at 42mm. But

when coupled to the relatively tight bored barrels, throw decent patterns.

The stock holds no surprises here, as the Game status of this model has a nicely rounded full forend that looks elegant whilst, at the same time, allowing a varied and good hold. The rear stock has a length of pull of 14.75-inches, so good for all manner of statures. The walnut is pretty plain and light in colour, but at this price point that's where the compromise comes. This is where more expensive Game guns increase the price.

Chapuis Artisan side-by-side 12-gauge

Wow, a lovely traditional Game gun! If ever there was one, a Chapuis shooter has the knowledge that they are shooting an almost bespoke gun with far more individual styling and hence pride of ownership. It's not all traditional though, the barrels are steel proofed, you have a unique Chapuis locking and ejection system, and the manual safety and non-select barrel firings are there to make your Game shooting experience much smoother and quicker.

Being a Game gun, the action is a work of art and feels and looks good, being further enhanced by engraving that seems to flow with the elegant lines. In fact, side plates are added to allow more adornment and as with the trigger plate and guard the whole metal finish is outstanding. Chapuis' use up-to-date CNC machining processes and hand-fitting where necessary, so a traditional looking Game gun but with a modern twist.

The action has a non-selective barrel system, which I like, and the fact the barrels are multi-choked anyway poses no problems. Chapuis have their own style of barrel locking or lump system. In fact, it's not a lump system at all but an all-in-one rectangular steel housing that locks and contains the ejector springs, in itself one massive

'lump'. It's most unusual, but works flawless and is famed for its reliability, especially on their double rifles when dangerous game is charging you. This design allows ejector springs in this under barrel mechanism and tricks you into thinking it's a self-opener also. Ejection is very well-timed and prompt, so no complaints here.

The barrels too are superbly appointed, with lovely deep rich blue/blacking to their finish. They are 30-inches in length, which is sensible these days even on a Game gun, and even more so is the fact they are multi-choked adding greater diversity.

The stock is pure quality and not your typical straight pistol grip on a side-by-side but a fuller pistol grip type with an outstanding grade AAAAA – near special selection in my eyes. Deep rich hues of dark Circassian walnut and swirling figuring and flawless hand rubbed oil finish, although the left side was better than the right side.

Now, there is engraving and there is engraving. Most modern engraving is a bit thin and shiny for my liking, but the Artisan has a blend of old-world silvered patina and really superbly executed deep and fine engraving that stands out but is classy without being tacky, if that makes sense.

Conclusion

The agony of choice is especially true when choosing a new or second-hand Game gun, as there are so many options out there. Hopefully, a bit of advice and hands-on use will allay your fears and get you on the right road to hitting your game humanely. In the end, the shotgun you shoot well with is the right gun, regardless of size, shape style or price. I shot a 30-year old Valmet double rifle with 12g barrels fitted and it was one of the few shotguns I could actually shoot well with. Sold it for a 'better' gun, which was a big mistake; I miss more now than ever!



First Steps First Shots

Mark Stone looks at getting started in clay pigeon shooting...

For many shooters, their first taste of clay shooting usually takes place on the 'Have-A-Go' stand at one of the numerous country shows dotted around the country. Alternatively, clay shooting is still extremely popular with corporate and team building events, many a large ground extremely active during the week with these types of outings. Then there's the charity shoots, where various charitable organisations try their hands at various activities, clay shooting being one of the favourites. This small piece therefore is on how to get started, so it ends the moment you're about to shout 'pull', it'll also give you the knowledge you require in order to take your first steps into what is one of the most addictive and fastest growing sports, not only in the UK, but most of the western world. And once you get hooked, you quickly realise as to why.

Now, whilst not everyone catches the shotgunning bug, one lady I once taught for a morning, wanted nothing more than to actually hold and fire a gun, certain participants want to know more. And today it couldn't be easier, the once almost closed-shop reputation of clay shooting now thankfully a thing of the past. All you now need is your smartphone, tablet or laptop and type clay pigeon shooting into a search engine and you'll be positively swamped with information.

Before you buy

Once you've been able to digest even a small part of what you'll find, your next step, should you wish to continue, is to either contact the shooting ground you had your



first go at, or and this is always the best route, find your nearest gun shop. Without fail, the staff, or the shop's notice board, will be able to give you the name of the nearest ground, a contact name and a mobile number to call. And if you call in on a Saturday afternoon, most of the customers will also be more than willing to help you out. Call made, all you then need to do is turn up; the only equipment you'll need is a decent pair of shoes or boots, preferably not trainers and some sensible clothing, usually a fleece. Avoid fashionable jackets, they might look good but the usual array of pockets, zips, buttons and poor collar design will work against you. How do I know this? Over the years I've had to ask numerous first-timers to remove their 'don't I look good, trendy and outdoorsy in this' outer garments. Nothing beats a basic, plain fleece jacket or pullover. Make sure that you're there at whatever time you've agreed to be at the ground. Whether it's a big, established ground, or a Sunday morning only affair, somebody will be waiting for you, so do the decent thing and be on time. Apart from that, all other equipment, such as eye and hearing protection, shotgun and cartridges, will be supplied as part of the introduction. But even before you head out of the clubhouse or cabin, you should get a basic introduction to how a shotgun works and all the safety aspects that surround clay and any other form of shooting. Always remember, shotguns don't kill or injure people, people kill and injure people, usually caused by sheer stupidity of handling.

Fit for purpose

Depending on you and your physical build, the person giving you your initial introduction to it all might decide that a 20g or a 410 is more appropriate. Don't worry about it, smaller bore shotguns are lighter to hold and initially easier to use and shoot with if your more slightly



built, or of a smaller stature. If you get into it all, you'll move over to a 12-bore soon enough.

To start with, you'll be shown the different parts of a shotgun, how it works, how to hold it correctly and what a 'sight picture' is and what you should or shouldn't see when the gun is mounted against your shoulder, where your head should be, the correct stance, along with the fact it needs to be unloaded and in a slip to be transported between stands and what your fellow shooters will expect of you and how to behave.

Unfortunately, I've seen more beginners start larking about, confident in the fact they think they know it all after a couple of lessons, than I care to think about. Shotguns, especially loaded ones, are serious pieces of equipment and need treating as such and with respect. The stories about 'unloaded shotguns' going bang are numerous, so please ensure you don't add to the list.

As regards costs, more formal grounds will charge about £35 for an hour-long lesson, that'll include all the kit you'll need, use of a shotgun and a box of 25 cartridges and approximately the same number of clays. Less formal clubs, especially the Sunday morning ones, tend to charge less, since their overheads aren't as high. That said, a box of cartridges cost the same wherever you are, so expect about £6.25 per 25 shells. Gun wise, it could even be a shotgun belonging to the member who takes you round and gives you the basic training and introduction;



remember, a thank you and a cup of tea usually goes down extremely well.

What you'll need

So, you've had your first official 'go' at clay shooting and you've decided it's the sport for you. The ground you've just been to will be more than willing to help you out,



especially if you decide to join the club. This also means that to start with you won't have to run out and buy a shotgun, most grounds having 'club guns' that they loan out to beginners, mostly for free but some do make a very small charge if only for maintenance and occasional replacement.

The most time-consuming part of taking up clay shooting is all the paperwork you'll need to fill in for your shotgun certificate and everything that goes with it. And like your initial introduction, most of it is now conducted online, to which end you'll need to visit and download from the following websites which are: www.gov.uk/government/publications/firearms, www.gov.uk/shotgun-and-firearms-certificates, www.cpsa.co.uk and www.shootinguk.co.uk. There's plenty more to visit but these are the most important ones, especially the 'gov' ones, since it's through these that you'll apply for your shotgun certificate. Apart from these, all you actually need is a copy of your favourite shooting magazine, Gun Mart! Within these information-packed pages, you'll find numerous adverts for shotgun cabinets, skeet vests, any other clothing you might think you'll need, hearing and eye protection and cartridge bags and belts. Alternatively, head over to your nearest gun shop or country show, as you'll find everything you need, often at special show prices. And remember, you don't need all the latest fancy gear, you're starting out and more often than not budget kit is just as good and will often outlast the more expensive examples.

Tin box

To make sure you'll be granted your Shotgun Certificate, you'll also have to buy the correct grade steel shotgun cabinet. You'll also have to have it installed in the most appropriate location in your house, using, might I add, expansion bolts and be constructed to the appropriate British Standards. It'll also need to be placed out of sight from anyone looking in and as a rule, bolted to an external wall. There are the occasional exceptions but not if you live in a modern house with the latest concrete block or plasterboard and wooden framework internal walls.

Buy used

When it comes to the correct shotgun, just like learner drivers, many of those starting out like to buy the same make and model of shotgun they've learnt with. If said shotgun is one of the more popular makes, my advice is to look for a decent second-hand example, otherwise you could end up spending thousands of pounds you don't initially need to part with. For example, a nice, used Miroku MK38 Grade 3 will cost you far less than a brand-new version. Alternatively, there are plenty of brand-new, sub-£1000 Italian- and Turkish-built shotguns to be had, such as the Redolfi EOS and Brixia ranges. Both offer tremendous value for money and excellent levels of performance.

Remember, a fancy, expensive shotgun doesn't break clays any better than a cheaper example, providing it fits you correctly and you've paid attention to your instructor; it's the person holding the gun that matters the most. Another personal example, I once consistently beat another shooter at Compact using a Russian-built Baikal that cost less than £600. The shooter I beat was furious that he couldn't score more or hit as many clay targets as I did, since he was using his new £3000 Italian 12-bore. To prove the point, we swapped 12-bores and I still beat him, although for some perverse reason my fellow shooter wasn't as annoyed, since he'd been bested by not only his own shotgun but one that cost far more than the 12-bore I'd lent him. Go figure?

Three things

So basically, at the outset, all you need to start out in clay pigeon shooting are three basic things, which are access to the internet, the latest edition of Gun Mart magazine and some spare time to go and visit your nearest gun shop or clay shooting ground. And that literally is it! So off you go and enjoy yourself; be it as a Sunday morning regular, or the next World Champion, it really is all the same at the end of the day!



Getting started in rough shooting

Jules Whicker gives us his top tips for starting out in this particular discipline...

For some people 'rough shooting' means some form of game shooting other than a formal driven day, but for most of us it is mostly about controlling pigeons, corvids, rabbits or other vermin. The precise meaning will depend on what you enjoy doing, how much money and time you have to spend on it and the nature of your arrangement with the landowner or occupier, which should always be set down in writing.

Targeting Pests

Pest-control gets most people their shooting permission and makes for the most affordable sport. As shot gunners, our primary quarry are those avian agricultural pests, wood pigeons, crows, rooks and jackdaws. The way the land is used should determine the nature and scale of the shooting, so focus on the major pests, and leave any other permitted species alone, unless wanted for the pot.

What kit?

There are three main approaches to tackling pigeons and crows: decoying, flight-lining and roost shooting. Any kit used for the first of these can be applied to the latter two, so we'll focus on decoying. For this, you'll need a gun and cartridges (obviously), eye and ear protection, and some decoys, plus a hide net and poles and a seat.

The Gun

Make it a 12g: no other gauge offers as wide a choice of guns or loads, or a better chance of hitting what you're shooting at! Reduce felt recoil if necessary by shooting lighter loads, or choosing a semi-auto. I reckon an over-and-under makes the best all-rounder. When decoying, however, I prefer a magazine-fed design, since I can load it with the gun held upright, letting me keep at least one eye



on the sky and permitting a shallower and therefore less-obvious hide.

Learn from the experts

Before you buy, find a local shooting ground where you can try out different styles of gun and get tuition. If your budget is tight, buy a sound but inexpensive gun and spend the money you save on learning to shoot it properly. Anything else is a recipe for bad – and potentially dangerous – habits, frustration, wasted ammunition, and wounded quarry. Just a few lessons with a competent coach will make you a far better shot.

Get insured, get certified, be safe

BASC, the Countryside Alliance and the National Gamekeepers' Organisation all provide third-party insurance, as well as defending shooting. Policy terms do differ, however, so check the small print. BASC also do a Safe Shot certification scheme, which covers the essentials and adds to the credentials you can present when seeking permission to shoot. You can do the 20-minute session at most country shows. It currently costs just £20. There's lots of good practical information on these organisations' websites too, and BASC's free-to-download Shotgun safety code of practice is a must-read.

Cartridges

The further out you try and take your birds, the better your choice of cartridge needs to be. As distances increase, even patterns, retained energy (how much energy each pellet carries at the moment of impact), and consistent velocities matter more. Pick cartridges with fibre wads. Pattern any cartridge to check for evenness of pattern, and for point of impact. Many shooters miss or wound



because they assume the pattern is centred on the bead, when it isn't. Remember too that large shot travels a lot further than small shot, so pick the smallest viable size and orientate your hide and decoys to minimise the risk of spent shot causing a nuisance.

Choke

Choke is a constriction of the bore at the muzzle that acts to control the density of the pattern. Almost all modern shotguns feature screw-in choke tubes that permit the user to adjust pattern density to suit the shooting situation. I use open chokes for decoying (you're trying to bring the birds to you, not stretch out to them), but tighter choke for flight-lining. Choke can affect the evenness of the pattern, so check for this with each choke you use. Evenness matters more than density and accurate shooting counts for more than any degree of choke.

Eyes and Ears

Eye and ear protection are essential. Cheap polycarbonate safety glasses will protect your eyes from debris, but you will be spending a lot of time staring into the sky looking for birds; so, to protect your eyes from harmful UVA and UVB radiation, spend a bit more for tinted lenses with a UV400 rating. Likewise, cheap ear plugs provide good sound attenuation, but they also reduce your awareness of what is going on around you. The solution is a pair of electronic ear muffs. Howard Leight Impacts are a good place to start, Peltor Sport

Tacs are even better and MSA Sordin's are what you ask Santa for. Some swear by custom electronic plugs, which are even pricier, but I've yet to be converted.

Decoy choices

Nothing beats a well-presented natural bird, but artificial decoys are more convenient. You can opt for full-body designs, stackable shells, foldable neoprene FUDs or fabric-bodied Sillosocks that billow in the breeze. A flocked finish prevents shine, but the latest ultra-matte paints – as used on the new Enforcer pigeon decoys from DJ Decoys – achieve the same effect and are more durable. Full-body and Sillosock decoys are available in both head-up and head-down variants, while FUDs are fully poseable. This avoids giving the impression of the whole 'flock' being on the alert. Crow decoys come in fewer varieties than pigeon ones, but the Sillosocks are excellent, as are Jack Pyke's flocked shells. Look for decoy supports that let the decoys bounce, or rock in the breeze, to give life to your pattern.



Full bodied

Get a few full-body decoys for positioning on fence posts or in trees ('lofting'), plus a set of aluminium poles and a hook for each decoy. Lofting makes your decoys visible from a long way off, and adds an important confidence factor for wary birds. It can be very useful even without a ground array, too, as when flight-lining and roost shooting.

Flying finish

Bouncers (a.k.a. floaters) and whirligigs (a.k.a. magnets or carousels) simulate flying/landing birds. The former are flexible, extendible rods with a ground spike at one end and a support for a dead bird or a winged decoy at the other. Set up right, a bouncer will bob and weave like a bird making its final corrections before landing. Highly visible, bouncers often prove deadly. They are also cheap, light and need no power. By contrast, whirligigs use a battery and a motor to spin the decoys mounted on their extendible arms. Some swear by them, but I usually leave mine at home!

Hide poles and nets

Get a set of height-adjustable aluminium poles, preferably with sturdy kick-in or screw-in ground spikes, and a modern, lightweight 'stealth' net. Add a handful of elastic bungee straps, plus a folding brush saw, a pair of secateurs (and possibly a machete) for clearing the hide space, and for cutting and fixing branches to 'dress' the outside of the hide. (Check with the farmer is okay with this first).

Are you sitting comfortably?

You will need something to sit on. Choose a seat that is stable, comfortable, and that lets you stand up to shoot easily. Forget the stick-seats, 3-legged stools and folding camp chairs and go straight for the drum-type seats with cushioned swivel tops. These are much more comfortable, as well as giving you a nice dry place to store gear. Do make sure you ballast the seat before shooting (Sitting back down on a seat that is no longer there, while carrying a loaded shotgun, could go from slapstick to tragedy in a heartbeat.) For a more adjustable option, check out Bergara's Stag seat. Its combination of four height-adjustable legs, broad feet, swivelling seat, rigid backrest and tough polymer construction ticks a lot of boxes. If a bigger, more padded, seat seems desirable treat yourself to an Idleback, the Gold Standard of shooting seats!

Whatever next?

Other things you will need include a gun slip, a cartridge bag or belt, some camo gear, wellies, waterproofs, a bag to carry your decoys and another for your dead birds.

For what it's worth, I use a Jack Pyke roll-up gun slip, pack all my gear into a Kammo stalker's roe sack, wear a turkey-hunter's vest from Cabelas into which I can empty a couple of cartridge boxes at a time (it'll also take up to

20 pigeons), cover my head and face with a Jack Pyke 3D camo LLCs cap and head net, protect my hands with MacWet short-cuff gloves, stuff my feet into a pair of tough and cosy Grubbs boots, keep a lightweight poncho from Military1st to hand in case of showers, put dead birds in a roll-up carcase tray from Farm-Land in Germany, and fish around for cartridges with a telescopic magnet from eBay. For crow decoying, I also take a Nordikpredator crow call: far and away the best I've ever used, though with practice you can get quite a good jackdaw sound out of the little Acme ones.

Never ending...

If you plan to roam the woods and hedgerows with your gun, you'll want a classic canvas game bag with a generous net front for cooling just-shot game (Ogdens); head and gun-mounted lights for going after rabbits and hares at night; plus, a hands-free predator call, and some dedicated cartridges (a heavier charge of larger shot) if foxes are to be squeaked in.

Of course, the gun has to be cleaned too, which requires a cleaning rod (a pull-through is not enough), a jag, brush and mop, flannelette patches, solvent and oil, and then it needs a cabinet to be put away in. And don't forget the odd bottle of goodwill for the farmer! And we haven't even mentioned dogs!



Beginners Guide

The Editor looks at how to start airgun shooting, safely and responsibly

If you've not yet started air rifle or pistol shooting, it might seem a little daunting. There are obviously laws regarding airguns and they must be obeyed but as long as you comply with them all (not just some of them!) you'll be fine. A guide to the law is on page 15 in a separate box but for the moment, let's look at where you can and can't shoot. If you own your own property, or have permission from the owner, with a decent-sized back garden, then you're OK to shoot in it but you must make sure that no pellets leave your boundary and you obviously don't want to annoy or worry your neighbours. I'd generally say that back gardens are more suitable than front gardens! The last thing you want is an armed response team turning up, guns drawn! You'll obviously need something to shoot at but be aware that some steel targets can cause the pellets to ricochet, so you'll have to be careful what type you use. If you have a garden large enough to safely contain any wayward pellets, lucky you, so you're free to use a huge range of spinner, 'knock up-knock down' targets and other reactive targets without having to worry. However, for most people, some sort of pellet trap is best. Target card holders made from steel with a built-in pellet trap can be positioned at various ranges and these will ensure that all pellets end up where you want them. If you want to shoot at reactive targets, then it's possible to construct a sort of 'bunker' from an angled paving slab at the rear and two more to form the sides; this way you can set up targets within the enclosure and any pellets will stay within it. Safety glasses



are obviously a very good idea, as our eyesight is precious and easily damaged!

Range Time

If you've not got access to a large garden, or simply don't fancy shooting in one if you do, then the best place to shoot is at a club or airgun range. Here, you'll have somewhere that has been purpose-built and will have been constructed to either contain all pellets within a building of some sort, or be outside. The benefit of this sort of set up is that the targets will be already there, so you won't have to pay for them yourself and there will be other shooters or staff members on hand to offer advice. If you haven't already got an air rifle or pistol, then there might be some available to hire from the range or club guns if you've gone to your local club. You will probably have to take some sort of training if you're shooting on an airgun range, so that the owner can be sure that you will be safe and responsible and clubs usually have a training scheme for new members. If you are going down the club/range route and haven't already got your own gun, it's worth waiting a while, as there's nothing worse than buying the wrong gear!

What Discipline?

Many airgun shooters are happy to use their guns for informal target shooting, or plinking', and it's a great way to spend time, without feeling the pressure of competition shooting; however, a lot of people want to try their hand at some sort of competition and see how they compare to others. The Olympic style Match Rifle and Pistol disciplines are often seen as the 'Formula 1' of shooting and the equipment is generally expensive, so it's best to use club gear to begin with if possible.

Bell Target is an air rifle target discipline, traditionally shot in the back rooms of Northern pubs but it is still popular in certain regions. The target is a hardened round steel plate with a 9.5mm hole in the middle; if the pellet goes through the hole, a bell rings and scores 5 points. If the pellet hits the plate, then the 1 inch scoring rings come into play, for a score of 4, 3 or 2. The plate is painted with

non-drying paint to make scoring easy and is over-painted after each shooter. Rifles in .177 calibre are used and can be spring piston or pre-charged pneumatics (PCPs)

Then there is Field Target (FT), where shooters engage steel knock down targets from 10 to 55 yards on a course set out in a wood or field, or a combination of both. When a pellet passes through a 40mm hole in the target face, it triggers a mechanism that causes the target to fall back for a score of 2 points; if the pellet hits the faceplate, a score of zero is scored. There are 2 targets per lane, with 2 minutes to range the target using a high magnification scope and then shoot at the targets. There are usually some targets with reduced diameter 'kill zones' (holes) and some shots must be taken kneeling or standing- most shots are from the sitting position. Rifles and scopes for FT can be very expensive at high level but more modest kit can still be competitive in the right hands. The range to the target can be measured quite accurately using the focus wheel on the side of the scope and the elevation turret can be used to 'dial in' the range to allow for the curved trajectory of the pellet.

Hunter Field Target (HFT) is more like 'old school' FT, where rifles are generally less target-oriented and scopes are generally much lower magnification since the scope can't be altered during the competition and judging ranges is done by eye. As with FT, the 'kill zones' can vary in size but shots are generally taken prone, with a few positional shots thrown in. 1 point is awarded for hitting the faceplate of the target and 2 if the target falls over.

The new discipline of Target Sprint is rapidly gaining popularity and combines outdoor target shooting and running, a bit like Biathlon, without the snow! Pest control is obviously a rewarding past time but time must be spent on a range first, before any shots are taken at live quarry.

Gearing Up

As you can see, there are plenty of disciplines to take part in but what about kit? Well, the new shooter will obviously need a rifle or pistol and the choice is massive! If possible, try before you buy and that's where shooting at a club or

on a range can be useful. If not, some shops have ranges where you can try various guns, to assess what's best for you. I'd advise buying the best you can afford without breaking the bank and a spring piston or gas ram rifle is a good idea, as you don't have to buy a pump or dive cylinder to keep it charged with air. Open sights are best to start out with but most people shoot with a scope these days and there are a lot of really good optics out there at very competitive prices. I would suggest a scope with an adjustable objective lens or sidewheel, as this allow you to keep the target in focus at all ranges. Scopes without this, especially variable magnification models, often can't be used at close range without lowering the magnification. Quality mounts are also a must, as that's what keeps the scope securely fitted to the rifle. Pellets will obviously be needed and the variety is huge and it's best to try several types to find out what your rifle performs best with. As mentioned before, a pair of shooting glasses is a good idea, as a ricocheting pellet could really spoil your day! A decent gun bag is a must, to protect your pride and joy and keep you legal going to and from the shooting venue.



Start 'em Young!

Howard supervises his grandson, as he makes his first hunting forays with an air rifle

My son has always taken a keen interest in all that I do and I remember buying him his first air rifle. And though he's stalked deer with a rifle and also shot birds with a shotgun, it's his air rifle that's still his favourite and he's pulled off some brilliant shots. Now he has a son who is using a BSA Ultra in 22, under adult supervision, as he's still under 14. The butt had to be shortened a bit to fit him but that was not a problem and with instruction from his dad on safety, gun handling, marksmanship and responsible hunting practices, it seemed the time was right to take him out for the first time.

Pigeons galore

We made off to a local farm that's getting pestered with grey squirrels, pigeons and crows. As we drove in past a wood, the trees were heavy with woodies; so too good a chance to miss! We got kitted up and walked back down a hedgerow to get within range. My grandson's keen eyes spotted some birds and with a nod from his dad raised his rifle and took the shot bringing one down to earth with a thud; great start! My son also took one and after picking them up we made our way to the end of the main building where the pigs are housed and startled six or so magpies.

We made a plan; I was to stay with my Grandson, while my son went to the opposite end of the wood watching the valley floor and the beech trees. As anyone



knows, air rifle hunting takes a lot of patience, my Grandson has been practising in the back garden and as long as he's resting it, he can hit the target. We would soon see if he has the patience and whether that first shot was just luck! I just hoped he would not lose interest before something else showed.

Two things in our favour though; at this time of year ground cover has died back and the trees lose their foliage, making observation easier. Also, with food harder to find, everything has to forage for longer, so making more targets. Squirrels were number one on our list and here's why- it's not just the food they take, it's the damage they do to the trees and the nesting sites they take over from the song birds. So now it's payback and it's this kind of shooting that helps hone your stalking skills! If all went well we'd make a dent in the squirrel and crow population. And at the same time give my Grandson his first experience of taking live game while teaching him as much of the dos and don'ts without over loading him.

Watching & waiting

I stayed with my Grandson at the corner of the main building closest to the beech trees, one thing I had not done was to put some bait out. I have tried a number of baits; one is obviously nuts but all they do is grab them and run off, not staying still long enough to make the shot. Peanut butter is the best, when pressed into the rough bark of a tree there's nothing to run off, so they stay and lick it off and its lights out! Rats will also take as much as you can put down; like all bait stations, it's best baiting a few days before.

We stayed watching and waiting until I could see my Grandson was getting bored, so decided to take a look around the farm buildings. I eventually met up with my son spoiling his chance of a squirrel, as there was nothing much happening to keep the interest



going. So we all did a little plinking before heading back to where the pigs are housed, not a thing in sight until I noticed a flick of a tail by the base of a beech tree, before disappearing. Had it gone up or was it still on the ground?

We scanned the area for movement but that was the last we saw of it. Changing places again only to keep the interest going, we came across a little hot spot; three or four, maybe more, squirrels down on the valley

floor; it was hard to tell how many, as when you lost sight of one, another would appear. If only I'd planned things better- I knew I should have baited up! It looked like if one found something amongst the leaf litter, the others would charge over to investigate, all the time moving further away. It's impossible to predict which way squirrels are going to go when they are foraging; they will set off at full speed chasing each other, and then quickly change direction completely.

Not lucky but good

The only thing we could do was to sit, watch and hope a shot would present itself; at least it's got everyone's interest. Then, as fast as they all appeared, they vanished all except one coming head first down an old oak tree slowly as if looking, realising the others had left. Suddenly, my Grandson shot and the squirrel responded by first running up the tree before falling; it can't be two lucky shots, as both had connected square on.

Not wanting to be out done by his son, my son wanted to go for one last try by the pig pens, while we were going to make our way back to the car. As luck happens, just as we were going our separate ways, I looked up and saw a squirrel sat in the fork of a tree, after two shots it fell bringing the total count to father and son one squirrel and one pigeon apiece and me nil!



In The Field

Starting field target shooting

Field Target Shooting is the original outdoor airgun target discipline, but it's fair to say that this flagship sport has undergone some major changes, from its humble beginnings, back in 1980. Turn up to a modern tournament in 2018, and the level of equipment, sophistication and skill on show, will soon have you wide-eyed in amazement. I've often likened it to gladiators, but with so many competitors now going the whole hog and shooting in stiff official shooting jackets, the collective image is impressive to say the least. Add to that the huge mega scopes and the ultra-sophisticated match grade rifles in use, and the end result is a high-gloss flagship sport worthy of the name.

Same But Different

So have we lost something along the way? Well, yes and no. The original ethos of the sport of FT still exists, that anyone can compete with any legal sub-12ft/lbs air rifle, and the British Field Target Association (BFTA), does operate a grading system, with shooters placed in C, B, A or the top AA class, dependent upon their ability. But there's no doubt that with the level of sophistication of both rifle and scope used the sport has developed out of all recognition from its origins. Okay, at this point I now say, so what? Just accept that Hunter Field Target has largely taken off where the original sport left off, and appreciate the modern FT for what it is – the cutting edge, ultra-sophisticated evolution of the outdoor airgun target sport.



Course Layout

So, for those unfamiliar, the sport of FT requires the shooter to move through a course of steel knock-down targets laid out through a wood, or across a field, gauge the distance, estimate wind, and try and hit the kill zone/ hole in the face plate, to make the target collapse.

In the early days of FT, the number of targets on a course varied wildly. 25 targets seemed to be arrived at as the norm, with occasionally the addition of an eliminator lane. Today, the BFTA's rules state that the course shall be not less than 25, but can be 30, 40, or 50. In practise, the normal FT course seems to be 40 targets, with the more prestigious Grand Prix events having 25 lanes of two targets, so a grand total of 50 targets, which gives shooters more action when they have to drive hundreds of miles across the country. 'Discipline' shots, where the competitor is required to take specific shots from the standing or kneeling positions, make up 20% of a course, so shooters need to practise these too; especially as they can go out to 45-yards!

Target kill zones can be 40mm or occasionally 45mm, and in practise, the 'standard kill size is 40mm. These can be placed between 10- and 55-yards. But a relatively recent change was the introduction of small kills, and here the rules state that 'the course can contain reduced size kills, but that they must not exceed 25% of the total. 25mm kills can be placed out to 35-yards, whilst a maximum of 2x 15mm kills can be used, out to 25-yards.

Key Ruling

Unlike HFT, where the shooter is unable to touch his rifle's settings once the shoot has begun, Field Target allows the shooter to use parallax adjustable telescopic sights. And here, the higher the magnification, the shallower the depth of field can become, and the easier

it can be to read off target ranges. Magnification of 50x is now commonplace, and with March taking a World Title with their 80x magnification model, (the highest mag currently available in a scope), the point was well and truly made. Ultra-high magnification will not suit all, and it is fair to say that certain scopes are still usable to parallax range-find with 32x mag, so as usual, practise and familiarity are vital weapons!

Range finding is the key, and the routine sees the shooter walk through the wooded course and arrive at the open 'gate' denoting the next lane. He/she then assumes their most comfortable freestyle position, (normally sitting), and then slowly turns the parallax dial on the scope, until the target goes from blurred and snaps into focus. The target distance can then be read off the scope's wheel/ parallax dial, and the shot taken with reasonable confidence, allowing for wind of course! Scoring is ruthless, and awards one point for hitting the kill zone and knocking down the target, and nothing for a faceplate. Obviously doing your homework and gaining confidence with a particular scope and magnification setting pays dividends, and the top exponents are now capable of regularly reading

targets to within a yard. Competitors are also allowed to adjust the rifle's hamster/ adjustable forend throughout a shoot, so this has given rise to all manner of high-tech add-ons.

The British Field Target Association's rules state that any form of sighting system may be used, with the exception of laser sights. It also states that no separate device, designed specifically for range finding, may be used. So, yes, handheld range finders are out! Power checks are carried out using electronic chronographs, and the BFTA has adopted a regime whereby a competitors rifle has to show a velocity at least 5fps below the 12 ft/lbs limit with the actual pellet being used by the competitor on the day. This seems to work, and everyone at least knows where they stand. It also means shooters are less inclined to push their guns to the legal limit, for fear of disqualification.

DEMANDING

We now have 39 countries taking part in Field Target, and a famously gruelling World Championship, requiring the competitor to navigate three consecutive days of 50 targets, so the winner really earns their title!

Of course, given the extreme demands placed upon the competitor and rifle/scope, inevitably the top exponents are using modified match rifles and FT specials. Yet, the ability to range-find the targets via a high mag scope has perhaps even more relevance, if top class results are the goal. Admittedly, many competitors have invested large sums in their treasured FT rigs, but when starting out, it is still possible to get competitive kit which won't break the bank. Any pin-accurate rifle is worth using, but shooters in my experience just love to advise and help if they can. We can all take part at local level, so just get down to your nearest club and give it a go.

A fantastic sport awaits.



Starting HFT

Hunter Field Target shooting is proving popular right now, but what exactly is it and how can you get involved? Mark Camoccio explains...

Outdoor airgun competition has really exploded in popularity in the UK over the last few decades, and few weekends now pass without some form of competition being available, for those so inclined. But just what is Hunter Field Target (HFT), and how easy is it to get involved?

Well, first, a potted history of outdoor knock-down competition is necessary, in order to understand where we are, and where the various disciplines are heading...

Sussex Origins

The first Field Target shoot, held back in leafy Sussex, back in 1980, was a real all-comers event, with shooters competing with indoor target guns alongside springers with open sights. Simple stuff, but for many of us that were there the excitement was tangible, and the seeds were sown for what was to follow. As FT did indeed take off, so the level of sophistication of the kit used began to grow, the inevitable result of progress, human nature, and the will to improve.

FT today, covered in detail elsewhere in this publication, has of course mushroomed into the flagship sport, pushing man and machine to the very limits of performance. But

competing with mega high magnification range-finding scopes, and top-flight match rifles, is not to everyone's taste; and whilst the modern version of the sport is a fine spectacle, there's no doubt that a gap had emerged some years back for a form of shooting somewhat more simple and instinctive, more along the lines of those early shoots in the sport's formative years.

Hft Established

Okay, the idea wasn't exactly new, having been unwittingly piloted for many years at club level through winter leagues up and down the country. Yet the push to have Hunter Field Target (HFT) accepted as a national discipline and an exciting sport in its own right was to prove a major turning point in the sports' progress. Since its introduction as a national series of competitions in 2003, largely due to the hard work of Pete Sparkes, the sport has now developed to the point where we have two national leagues, World and European championships, and a wealth of smaller events around the country at club level.

Course Format

So, just what is Hunter Field Target, and what is the HFT format that has proved so popular? A typical course consists of 30 steel animal shaped knock down targets, with varying sized kill areas (the hole cut into the front plate), and these are laid out in an outdoor setting; either through a wood, or across fields. The targets are set



at distances between 8-yards and 45-yards, (10-yards shorter than FT incidentally) and rules govern what size kill areas can be laid at specific distances. The smallest kill zone is 15mm, and these can be set out to a maximum of 25-yards, which is still an ultra-demanding shot, especially when a breeze gets up! Kills range in size up to 45mm in the rules, but in practice, 40mm seems to be the accepted norm. The shooter moves along the firing line, where there's one target to shoot per lane. He/she has to touch what's termed the 'peg' whilst taking the shot, and then move on to the next lane.

Unlike Field Target, where shooters are allowed to sit, HFT actually bars this position, which means that most freestyle shots are taken from the prone position. Here also, competitors are allowed to use a tree to rest on if it is designated the peg, for example, so there's some positional variety to practise and play with.

Discipline pegs with compulsory standing or kneeling shots really keep everyone on their toes, and the course overall is a good three-hours of exciting sport. Where Field Target (FT) has a ruthless scoring system, i.e. one point if you hit the kill area, and zero if you hit the front plate, HFT awards one point for the front plate and two points if the kill area is struck. This makes a big difference and virtually guarantees that all participants in HFT will score at least 50%, just by hitting the front plates alone. Great for newcomers, and one of the key rules that work so well.

No Touch Rule

Perhaps the most significant difference though between FT and Hunter Field Target, comes with the rule that states that the shooter cannot touch the settings of the telescopic sight in any way, once the competition has commenced. At a stroke, this means that the ultra-high magnification parallax adjustable scopes used to range-find in FT, are totally redundant for HFT; given their deliberately shallow field of view. The brief therefore for HFT, is to pre-set the optics so that all targets are relatively clear throughout the target distances, without having to adjust anything. This means that an ideal magnification



is between 7x and 10x, and if the scope has parallax adjustment, this will probably be best set on around 25-yards. Obviously partly dependent upon individual preference, but the aim is to arrive at a scope spec where all targets have an acceptable level of clarity. That said, there's always a compromise of sorts, and where a 25-yard target, for example, will be crystal clear, if the scope has been parallax adjusted for that distance, an ultra-close target placed at the minimum 8-yards will be at least slightly blurred... but hopefully shootable.

A scope with a reticle which can provide plenty of reference points for trajectory, is the name of the game, and with this in mind, Mil Dot reticles are increasingly popular.

Classes

Shooters can opt to shoot in different classes too, so there's effectively a handicap system if you want it. The following are available to enter at each UKAHFT shoot, and the HFT Masters Series run similar but different rules.

- Open League (as mentioned, anyone can opt to shoot in this)
- Veteran Class is new for this year, and is open to anyone 60-years and over.
- Juniors 9-13
- Juniors 14-16
- Ladies Class
- .22 Calibre (PCP's and semi- recoiling .22 or .25 calibre
- Recoiling Class – all recoiling rifles irrespective of calibre
- Club Team

So if like the sound of HFT, there's only one thing for it, get down to your local club, and give it a go!

For pre-booking application forms and downloads regarding established UKAHFT events (where bookings are still possible), and all the latest information on anything connected with Hunter Field Target shooting, take a look at the following websites:

<https://sites.google.com/site/ukahft/> and www.shooting-the-breeze.com. <https://sites.google.com/site/whfta1/>. In addition, details of the new HFT Masters events can be seen at www.hftmasters.net.

Gun Security

Pete Moore considers some important points you might not think about, when keeping you and you're kit safe

Gun security is a multi-layered subject and one that is addressed by specialised companies who make appropriate equipment. When you apply for your FAC or SGC, you'll get a visit from your FEO (firearms enquiry officer). They will ask about the amount and type of guns you want; the onus is on you to fit a government-approved box or boxes securely!

Out of sight

Approved gun boxes are available for firearms from any number of firms, from a simple single cabinet to a walk-in vault to suit all pockets and requirements. They must be attached to a supporting wall with rawl bolts and not in interior/partition-type wall. If possible out of sight as in a loft, but not in an unoccupied out building. You might be asked to fit an alarm, but this mainly applies if you have a lot of guns. One other consideration here is protection as and although lofts are an out of sight/out of mind location, they can get cold in the winter, which leads to rust etc. Storing them in slips or sleeves helps, but I'd recommend Napier's VP90, which is a compound that releases a vapour that coats the guns to give a corrosion-resistant skin. Also, a good bet for dropping into your gun bag after a day's shooting.

You will also need an ammo cabinet too; some FEOs will stipulate that rifle bolts are kept in a separate compartment in the main box. Again, the industry offers such designs. Once you have fitted all this the FEO will come again to ensure it's as required and then you wait for the postman. On that point you can get bolt scabbards that slide onto your belt, so if your out with your rifle, you can store the bolt on yourself, so if your gun gets nicked or lost it's inoperable. However, also be aware that separating the bolt from its rifle is a recipe for forgetting to bring it along, I've seen this too many times!

Airguns

12 ft/lb air rifles due to their lower energy output fall into a different class (unless you live in the fascist state of Scotland), but still need to be kept secure and away from anyone who should not have access. This could mean locking them in a cupboard; equally effective would be cable and trigger locks. There are Home Office guidelines and the major shooting associations – BASC etc. give guidance. FAC-rated airguns that produce in excess of 12

ft/lbs of energy are not an issue as they are legally classed as Section 1 firearms, so require the same level of security!

Security is not just about boxes on walls, here we see a 4x4 kitted out with Lintran gun and dog boxes. Other options can include security cables with padlocks. Napier of London offers a special gun slip with lock and cable that provides portable security. These are not a first line of defence for home storage, but a practical approach to transportation and shoot security. Another useful item is a trigger lock so rendering the gun unusable. Different are 21st Century Antiques who custom build, full security/approved boxes into reproduction period furniture, for those who like to have their guns on display but legally secure.

It does not stop at home as we all take them out to the range and field be it in the UK or abroad, so they at least need to be protected. A gun slip is entry level, as it offers a bit of protection and disguises the contents to a degree. For some hunters who must cross roads on their approved ground this is essential as legally they cannot do it with the gun out. Napier's Roller gun slip is a basic design that



does the job and rolls up and clips to your belt/pack when not required. Conversely you might want to spend more on protection and storage with a proper bag with accessory pockets. A good example of this is the AIM Field Sports Drag Bag. Heavily padded and offering a tough construction they will protect and carry all your gear.

What about vehicles? Well there are also secure boxes and compartment that can be fitted to most 4x4s. LinTran is one such company who will fit slide-out, lockable gun trays in the cargo bed of a pick-up and offer custom packages and even dog boxes. Bratton Sound makes a small, QD shotgun box that will fit into the boot of most saloon cars and easily in 4x4s with its dedicated mounting kit.

Gun luggage

Napier's Trekker bag from their Razorback range, looks like a modern roller bag complete with pull-out handle, but are made tough! The cargo compartment on top takes all your gear. But another zip-open section in the base will take a double shotgun or even switch barrel rifle (broken down) in a moulded section. Blaser, Sauer and Mauser offer boxes with combination locks, inside they are compartments to hold actions, barrels and scopes. Blaser also makes a very nice roller bag that will carry their gun box. There are any number of generic hard cases, often of aluminium or an alloy/composite build that will accept most guns and are airline-approved. For overseas travel by air ammunition must be secured. The requirement is a lockable metal container. Cheapest and near universally accepted is a cash tin you can buy at any stationary store.

Hard cases are the next step. Made of tough polymers with high density, foam inside they cradle your scope/rifle and feature integral, padlock eyes. They are fitted with a number of handles and have integral wheels to roll along, which is a godsend. If you are going overseas a lockable hard case is a legal requirement for air transport. Most modern shotguns and a few rifles come with cases of this type that can stand the rigours of the average baggage handler and are cheaper by comparison!

Be Smart be Safe

In recent years terrorist threats far from being something that happens elsewhere have really come to our shores. These people are getting clever and are aware that there are many privately owned guns in the UK as well as gun shops, all of which are potential targets for weapons they might try to and get hold of. OK you've got your approved security as have gun shops; even more so, but! Give a thought to how you look when you leave the house with guns. Camo is accepted amongst our community, but maybe keep it in the truck until needed. Keep an eye out in your street for unfamiliar vehicles; you tend to know who lives near you, so a strange truck will stand out more. Maybe rig some security cameras front and back to give you some pre-warning of visitors and if you're worried get on the phone and ring the local police, explaining you are a gun owner and have spotted something that could be trouble.

I'm not trying to scare you, but just be aware and act and react accordingly!



Bits and Pieces

Mark Stone looks at the type of accessories the shotgun enthusiast might find useful

Like any pastime, shooting is replete with things you simply must have. However, whilst certain items you can well live without, there are a few items that will actually make your life easier and in certain cases, keep you safe when the pheasants and clays start flying. Equally, it's also when the drive ends or you've finished walking-up that part of the shoot that certain accessories come into play, that's if you're able to carry the bag back to your car.

Certain of these extras are regularly covered in the various clothing pieces you'll have already read. Even this edition of the ESG will have made mention of them but it's always worth recapping, quite literally in some cases. What we've tried to do here is give you an idea of the most useful, some of which you might not have thought of. Likewise, some you wear, some you carry, whilst others remain in your car waiting for day's end. You probably don't need all of them; some make for an ideal present, a subtle hint to your family as Christmas and birthdays approach, with a magazine strategically located and open at the correct page usually doing the trick!

Heads up

Whilst game shooters usually prefer a flat cap, their clay breaking counterparts' one of the baseball varieties, either one serves the same purpose. Apart from keeping your head warm and dry, they shield your eyes from the sun and offer a degree of protection when unexpected objects head your way. Whether it's a partridge falling out of the



sky or a piece of clay, both hurt if they hit you, some form of headgear significantly reducing the impact.

Remaining up top, some form of hearing protection is a must. Be it a basic foam plug, customised plugs, headphones be they passive or active or one of the new range of caps that incorporate swing down protection, you must protect your ears. Sustained shotgun shooting, be it game or clays, will have a dramatic and irreversible effect on your hearing both short and long term, so some form of protection is an absolute must and not a suggestion. Auritech have been offering plugs with ceramic filters for some time now and for many uses that require protection. They now have moved up to custom moulded units. You need to get an impression taken of the interior of your ears by Auritech, who are at most Shooting Shows and Game Fairs. It only takes around 5 minutes, after which the moulds are sent off to the lab where the plugs are made and fitted with the ceramic filters. These units are not powered but allow the wearer to still hear conversation, although you can hear some things better than others. In tests they worked well and were effective with 12 bore shotguns and high-powered centre fire rifles. These units are comfortable to wear and easy to insert and remove via a moulded in finger tab. They are also colour-coded, as they only fit the ear from which the cast was made, red is for the right ear, blue for the left. They come with a cleaning rod to remove any wax build-up. There is a choice of 6 different filters, giving attenuation values specific to application. These units are good value at £119.

Keep 'em peeled!

Likewise your eyes, it only takes a small piece of clay or a stray pellet to cause permanent blindness. Granted,





you are born with two eyes, but I can assure you that losing even one of them is catastrophic. There's now a whole host of shooting glasses to choose from, from the most basic clear lenses, up to really clever types such as the ones recently launched by Sunglasses For Sport, who have just released a brand new Evolution 3 Lens Interchangeable Set, aimed at both game and clay shooters. This is another important addition to its specialist own-label Evolution shooting eyewear comprising Chameleon, Matrix, Hawk and now this new model called 'Switch'. Evolution Switch is unisex fitting and supplied with 3 interchangeable lenses: grey, yellow and orange colours that cater for different clay colours, light and background conditions. They are lightweight for all-day wear, all lenses are Class 1 Optical Quality and the one-piece full wrap lens shape provides maximum protection, with no frame or bridge to obscure vision. Lenses have hydrophobic (water) and oleophobic (oil) lens coatings, to repel water, dust, oil, fingerprint smudges and dirt. They also have an anti-scratch lens coating and lens change is quick and simple. The UV 400 rated lenses are made from

impact and shatterproof polycarbonate complying with EN 166. They are supplied with a cleaning cloth, soft carry pouch and hard case. Evolution Switch are a highly affordable price of just £39.95, so are well worth checking out.

But whichever style you select, from simple to advanced, all you have to ensure is that the lenses are impact resistant; something you can guarantee by buying shooting specific glasses and that they grip the head or have wire ear pieces, the last thing you want is them coming off at an inappropriate time.

Underneath

One thing many shooters overlook is their underwear. Not one of the more popular topics of conversation, whether you're waiting on the peg for the drive to start, or hanging about for your turn to shoot the first stand of that big, winter series competition, if you're cold and by association stiff, you won't shoot well. The other benefit of a decent set of thermal underwear is that they don't add much bulk to your overall outerwear and can cut down on having to wear a thicker jacket, the name of





the game when it comes to any type of shooting is comfort and unrestricted movement.

Some of the best places to source a full set of thermal underwear are outdoor shops; those who go hiking and mountaineering are seriously choosy about their warmth giving undies. And like conventional undergarments, you can select from short sleeves, long sleeves, boxers, Y-fronts and the familiar Long Johns. Likewise, there's also a full assortment for both male and female shooters, so the ladies don't have to make do with what for them are uncomfortable men's clothing.

If you want to be really posh, then it's a full set of silk, this luxury material able to wick away moisture, yet still able to keep you warm, even when damp. Usually, the choice of the elite or those with big wallets, the downsides to silk underwear is that it's expensive and tends to wear out rather quickly. For most of us, it's usually cotton mixture that combines all the qualities of a natural fibre with a manmade material, or one of the new super soft technological marvels. Whichever material or style you go for, buy the best you can, since the cheaper examples tend to have unwanted seams that rub in the more sensitive areas!

All in hand

Clay shooters especially wear them all year round but one item all shooters will use at some point in time is shooting gloves. And whilst you can still get the older types with a slit and fold back section in the trigger finger, times have changed, as have the materials. Rule of thumb and no pun intended is that you buy the best fitting pair you can find; a loose fit is no use whatsoever, a 'second skin' type the best of all.

Some are waterproof whilst others will become wet very quickly but still provide the shooter with decent grip. For some clay shooters, a pair of golfer's soft leather gloves is the perfect choice but they tend to wear out quickly. But whilst leather is still the best, there are shooting specific examples with suede palms and firm closures that offer the best of both types and can be had in summer and winter weights, whilst a good pair of leather gloves also allow you

to handle your gun's barrels even when warm.

For the clay shooter, a pair of fine leather gloves also helps absorb sweat and improve grip, a significant advantage when the next shot could be the title winning clay. And should you so wish, they are often available with your gun maker's name embroidered on the back of them. But do avoid wooly gloves, whilst they might keep your hands warm they offer no grip whatsoever and the shotgun can easily slip out of your hands. If you don't like the idea of wearing gloves but are fed up of singeing your hands on hot barrels, especially side-by-sides, get yourself a hand protector that slides down over both tubes and locates up against the forend. The added benefit is that they improve the shooter's ability to handle and move their shotgun when the air becomes thick with high pheasants. Once again, drawn from the world of golfing, many clay shooters like to hang one of those small furry towels from the D-ring on their shooting vest. Ideal for drying hands, they also allow the shooter to wipe down their gun and stock when it's raining.

And for when it is cold, you'll appreciate a good quality hand warmer. You can now get battery powered ones like the 'Hot Rox' for around £20 that'll recharge from your laptop but like all electronic gizmos they can at times be fragile, so look after them. Nothing however beats the solid fuel or lighter fluid variety. Buy a decent one such as the one made by Zippo for around £25 and it'll radiate





welcoming heat for your hands for up to twenty hours and since they tend to be of metal construction, they'll last for years on end.

Put your foot down

Basic boots are all well and good but leather is best, followed by leather lined and then neoprene lined. Make sure you buy the best you can and should the mood take you, you can even buy welly or boot warmers, which pre-heat your footwear so they're nice and cosy when you put them on. Also, a good quality boot bag, like the one from Napier of London is a sturdy example keeping your post-shoot dirty boots safe, secure and stopping them distributing mud around the interior of your car.

Since trainers or softer shoes tend to be the choice of many clay shooters, make sure they have good foot support. If needs be buy some insoles with increased arch support, you'll appreciate it in the long run. And for summertime Sporting, a pair of modern golf shoes will ensure your footing remains firm and secure. These tend to look like trainers, so they won't look out of place.

Gun care

Most shotguns now tend to come with a decent quality traveling case. And whilst many of these plastic examples aren't the most glamorous of their type, they serve a very useful and protective purpose. Equally, whilst your shotgun is being transported they must reside in such a case preferably with a small lock that'll keep prying fingers at bay. If you'd prefer, you can buy more ornate, wooden framed ones wrapped in canvas or leather and fitted with combination locks but they do tend to be expensive.

The next thing you'll need is a decent gun slip, cartridge bag or belt and for the game shooter, a decent game bag. When it comes to slips, cartridge bags and holdalls, clay shooters are well served, usually available with their chosen brand embossed on them. For the game shooter a good leather or canvas and leather edged slip, complete with a heavy brass zip is to be recommended and if finances allow a matching cartridge bag that holds between one hundred and fifty and two hundred cartridges. You can now get various gun slips with built in stands, which means your slip and gun are held clear of

the ground, ideal when the ground is wet or churned up.

With the cartridge bag, also make sure its got a heavy-duty shoulder strap, a full width metal bar flap hinge and a good strong buckle fastener, whilst small front pouches to pair up cartridges is also a good idea. Buy well and they'll last for years, which mean their at times high asking price works out very economical, compared to the number of cheap versions you'll otherwise end up buying. Alternatively, a good cartridge belt that holds twenty-five shells also works well, especially for rough shooting, where most shooters expect to take fewer shots, a box full around your waist usually more than enough.

In with these a good canvas game bag with a mesh front pocket and a washable interior is also an asset, the pocket useful for carrying rabbits or a few pigeon or duck decoys. Granted, most shooting coats tend to have game pockets incorporated into them but a game bag will hold a surprising number of pheasants, partridge and rabbits all in one place and make them easier to carry.

If you don't want a game bag, a game carrier also works well. There are two types to choose from, the more substantial being a thick leather strap that holds two preformed metal frames. These allow up to eight pheasants to be suspended over the shooter's shoulder. The smaller versions are small leather loops, each one twisting around the bird's neck, before being attached to the shooter's belt.

Keep it clean

The next major accessory is of course a shotgun cleaning kit, of which there are literally hundreds to go for. Apart from the fact you need to make sure the one you buy is for your gauge of gun, just make sure it's got a decent cleaning rod, bronze brush, various jags for attaching the cotton swabs and a selection of cleaning fluids and oils.



These days the wooly paradox and pull-through are gaining in popularity, due to the speed at which they'll clean a gun. What they won't do is remove the build up of plastic in the chambers and rear forcing cones, so you'll still need a decent bronze brush and quality solvent plus some top quality gun oil and a small pot of gun grease for the hinges. The new Magic bore, that can be used in a re-chargeable drill (£45) or by hand (£60) looks to be a very well thought out design and I can see them catching on as they are very efficient at removing plastic fouling.

And finally

If you're out and about very early morning or late at night, a modern LED torch, head torch or portable light will prove extremely useful, as will a decent shooting stick or lightweight portable seat. A quality, unbreakable flask is also worth its weight in soup or coffee on cold mornings, whilst a day's shooting often runs a whole lot smoother if the shooters and the beating line have two-way radio communication. With a mile or more transmitting capabilities, these little radios aren't particularly expensive and can save untold amounts of time.

And a decent folding pocketknife or multitool will never go amiss. Be it a simple single blade or one of the multi function jobs, you'll be surprised just how often you'll call upon its services especially if you're doing some DIY keeping around your shoot. Like all knives, buy the best you can afford and to keep it safe, a decent lanyard to fix it to your belt will ensure you don't loose it.

Another piece of kit you'll always keep using even though at first they seem a luxury is a good pair of pocket sized folding binoculars or a monocular. You'll find that you use them far more than first thought be it to see where the beaters have got to, spot that elusive fox or just watch the wildlife until the shooting starts. Take our word for it you'll appreciate having them in your pocket.

As recently shot game needs to be kept cool, a large cool box plugged into the car's 12v outlet is an excellent addition to your shooting kit and can be had from most supermarkets or caravan sellers. And irrespective of whatever you shoot, a decent fleece or light, quilted jacket to change into at the end of the day is a worthwhile item to keep in the car. After a full day's shooting, a change of clothing is beneficial to your wellbeing.

Don't over do it

The various shooting accessories outlined are far from definitive, there're probably loads of them we've left out or have forgotten to include. Our advice is buy the accessories you need when you think you'll have a use for them, if not it could well be a waste of money. But apart from that, over the years you'll start to learn what you do need and what you don't, certain items rarely seeing the light of day, others forming an essential part of your shooting kit, be it game or clays.

