

DOES STOCK LENGTH REALLY MATTER ALL THAT MUCH?

Dear Technoid:

I really appreciate the way that you deal with all the questions that are directed to you. I have an observation and a question about stock length and its direct affect on sporting clays shooting.

I am 6'2, 245 lbs and I have a 36" sleeve length. I own a standard, un-altered SKB 685 in 12 ga., and a Beretta 390S sporting that I had cut down and a recoil pad installed on so that my wife could shoot it. It is fully 1 inch+ shorter than my SKB. I shot the auto for a few weeks last year while I had the triggers altered in the O/U so that my Briley 28 ga tubes would fire the second barrel. I noticed that my scores with the much shorter Beretta were 4-8 birds higher than with the SKB. The SKB fits me so well that if I put it up to my shoulder with my eyes closed, and then open them, the sight picture is about perfect.

This past weekend, I shot both on 2 separate rounds of sporting clays. With the SKB I only broke 32(I am usually at a bout 38-40), but with the Beretta, I broke 44. That gun is so short that my thumb is about 1 inch in front of my face. It does not fit me in the way that I have been told guns fit over my 52 years, but I kick butt when I shoot it. Do you think that stock length is as important as most say it is? I am confused by this obvious advantage with such an ill-fitting weapon. The loads, chokes, etc were the same in both rounds. Maybe I ought to sell the SKB, and sneak my wife's gun out when I shoot.

Thanks

Steve

Dear Steve,

Thanks for the kind comment. I don't think that I can supply any hard answers over the ether, but I sure can muddy the waters a bit.

It is always tough to compare gun fit when two vastly different guns are being used. Contrary to what the British gunfitters will tell you, one set of "ideal" dimensions will not work for each and every gun. Placement of the pistol grip on the stock is a major contributor to gun fit and this is never mentioned by the gun fitters because they cannot do anything to change it! All they talk about is length, height, pitch and cast-the stuff that they can charge you to alter. Your SKB and the Beretta auto are a good bit different in the pistol grip area. It really isn't fair to compare them.

Pistol grips govern where you place you hand and THAT is what really matters in stock length. Don't believe me? Try this:

Hold your gun at the ready position in the normal way and mount it a few times. Get the "feel" of the stock length. Now slide your hand down the pistol grip to the very bottom, so that your finger can just reach the trigger. Mount the gun several times again. I will bet you a cold beer in August that the stock "feels" shorter. Now slide your right hand all the way up the pistol grip to the very

top and mount again. The stock should feel considerably longer. No dimension has changed. It is all in where the pistol grip places your hand.

There are so many other variables between the two guns that it is really hard to know where to start. Your 390 has a stepped rib, I believe that your model of the SKB does also, but are they the same height? That is just one point. You say that your SKB sight picture is just about perfect. That is nice, but what really matters is the point of impact. Is that perfect? That is what counts, not sight picture. Make sure that you test for this. It is absolutely vital to proper performance.

You say that your wife's gun is so short that it allows you only 1" between thumb and glasses. That should be plenty. The usual amount is 1" to 2" of clearance. I know many very successful shooters in trap and skeet who shoot with the back of their thumb touching their glasses. You can get away with this at trap and skeet because there is very little vertical gun movement in the sports. You could not fit a gun this way for sporting clays or game shooting where rapid vertical movement would push the glasses off your face, but your 1" clearance on the 390 should cover that.

Is stock length as important as everyone says it is? The Technoid (that all knowing, all seeing bag of wind on the other side of your computer screen) never said it was all that important. 1"-2" thumb to glasses clearance is a pretty flexible ballpark. Stock height is far more critical for most people. Too low is worse than too high for most shooters. Personally, I find cast off to be the most critical dimension of all. Any cast at all and I get an open wound on my cheek (usually richly deserved for being too stupid to stop shooting when it starts to hurt).

Maybe you just shoot the gas pipe better than the O/U? Most people do. I love my O/Us, but have always shot better and more consistently with the 303 gas gun. Semi-autos are just easier to shoot for many people. I find the extra 3.5" of semi-auto sighting plane to be a real advantage.

The general tendency in sporting clays (at least in England and the New England area) is to shoot the longest stock possible before mounting becomes a problem on the "awkward" stations (below in a valley usually requires the shortest stock). I am a bit smaller than you at 6'-1" and wear a 35" shirt. The stocks on my FN O/Us and Beretta gas guns run about 15", but I shoot my 14.5" Beretta 390 field model "meat gun" just about as well. I am more flexible with the field gun and more locked in with the target guns.

Experiment and buy some longer stock screws and some spacers and temporarily lengthen your 390. Don't trim the spacers or anything; just bolt them on. See how you do with it. If you have spacers in your SKB, take some out and give that a try. If nothing else, that will keep you occupied for a weekend. The grass can take care of itself. You may well learn that each gun shoots best for you at a different length.

Shotgun fitment is a matter of experimentation and the easiest area to experiment in is in stock length. Have at it. Spacers and screws are cheap.

Regards,

Bruce Buck

Shotgun Report's Technoid