

TWO CHOKES VS ONE

Dear Technoid:

A couple of weeks ago, I observed two shooters shooting 5 stand. One was shooting an over/under and the other was shooting a semi-automatic. The wind was blowing, but the semi gun with a single choke outshot the over/under by a wide margin. What gives? I thought over/unders were the gun of preference with 2 choke selections?

Thanks, Sid

Dear Sid:

What you just saw was the better shooter winning, not the better gun winning. Your observations might be just the incentive that the Technoid needs to write another one of his endless, pointless and wandering misinformation filled screeds. Put on your barnyard boots, here we go into the cow pasture:

"The type of gun you use really does not matter." There. I have said it and I feel much better. A shotgun is just a tube (or two). The most expensive shotguns really don't have any significant technical advantages over the cheapest. A Remington 870 will still hit a target just as well as a Purdey, and be a lot more durable too. No, I am not an unfeeling, insensitive Philistine. Those are just the facts, sir.

In theory, the second choke of the O/U is quite helpful. In fact, not really. Andy Duffy beat 1000 other shooters at one past summer's NSCA national championships. Andy was shooting an O/U (like 95% of the people there). So the two chokes must be best, right? Wrong. Andy told me that he NEVER changed the chokes during the shoot. He left his pair of Ken Eyster .015"s in for the entire shoot- including the monster teal. I don't know if he changed them for his shoot off with Kruger, or not, but he said he did not change them during the main match.

So, this indicates that the O/U is still the gun of preference, but only if you use identical chokes! NOT. After the winning the NSCA nationals, Andy (who is sponsored by Browning) set aside his old 32" Citori 325 and started to shoot the new Browning Gold semi-auto. After shooting this gun for less than a month he won the Pan American FITASC championship and the NSCA All Around Shotgun Championship (trap, skeet, sporting). The single barrel gun did just fine for him.

FITASC (Frightenly Intense Tough Ass Sporting Clays) is grown up 5 Stand. As you so correctly point out, if ever two chokes would be an advantage, they would be here. The US team won the Gold at the FITASC World Championship in Spain one summer. It was a big upset. Half of the US team (Robertson, Dykes and Leiske) used Beretta gas guns, half used O/Us.

Careful shell selection can alter choke behavior about half a choke either way- much more if you get into spreader loads. This narrows the difference between the auto and the O/U, but really isn't the point. Choke just isn't that important! (After having written reams of prose on the subject, I

cannot believe that actually I said that.) If you put only .015" in your gun and shoot only hard #8s, you would not be far wrong for almost ANY clay target game. Perhaps it would not be ideal for the second barrel at Olympic Trap or 27 yard handicap, but you would do better than you would imagine. It probably would not make much difference to a good skeet shooter at all. The set up is about what they are now shooting at the tough International Skeet. And, of course, light mod and #8s are the standard middle of the road selection for sporting clays. Remember what Andy used to win the 1995 championship.

Far, far more important than the ability to change chokes or have two different ones, is the way the particular gun suits the shooter. This becomes very subjective- extremely subjective. It is difficult for someone who appreciates the soft recoil and long sighting plane of the gas gun to convince an O/U shooter that the occasional malfunction and loss of the second choke is worth it. Malfunctions drive some people crazy, other just shrug them off.

I have been shooting competitive clay targets for almost 25 years. During this time I have searched, and watched other also search, for the magic gun- "The Answer" as Burl Branham, coach at the Army Marksmanship Unit and Olympic Shotgun coach, used to say. I have not found it yet, but it just might be the next gun I buy.

I have noticed that the good guys can shoot just about anything. Note Andy Duffy switching from an O/U to a gas gun. He still won. Dan Carlisle set world records and won world championships (and an Olympic bronze) in Olympic trap with a Perazzi O/U. AT THE SAME TIME he was doing this, he also won a World Championship in International Skeet- with a Remington 1100. I believe that Dan was the only one to ever do so well in two different world class shotgun sports. Oh, yes. I don't remember what he used to win his US sporting clays title. It would not really have mattered.

I mentioned earlier that it seems to me that about 95% of the competitive American sporting clays shooters use the O/U. I may be off by a few percentage points, especially if you consider all those who shoot sporting clays for fun. In Britain and on the continent, very very few shooters compete with the semi-auto. Does that mean that the O/U is the best gun, or does it mean that the average competitive shooter just hasn't figured it out yet. Dunno. Certainly, at sporting clays we are seeing more gas guns than ever among the top shooters. There is clearly some movement, but it has hardly become a general trend and may revert just as soon as the newness wears off, or the O/U sponsors get more aggressive.

Fred Misseldine, one of the most respected skeet coaches, always wanted to start the new shooter with the Remington 1100 20 gauge. He claimed that it was just plain the easiest gun to hit clay targets with. Thousands of his beginning students proved him right. Few of his students who became top shooters stayed with the 1100. As they became better shots, the shootability of that 1100 mattered less and other things (like the ability to change barrel sets or tubes for the four gauges) became more important.

Finally, the carved in granite, iron bound, locked in place final argument- what does the Technoid use when he goes forth to strike fear into the hearts of lesser shooters (and revulsion in the stomachs of the better ones)? The Technoid takes gas. A 30" Beretta 303 trap gun to be

exact. There are a number of properly fitting, suitable O/Us in the cabinet, but if it is important the gas pipe gets the nod.

Best regards,
Bruce Buck
Shotgun Report's Technoid