

.410 BORE AT SPORTING CLAYS

Dear Technoid:

I have a Beretta 28ga., on 20 ga. frame, and shoot it well in Sporting Clays. I am considering a Briley 410 ga. tube set and have little experience with this gauge. What are your thoughts on chokes?

In my 12ga. Browning Ultra I use Briley Cyl., IC and rarely Mod. In the 28 I use Briley Skeet, IC & Mod. I will typically drop about 10% in score going from the 12ga to the 28ga.

Enjoy your WEBSITE, keep it up

Judith

Dear Judith,

The best advice that I can give you about shooting sporting clays with a 410 is to sign your shrink to a five year no-cut contract before you start. It is going to drive you crazy. However, it can also be fun.

I am assuming that the 410 tubes are going in your Ultra, not in the Beretta, because tubing the 12 is the most common application. However, that may not be the best way. I sold a 28 gauge 686 to a friend because I found the gun a bit too fast for my liking (though my wife shoots a 687 28 gauge and will have no other). He also thought that it was a bit fast for clays and had Briley install a set of .410 tubes in it. The resulting 28/410 was very nicely balanced and not at all nose heavy the way that your 12 gauge Ultra with tubes will be. Skeet shooters deal nicely with extremely nose heavy guns, but sporting is a different game and requires much more vertical gun movement. There is a very good chance that you will find a tubed 12 to be unpleasantly heavy. The tubed 686 28 was really just right. Anyway- you certainly have some options- perhaps one that you had not thought of.

You will have your work cut out for you no matter how you go about your tube set. Trust the Technoid- 410 sporting is not something to be taken lightly IF (note big "if") you will be shooting sporting on a standard distance course. Around here in the parts of the NorthEast shot by the Connecticut Travelers, a course will have at least two 40 yard shots and many, many 30 yard shots where the bird is dying and has no spin (equally hard to break).

I worked out a handicap for sub-gauge guns at our 100 bird shoots: 16=3, 20=5, 28=10, 410=20, pump or SxS +5. If the course is a close one, the 410 has a chance, but it has yet to produce a winner. We do have a couple of hotshots with model 42 .410 pumps that have come close, but the best subgauge is usually a 28 or 20, even though their handicaps are less.

The ten bird drop that you experience between your 12 and 28 will be multiplied several fold when you go from the 28 to the 410. I can attest to this from sad personal experience.

Unfortunately, I am in a position where I have been able to pragmatically test the difference effectiveness of the gauges at sporting clays.

I regularly practice on a local FITASC parcours with a .410 tube set in my 30" FN. I have .015" in each barrel (about Improved Modified) and I use #8s. I am fairly consistent with the 410 out to about 30 yards, but then the scores fall precipitously. For example: My average on this parcours (the range does not change it often, I know it well and have learned the leads) with a 12 is about 47-48x50, with 20 gauge tubes in my FN I shoot about 44-45, with the 28 gauge tubes it is 43-44 and with the .410 tubes in the same gun it is 34-35 on a good day. My zero weight gain tube set was carefully constructed for sporting clays and you absolutely cannot tell that it is a tubed gun just by testing its balance and weight. The difference in score is due solely to the gauge.

The parcours contains a pretty aggressive teal and an honest 45 yard crosser, plus a bunch of 30-35 yard stuff. I was chatting with Warren Johnson (Choke Chooser and the SPRED pattern program) about my difficulty with the .410 at distance. I asked him to run the numbers in his SPRED program for a full choke .410 using 1/2 oz of #8 shot on a 40 yard edge on crosser.

Warren came back and said that if my aim was absolutely perfect, dead center, on that 40 yard edge-on crosser that I had a 17% chance of an 80% chance of a two pellet hit! (He uses an 80% chance of a two pellet hit as his fringe limit.) In short, if my aim was always perfect, I had the right to expect one break every eight shots. Add in human error (something that even the Technoid must occasionally endure) and you can see why they call the 410 the idiot stick.

Soooo- out to about 30 yards, you have the right to expect a decent chance to break the bird if your aim is very, very good. After that, a lot of luck comes into play. As to whether the .410 will work for you, it may really depend on the kind of courses you shoot. If they are all skeet distance, then you should have a lot of fun and not suffer over much. If you will shoot real contest quality courses with the .410, be prepared for tears. Few things are more maddening than doing everything right and not having the bird break.

As to chokes, I would recommend skeet choke for skeet distances (.007" to .009" is popular around here among the better skeet shooters) and the fullest you can get (about .020") for anything much over that. I use a compromise .015" for sporting in my Briley Ultralights using #8s and find that this generally works as well as can be expected. A little less constriction seems to handle the larger #8 shot better, which is why I chose .015" over .020". For skeet I use .005"s and #9s, but my hot shot friends say that I will need more for the shootoff doubles. I am not so sure as the breaks look pretty good now.

I would really only recommend Skeet and Full as 410 chokes. Although you can kid yourself that the tiny tube is entitled to a full range of chokes, the fact of the matter is that 410 skeet is usually shot with almost a modified (even though it is called Skeet) and full peters out at about 30 yards. .015" is a pretty good one choke compromise.

From all of the above you may gather that breaks with the 410 are impossible at longer yardage. Not quite so. Every now and then Old Mr. Probability will raise his head (as Warren said) and you will get an absolute smasher on a long bird. After all, those little #8s have to go somewhere.

Consistency is where the 410 lets you down. It is hard to break a long, edge-on crosser several times in a row.

So, enjoy the 410 as you would any amusing child's toy, but don't ever confuse that miserable little worthless mind numbing idiot's delight with a real cartridge like the virtually perfect 28 gauge.

Best regards,
Bruce Buck
Shotgun Report's Technoid