

ARE CASED GUNS SAFE?

Dear Bruce:

I attended my third Conn. Travelers shoot this weekend. Its a great organization, I am glad I joined. Every shoot is different, the targets are challenging (should I say tricky?) and each course has a personality. Although there are a lot of good friends that shoot together, the guys are pretty accommodating to outsiders, especially if you make the first effort.

You are probably wondering why I am writing. I want to take exception to a practice of the Travelers and one you discussed in the last issue of Reload! That is the casing of guns between stations. To me it leads to a terrible safety practice. I have had more closed guns pointed at me in the last three shoots than I ever saw in ten years of trap shooting. Guys are VERY casual about closing actions, swinging closed guns and wildly swinging cases around. It seems like a flourish to finish a stand, close the gun, then catch the case over the closed barrel.

I thought that it was an NSCA rule that actions had to be open at all times, except when in the box. At these shoots, guys carry closed guns all the time and point them without thinking. If I were an insurance agent, I would never cover any shoot with this kind of loose interpretation of the old rule I treat every gun as if it were loaded.

Before you flame me as a response, look around at the next shoot, and think if you would let your son treat a gun like these guys do. Cases contribute to the problem. It's a great group, I would hate to see it marred by a safety accident that could be avoided.

Respectfully,

George

Dear George,

I am certainly not going to "flame" you. You have an excellent point. The safety record of the Connecticut Travelers has been superlative and we certainly will bend every effort to keep it that way. I have been shooting with the Travelers since their inception ten years ago and have found them to be very careful indeed about how they handle their guns when not in the case. However, you are quite correct when you say that clay target shooters treat cased guns differently than uncased ones.

Casing guns between sporting clays stations is commonly done for a variety of reasons. First of all, soft field cases come with straps so the gun can comfortably be slung over the shoulder as it is carried from station to station. Secondly, when stations are backed up the gun rack is always overfull. Cased guns are less liable to be damaged in the general milling about. Thirdly, it is virtually impossible to accidentally pull the trigger of a cased gun.

That said, perhaps it isn't so safe after all. You are very right that many shooters are less wary of their muzzles when the gun is in a soft case. Obviously, when an O/U is cased the action it is closed and not as completely safe as it is when broken open. If the gun does go off somehow, the case certainly will not protect anyone. Perhaps people think that the gun has been made completely safe just because it is put in a cloth case. Your observation is quite correct that shooters handle uncased guns with a lot more care than they do cased ones.

Casing has always been considered the polite, preferred and safe way to carry a gun at a sporting clays match. Maybe it isn't. Then again, even those who carry their O/Us broken open, close the gun when they place it into the rack while waiting their turn to shoot. I have seen a few people attempt to rack their O/Us slightly open, but the guns tend to fall. Trap and skeet shooters always rack their guns closed, but they are shooting in much more controlled situations than the sporting clays shooter. Many (most?) shooters carry their guns to and in their cars made up in long, soft cases. The English are very strict on gun safety and when I have shot there, they always made a point of casing their guns between sporting stations or when changing grouse butts. That said, you have certainly made a point and raised a doubt.

I just do not have an answer for this and would love to hear from our readers on this point. Safety is too important to mess around with. If there is a safer way to conduct our shoots and carry our guns we should do it. Would it help if we banned soft cases on the course and required the guns to be racked with the actions broken? Would simply educating our shooters that, cased or not, an assembled gun is still a danger be enough? Is there some better way? We hope that Shotgun Reports' readers will write with their thoughts.

Regards,
Bruce Buck
Shotgun Report's Technoid