

SUBGAUGE SPORTING HANDICAPS

Dear Technoid:

My friend Jack and I shoot sporting clays often. He usually uses a .410 Browning Superposed. His face lit up when he saw your two articles on sub-gauge sporting clays; He loved it! What we would like to know is your method of handicapping the sub gauges.

Thank you in advance.

John

Dear John:

If he shoots sporting with a .410, he is just as dumb as I am! I alternate between using a special tubed Fabrique Nacional Browning and a first year production Winchester M-42. Humble pie is never very far away.

Some time ago, I worked out a handicap system for subgauge sporting clays at the monthly Connecticut Travelers shoots. I fine tuned it for about half a year and then finally settled on the numbers.

12 gauge is scratch, 16 gauge +3, 20 gauge +5, 28 gauge +10 and .410 bore is +20. Pumps and SxS guns get an additional 5 targets, i.e. the Winchester M42 .410 pump gun would get $20+5=25$ targets. The amount of shot permitted in the subgauge guns is the same as it is in NSSA skeet. The 16 gets one ounce.

Does it work? Sort of. Connecticut Travelers pride themselves on shooting very difficult contest courses. Last year our shoot attendance averaged over 100 guns, but our average score is only slightly above 50. The quality of the contestant ranges from national champion (Andy Duffy was a member) and local British instructors to rank beginners. Our scores are so out of synch with the SCA classification system that I developed an entirely new class system. Our top class starts at 75.

The fact that we shoot such difficult courses does not encourage subgauge use. If you are shooting a 60 with the 12 gauge, you are not going to want to give it much of a try with the .410. The .410 is hardly ideal for the 40 yard battue, the 50 yard teal or the 30 yard edge-on rabbit.

The best that I ever did with my M-42 was second over all at the club championship. They happened to have set a generally shorter course and the long shots were tough enough so that not many people hit them anyway. On our average course, the .410 is just futile.

My wife shoots a 28 gauge Beretta O/U (it is the only gun that she will shoot) and occasionally medals in the lady's class or in her earned class V (of six classes). One devoted fellow shoots the 20 (a 30" 325) in all the matches and has often finished in the top three places.

Generally, if we have 100 shooters, we will have 7 or 8 people shooting subgauge.

The subgauge handicap system generates much more interest on the shorter courses. We do one relatively short course shoot per year and encourage people to try subgauge. About half of them do and a handicapped 20 usually wins. Most of the shots are kept at 35 yards or under.

If you read the SHOTGUN REPORT's Technoid's columns on "The Answer" (Roland should have it up by now), you will know that I attempted to make the ultimate subgauge sporting clays gun. I felt that regular skeet guns with tubes needed wheels on the front. Four barrel sets were generally not screw choked and were not available in barrel lengths over 28". I wanted a subgauge gun that looked, handled and felt exactly like a standard 30" sporter.

After doing a bunch of calculations, two years ago I sent one of my 30" Fabrique Nacional B-25 Brownings down to Briley and had him enlarge the bores from .723" to .765". This removed 12 ounces of weight. Briley then made a set of 12 ounce matched weight skeet tubes (with screw chokes) for the gun. Voila! A three gauge screw choke 30" tube set that felt like a real gun. Briley said that he had done a lot of back boring and carrier barrel work before, but that he had never made a zero weight gain tube set before. This was his first.

The downside is obvious. 1) it is fairly expensive and 2) the gun cannot be used as a 12 gauge. On the other hand, I now have a properly balanced 30" subgauge sporter built on the highest quality action. I selected screw choke constrictions of .005" and .015" across the board and this has proven to be spot on.

I go through all of this because I want you to know that I have gone to some effort to reduce the subgauge variables to just the differences in the shells and not the differences in the guns. So often what makes shooting a subgauge hard is the fact that you are shooting a different gun from your usual one.

My gun club has a challenging FITASC parcours, longish in nature. In 12 gauge (using my 303 Beretta 30" trap gun), I can average right around 48x50. With my 20 gauge FN tube set I can run around 44x50, with the 28 gauge tube set I shoot about 41 or 42x50 and with the .410 I feel elated if I can manage a 33x50, but the truth is closer to 30x50 on the average. I use #8 shot and .015" choke for all my subgauge shooting. These results are at a variance with my handicapping, but the FITASC targets are all pretty long and the .410 just dies much after 30 yards.

I know that I have taken up a fair amount of space here, but this is a subject close to my heart. I hope that you and your friend found it interesting.

Regards,
Bruce Buck
Shotgun Report's Technoid