

Cheating Shells?

Dear Technoid,

Tell me if I smell a mouse... at a registered shoot someone is loading 19 grains of Vitavouri powder in a 12 ga AA silver trap hull, with a claybuster AA equivalent wad column. Now, this load runs at 1265 fps as the reloader chronographed. I'd say this load definitely is not 3 drams equivalent as per the rules. If it were, then they discovered how to break the 1200 fps barrier using only 3 drams! What do you think?

I'm considering turning these shooters in to have their shells checked, I believe they are cheating. Problem is, is 19 grains excessive? Or their chronograph is off? I'm amazed at how little delay from muzzle blast to target disintegration which leads me to believe the load is fast.

James

Dear James:

You don't mention which game you are playing. Sporting clays and FITASC do not have any velocity restrictions, so I assume it is trap or skeet. Going with the percentages, I will guess that it is ATA-style trap. I believe that they still do have a 3 dram rule in force and 3 drams of black powder does indeed drive 1 1/8 oz of shot 1200 fps, not 1265 fps. Technically, he is over the line if his shells do indeed chronograph at that speed.

Does it matter? I don't believe that it matters in the slightest. Even if you were back on the 27 yard line, I doubt if you could tell the difference in time delay to impact between 1200 and 1265. There is only about 25 fps difference at the bird and shell to shell variation is far higher than that. You don't say which Vitavouri powder he is using, so I don't know where 19 grains puts him, but again, it isn't important.

When I was out at the Grand in Vandalia a couple of years ago, I bought the Grand commemorative 3 dram Federal handicap trap loads from the armory on the grounds for my matches. The entry fee includes your choice of factory shells and I have always preferred Federal. I was shooting an 1100 then and those Grand shells just tore that old gun up. They really seemed even hotter than Federals usually are. While I was waiting to get my gun fixed (no more free fixes at the Grand from chintzy Remington thank you!) I asked one of my friends who works for the ammunition side what the story was. He said that many of the big ammo companies load special shells just for the Grand "with just a little more powder". Even the factory trap loads sold there were over three dram equivalent! Everyone just winked at it because they knew that it didn't matter. Extra velocity is not real advantage, it is just different.

One thing that you can be sure of is that your friend shooting 1265 loads is taking more pounding than you are and his pattern (all things being equal) will not be as good as yours due to increased shot deformation. The most important thing is to shoot your matches with what you practice with. That way you perfect your timing. If you practice with 1150 fps loads and then use 1265

fps ones in matches, your leads will be ever so slightly off and you might miss that extra bird.
Fast is not necessarily better. Consistent is.

Best regards,
Bruce Buck
Shotgun Report's Technoid