

OPEN CHOKES FOR EVERYTHING

Dear Technoid,

The issue I have is with the review of the Choke Chooser where (you) says: "Don't believe that old canard about choke and shell not mattering if you aim right. Baloney".

Number one point, you never aim a shotgun, it is to be used like a bucket of water on a clown at the circus, you throw a cone of pellets at the clay.

Second point, it sounds as though the right choke/cartridge combination will hit the clay even if you point in the wrong direction ?

Also, the fundamental flaw in the choke chooser as described by Technoid, seems to be estimating the distance to the clay. At a range with some recent shooters I asked them to estimate the distance to a clay - I got estimates varying from 35 to 75 yards. The clay was less than 25 yards away. If people do not get that right, how will they use the choke chooser correctly. In this case they would ALL have overchoked their guns

I am from the UK, I learnt to shoot there. I have been amazed shooting in the US to see the antics of people changing chokes from stand to stand. The most hilarious was the man at the Illinois State Shoot a couple of years ago who had adapted a re-chargeable Black and Decker screwdriver, which he had in a holster on his belt and which enabled him to change chokes quickly.

I have yet to see a truly long bird on a US layout, 45 yards at the old course at Deer Creek MI is longest I have seen. I shoot with skeet and skeet chokes with 1 Oz, or when I can get them 7/8th oz number 8's in a 32" Browning, and have no problem in breaking clays here. I don't change from stand to stand.

If you fiddle around you have to re-pattern the gun so you know what you are getting; each gun throws a different pattern with different chokes, shot sizes and brands of ammo. If you change a lot, you introduced MORE room for error. If you say constant, you know who is to blame

That's my opinion anyway.

Roger

Dear Roger,

I had hoped to make it clear in my Choke Chooser review that I particularly did not subscribe to the old saying about choke and shell not mattering if you aim right. Perhaps my writing could use an extra dose of clarity, or something was lost in the translation from American to British.

Estimating distance to the clay is always a difficulty, but that is certainly no flaw in the Choke Chooser. Distance estimation is an acquired talent, like anything else. Your friends will find it easier to estimate distance to a bird by estimating distance to some tree or other stationary object that the bird passes near, rather than to the moving bird itself. With practice, they will become quite accurate. Like anything else, the Choke Chooser is a tool and one must develop some skill in its use.

I certainly agree with you about my fellow countrymen's penchant for gadgetry and particularly choke changing. I am sure that many Americans did go overboard with their electric screw drivers. I don't know if any members of the American team used these electric choke changers when they won the gold medal at the FITASC World Championships last year, but if they had, I am sure that the less fortunate French, Belgian, German and English teams would have been hot to get them.

You must be an excellent shot to score well on long birds with 7/8 oz of #8s and only skeet chokes. 45 yards is a nice long target. I would certainly hesitate to shoot a 45 yard bird with open chokes and a training load of #8s if the result held any importance for me. No matter how well you think that you "know" your load and choke, knowing it isn't going to make up for simple physics. Sticking with one open choke and a light load may be less confusing for some, but it will not be more effective.

I once against Mick Howells, one of the UKs best, at the SCI fitasc-style Nationals at Orvis Sandanona. Mick had a set of American screw chokes installed in his Miroku as soon as he arrived over here (to teach at the Friar Tuck Inn in NY) and freely admitted to changing chokes all the time. I can also absolutely, positively guarantee you that he did not use 7/8 oz of #8s and open chokes on some of the longer shots. Like everyone else who was there to win, he used all that the law allowed. In this case, it was often 1 1/4 oz of nickel #7.5 through the fullest chokes he owned.

Another great British shooter, Smoker Smith, often claimed that he shot #8s for everything and used "no choke in one barrel and just a tiny bit in the other". Maybe that is what he thought, but he loaned his gun to a friend of mine who miked Smoker's chokes. Smoker was really shooting closer to a pair of Mods.

I am not saying that it is impossible to break long targets with less than optimal loads and chokes. Andy Duffy and I once spent some time happily experimenting with 50 yard crossers and #9s just to see if it could be done. Yes, you can do it, but you have to really learn to grove the target and center it perfectly. The slightest aiming error will let the bird escape. With #7.5s and full choke, it was easier to break that bird because we had a larger "effective" pattern. The wrong pellet and choke might do the job, but the right pellet and choke will allow for a little more pointing error. Since you only win or lose a shoot by one bird, it seems silly to give up any competitive advantage if you are there to win and not just contribute to the prizes.

Frankly, I believe that most sporting clays shooters underchoke, not overchoke. It is easy to make that mistake. For example, many new shooters will smoke a given bird with a certain

choke/shell combination and automatically conclude that they should "open up". They equate smoking a target with being too tight.

All shotgun patterns are Gaussian in nature, i.e. they follow a bell shaped curve. They are ALWAYS hotter in the center than at the fringe. It stands to reason that if your shot pattern is to be effective out to, say, a 20" diameter, that an adequate density at that 20" fringe will also entail a much more than adequate density at the center. If you center a bird, it SHOULD smoke. That is the only way that you know that you are getting the largest possible effective fringe. If a centered bird does not smoke, then you can be absolutely certain that you have not optimized the size of your fringe.

The Choke Chooser uses an 80% probability of a two pellet hit as its criteria for the outermost diameter of the effective pattern. This is certainly reasonable. To achieve this 80% chance of a two pellet hit at 20", the center of the pattern will have to be very much denser, perhaps a 95% chance of a four or five pellet strike (enough to smoke). If you open up the center of the pattern, then you will also lower the pellet count at the 20" fringe to a number below your acceptable minimum. The 80% two pellet standard will have move inward, decreasing the effective size of the pattern.

Numbers do not make shooters, but I have noticed that the good guys have all done their homework, whether they admit it or not.

Regards,
Bruce Buck
Shotgun Report's Technoid