

SKEET GUN BARREL LENGTHS

Hi Bruce,

To what do you attribute the move toward longer barrel lengths in skeet? I recall 26" used to be THE standard skeet length, and I think many of the old skeet records which were set with this "short" barrel probably still stand.

Now, it seems that 28" is the bare minimum, with many 30" and longer showing up at skeet shoots. I think I recall seeing you shoot your Fabrique Nationale at Thunder Mtn., and it looked like it was pretty long (a lot longer than 26").

Thanks,

Mike

Dear Mike,

You are absolutely right. 28" has been the standard O/U skeet barrel length for about 20 years. Before that it was 26". Now many skeeters have gone to 30" and I have even seen a few 32"s. Although it is more difficult to document, I'll bet that stock heights have also increased during that period. Furthermore, I'll stick my neck out and say that many of the skeet guns of today have more in common with the trap guns of 1970 than they do with the skeet guns of that year- chokes excluded. Skeet has become a "locked in" game like trap, not a reflex game.

As in any sport, the longer the game is played, the better the average participant becomes. Roger Bannister's four minute mile once stunned the world, now it would not win a good sized college meet. My guess is that as we became better skeet shooters (translation- more "grooved"), the speed and correctability advantage of short barrel guns became less important while consistency and pointability became more important. Longer barrels are easier to point and a bit more precise on longer shots.

Also, doubles have really entered the picture in the past ten years. Now a AAA shooter will spend as much time practicing his shoot-off doubles as he will anything else. The 100 straight in three of the gauges is just assumed. Since skeet, especially doubles, is a "come up in front" sustained lead game, 30" barrels are ideal for many shooters. The sustained lead technique keeps the shooter from rushing and the longer barrels increase precision.

Ballistically, there is no real difference between 26" and 30" barrels. The tiny velocity change (about 20 fps) is not material at skeet (or any other) distance. The longer sighting plane of the 30" barrels may, or may not, help the shooter depending on whether he looks down on top of his rib like a trap shooter or looks along it like a hunter. If one looks down on the rib and sees a trap shooter's "figure 8" with the beads, then the longer barrel will give the shooter a good reference as to just how hard his head is into the stock. If the shooter sets his gun up so that he looks flat along the rib (or if he has a stepped or humped rib) all barrel lengths will visually seem the same.

Obviously, all things being equal, the longer barrel will have a bit more weight up front. A good rule of thumb is about one ounce per inch of extra O/U barrel. The longer barrel will have a more weight forward bias, even more so if a tube set is being used.

While many skeeters enjoy a weight forward gun, most skeet shooters are really not that fussy about a gun's balance. I mean, once you stick a set of 12 ounce tubes into a 30" Krieghoff, "balance" starts to lose its meaning. The gun becomes more like a pig on a snow shovel. A gun set up like this is very difficult to shoot well from the low gun position, but wins championships when shot mounted. Skeet places a premium on horizontal movement where the follow through of the long, heavy barrel is apparent. Vertical correction is more difficult with a weight forward gun, but skeet seldom requires this unless the bird is slightly irregular or it is windy. This is why the grossly weight forward gun does so well for so many. This is one of the reasons that tube sets, not barrel sets, dominate the winner's circle.

Of course, none of this means that you cannot go out and win the Nationals with your 26" Browning four barrel set. It just means that there will be a lot of slack jawed people standing around when you do. You could probably do quite a business in hack saws.

Best regards,
Bruce Buck
Shotgun Report's Technoid