TUBE SET CONUNDRUM

Dear Technoid,

I shoot a Browning Special Skeet (O/U-28" barrels 8# gun weight). I shoot American Skeet, 12ga. only. I have added an 11 oz.mercury weight to the stock. I feel that this helps reduce felt recoil significantly and I shoot reasonably well (95.5 average). My concern is total gun weight and the change in balance when I have the gun tubed in the near future. I recently shot a tubed K-80 (.410), I broke 23, but really noticed the forward weight. What are your thoughts on balance and total weight?

P.S. A 12 ga. auto is not an option.

Thanks, Steve

Dear Steve,

Well, there it is. Which do you want? A tube set or a well balanced gun? The lightest tubes around are going to weigh over 10 ounces. My Briley Ultra Lights weighed in at slightly over 12 ounces in 30" barrels. Since American-style skeet is a pre-mounted game, adding that recoil reducer to the rear helped recoil (10% increase in gun weight equals 10% decrease in free recoil-the action of the mercury sloshing about really doesn't have much to do with it), but it didn't really change the way that your gun swings because it is in the back and the gun is pre-mounted. Adding the same 10-12 oz worth of tubes to the front of the gun is going to make a big difference in the feel.

If you want a gun with "normal" balance that can shoot all four gauges, you have no choice but to go with a four barrel set. There is no other way that I know of, short of getting exotic (more about that later).

As you no doubt know, most skeet hot shots have gone the tube route. They actually LIKE the monstrously nose heavy guns. They must work well too. Look at the records. They are just about all held by tube sets.

As to twelve gauge, the tube users shoot the tubed 20 in the 12 gauge event if they want to keep balance the same, or they shoot a separate 12 gauge gun (usually an autoloader) or they tough it out and just shoot the main gun without the tubes, even though the balance is very different. All three are compromises and all three have plusses and minuses.

If you get creative and throw money at the problem, there are some more exotic solutions. I wanted a sub-gauge tube set for sporting clays. You may be able to get away with a nose heavy gun at American skeet, but it would be a real handicap at sporting where there is much more vertical gun movement involved. I wanted a tube set that weighed what a normal gun did.

Look for some Technoid articles titled "The Answer". I describe what I did to build a tube set. Briefly, I found out what the tubes would weigh (12 oz) and had Briley backbore that much out of my barrels before fitting the tubes.

Voila! (Actually, it wasn't quite as simple as it sounds) Instant perfectly balanced tube set- but at the cost of destroying the 12 gauge capability of the gun. The gun is now strictly a tube carrier because those barrels are paper thin. Plenty of people (Krieghoff and Perazzi) make carrier barrels for tubes, but no one goes as far as I did to make a zero weight gain set. All the carrier barrels gain a good bit of weight. They often have to be balanced by an extra heavy 12 gauge barrel to make things the same. You still end up with a pig, but it is a lighter pig. My tube set was the first time that Briley had done a zero weight gain gun. Kolar refused the job.

Briley did great work and I am very pleased with the results. I used a 30" FN trench gun as my base gun for the project and had also purchased a second identical FN for use in 12 gauge. One thing to note, the FN Brownings have solid chokes. The Japanese Brownings use screw chokes. If you were to do this and chose to use a screw choke gun, they would probably have to sweat in the chokes permanently and then backbore. This would be an extra step and you would have to talk them into it. Remember, they don't like to do things that they haven't done before.

So, those are my thoughts and solutions to the balance/weight problem inherent in sub-gauge guns. Let me know what you come up with. I am always ready for a new project.

Regards,
Bruce Buck
Shotgun Report's Technoid