

BARREL LENGTH, SIGHT PICTURE AND STOCK HEIGHT

Dear Shotgun Report,

I just bought a new Beretta Essential, 12G, 26 1/2" barrel. I am 5'10" tall and have a 60" chest my questions are:

1- Is a 26 1/2 barrel to short? What other barrels do you recommend?

2- How do I lower the stock so that I do not see the entire rib only the front sight? I think that I sit too high on the gun so the stock should be lowered. I shoot mostly sporting clays. I also need the same adjustment on my Beretta 302 semi auto 12ga. Your report is the best. Keep writing.

BIG JOHN

Dear Big John,

It is always a bit difficult to analyze gun fit without actually seeing the person shoot. It is like trying to describe color to a blind man. Of course that never stopped me- it just makes it more interesting.

1) Barrel length: Sometimes it is best to seek advice BEFORE buying a gun, not after. The most popular barrel length for an O/U in sporting clays is 30". You see some 32" barrels, few 28" and almost no 26". That does not mean that 26" cannot do the job, it is just that since sporting clays has "grown up" in many areas of the country, it is no longer skeet in the woods and presents many longer shots. For most shooters, long barrels help them more on the long shots than they hurt them on the short ones. (Read twice- I think I got it right.) Ballistically there is no difference between long and short barrels. It is the length of the sighting plane that we are talking about. There is no reason that you cannot shoot excellent scores with a 26" barreled O/U, but it will certainly cause some comments when you start smoking those 50 yard teal. If your courses are short, you will be fine. You may start a trend.

2) Gun fit: I am always amazed when people mount a gun with a high stock and exclaim "Wow! I can see the whole rib." Well, of course you can! If you can see any part of the rib, you can see it all. You can't just see half a rib. It is like pregnancy-an all or nothing deal.

I like flat ribs and simply hate, loath and detest stepped ribs. Here is why. A stepped rib is designed to be looked right down so that no rib is visible- sort of like a rifle. Because a stepped rib, by definition, is higher at the rear than at the front, the gun is set to shoot high when the rib is viewed flat. I guess that some trap shooters like that, but most sporting clays shooters do not. With a stepped rib, if you put your head in a bit harder you lose EVERYTHING and are just looking into the back of the step. Sporting clays does not permit the same reliable head placement that pre-mounted skeet and trap encourage. Losing the rib in sporting clays can cost you the target.

I set my flat rib guns up in the standard trap configuration of a figure "8" or snowman formed by the front bead sitting just on top of the middle when I am cheeked in my normal way. This way, when I cheek a touch harder I do not "lose" the rib, the way I do with a stepped rib gun. With the figure "8" configuration I see "all" the rib., of course.

Naturally, you should never actually look at your rib when shooting. This is the sure and certain kiss of death in sporting. However, just because you don't look at the rib or beads, you most definitely "see" them in you subconscious, so they are important.

So, having waded through the above, just because you can see some rib when mounting the gun is not a bad thing at all and does not mean that your gun is too high. Of course, if you see too much rib and your gun's point of impact is too high, then naturally you will need to lower your stock.

Checking the point of impact is easy. Simply put in your tightest choke, stand 30 yards back from a piece of pattern paper, painted steel plate, old barn side or dirt bank with a good vertical surface. Put an aiming mark on the target. Start your gun in the sporting clays "ready" position and, always looking at the aiming mark never the barrel, raise and fire. Do this several times and you will quickly see where that barrel is shooting.

If your point of impact is too high, how do you lower a stock? Take it to your gunsmith unless you are pretty handy with a sanding block and refinisher. A good gunsmith will probably bend the stock down for you. This should avoid refinishing and save you some money. Do it yourselfers invariably sand the stock down and then refinish. Bending is easier, but you have to know what you are doing. If you go the sanding route, make sure that you use a sanding block or you will dish the top of the comb. Also be aware that you will have to restrain the walnut before you refinish. It seldom matches correctly. Better to bend.

Your 302 will be much easier. You can shim the stock down by small amounts by inserting a shim between the head of the stock and the receiver. Don't use too much or you will bend and bind the mainspring tube. Trust me, you do not want to do that. Jeff's Outfitters, Cape Girardeau MO sells inexpensive replacement stocks for the Beretta 300 series in case you screw the pooch.

There it is. More than you ever wanted to know from your garrulous guru of gun gear.

Regards,
Bruce Buck
Shotgun Reports Technoid