

Seven Steps to Shotgun Heaven
(Learn Quickly How to Break Clay Birds)
by Roland Leong
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I wrote the original version circa 1995. Someone remembered it and asked for a copy. In the process of finding it, I re-read and updated it. The changes/comments can be found in bold and italics. What is interesting is that there are no fundamental changes, but I just expanded some details.

Short version

1. Find a good teacher/coach.
2. Buy a gas operated autoloader.
3. Have the gun fitted.
4. Take instruction for a full day twice a year.
5. Shoot the one gun exclusively for one year.
6. If you decide to get serious, mortgage the farm and buy the best gun.
7. Have the gun fitted and shoot this gun for the rest of your life.

Long version

1. Find a good teacher/coach.
 - A. You may very well get lucky and find a fellow shooter who is a good teacher/coach, but often a fellow shooter's advice is at best, only part of the whole solution and at worst, totally wrong. You may be getting advice from someone who can't determine what his own mistakes are much less tell you what your mistakes are.
 - B. A good teacher/coach will have a teaching system that will break down the act of shooting into simple, easily memorized parts. Once the component parts are memorized, the parts when put together will result in good form without physical mistakes. Once the physical mistakes are minimized, or eliminated, then one can concentrate on the mental part of the game, the equally, if not more challenging part of the game. Vital teaching skills: Observation, Communication.
 - C. When you pay for instruction, you pay attention.
2. Buy a gas operated autoloader in 12 or 20 gauge
 - A. Relatively inexpensive. For about \$500.00 you can get started in the game without spending all the children's college tuition. Chances are it will last about 10,000-15,000 rounds before you'll need to replace parts, but that can be cheap. Buying cases of 12 or 20 gauge ammo when the discount store is having specials will cost just a little more than reloading, so reloading may not be cost effective. By not reloading, you won't need to chase the empties around the field. ***The price of gas operated autoloaders has increased to the \$1000 level. Inflation, shooters.***
 - B. Reduces felt recoil--less Kick, less fatigue, more broken birds.
3. Have the gun fitted.

Individuals are different. (Well, now that's a revelation.) The physical dimensions of a stock shotgun are made to fit the average person, but will not fit everyone. A properly fitted gun will meet the shoulder and face and present a consistent and repeatable sight picture that will allow the shooter to concentrate on the clay target, not the gun. A Try Gun is a shotgun with a fully adjustable stock that an experience fitter uses to find your proper stock dimensions. Afterwards the measurements are given to you and take the measurements to a gunsmith or stockbender and they modify your gunstock to fit. Sometimes wood is removed from the stock, sometimes the stock is steamed or heated, the stock placed in a vise and the stock is bent and cooled. This author prefers a gun with an adjustable cheekpiece that can be moved in at least 2 planes. No permanent modifications are necessary to the stock so if you gain or lose weight the gun can be adjusted without rebending the stock.

4. Take instruction for a full day twice a year.

You've selected your teacher/coach; you should have confidence in you teacher/coach. Invariably you will develop small irregularities in your style that will need to be corrected. Who better to correct you that the person who taught you. At worst he will correct some major flaws. At best, he will tell you that you are doing nothing wrong, but simply need to practice more. ***Don't feel you need to stay with your original coaching selection. There are plenty of ways to teach shooting. In fact I would recommend switching if you don't feel you are progressing as a shooter.***

5. Shoot the one gun exclusively for one year.

A whole year. Don't pick up another, and certainly don't buy another gun. Learn to shoot one gun for a whole year. Shoot a lot, shoot often. You want the gun to be part of you, too feel like part of your body, with movements that require no thought or pause. You don't need to think about your hand position when you pick up a pen to sign your name. You shouldn't have to think about anything other than the target when you shoot. Putting another variable, a different gun, at this time can be confusing and regressive. Learn to shoot one gun well before picking another. Then after the year if you decide you enjoy the game and want to continue, go to step 6.

6. If you decide to get serious, mortgage the farm and buy the best gun.

Rather than take little baby steps to the ultimate gun purchase, characterized by buying less expensive guns than what you really want, and using the excuse that you are getting something "just as good," and that the top of the line is an overpriced piece of European marketing. Stop kidding yourself, mortgage the farm, and buy the damm gun that you really want, whether that gun is a Belgium Browning, a Perazzi or a Kreighoff, or whatever. My first O/U after the Remington 11/87 gas gun was a used Beretta that I futzed with and massaged for more than a year trying to make it be everything I hoped. I kept telling myself that the K-80 was a ripoff and a old Remington design, and was an overpriced piece of Teutonic Black Forest marketing hype that wasn't worth the money. Yep, sure. I kept looking at the K-80's in the hands of the top skeet shooters at the World Championships, and marveled at how marketing can sell a fool anything.

Huh. Just about the second trip out of Robert Paxton's trailer, my knowing wife said to me, "Look, I know you want it, so why don't you just get it." So I did. And I've never regretted it. *The envy of seeing others possess and shoot O/Us is too mighty a force to resist. It is like gravity; inexorable and constant. It is futile to resist. Just get it. There are three reasons people leave gas operated semi-autos and go to over and unders, but the real reason is pride of ownership. They want a nice O/U just like the other shooters. Envy, Pride, they a couple of the 7 Deadly Sins, no? Here are the "rational" reasons for having an O/U:*

- A. They don't want to pick up their empty hulls. They have to because it is a requirement to clean up after oneself at most clubs, or they want the hulls for reloading.*
- B. They are tired of cleaning gas operated guns. Even though most gas operated guns can run for a long, long time without cleaning, most shooters are clean people, they clean their guns. Gas guns are more dirty than O/Us and require more attention.*
- C. They feel the need to have the option of having two chokes of their choice when shooting. The two barrels of an O/U can be choked differently, so if one has a barrel selector, one can pick the choke sequence to use at a target pair. Not so with a gas gun. On a target pair, your first and second shot will have the same choke.*

"Yeah, but RL, I can't take the recoil." No worries, mate. Most ammunition manufacturers make 1 oz. 12 gauge shells that are low recoil. Most experienced 12 gauge shooters use these shells or make their own. If you can't take the recoil of these 1 oz. loads, you may have to stick to a gas gun in 12 or even 20 gauge. This isn't a bad thing. After all that's what I recommended in #2. Just patronize a range where you don't have to pick up your empties, hope that the cost of ammo is within your budget, and use an IC or MOD choke and don't worry about chokes. Oh and find someone to clean your gun for you.

7. Have the gun fitted and shoot this gun for the rest of your life. You've got the ultimate shotgun, have it fitted and shoot this for the rest of your life. There is no higher plane. There is not a better gun than what you've got. It may take you some time, perhaps as long as a season to get used to this new gun, because it will weigh, point and swing differently than what you are familiar with. Be patient. Your scores may very well drop and then plateau at a lower level than when you had the cheap autoloader. Go back to your teacher/coach and work out your problems with him/her. You've bought the best and if there is any problem it's you, not the gun. OK? Next target please. PULL!