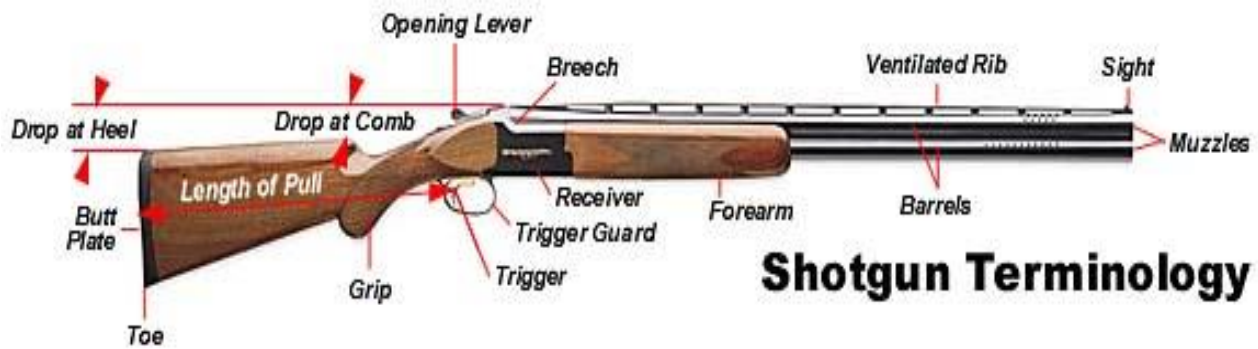


BUYING A SHOTGUN

So you have tried shooting, and decided that its time to invest some of your hard earned cash to purchase a shotgun, but where do you start? A good quality shotgun is a long term investment and properly maintained it can last you a lifetime of shooting. For this reason alone it is well worth taking your time, doing your research and choosing wisely.

Having been around a club for a period you will have undoubtedly heard a daunting array of terminology, but what does it mean and how does it apply to me buying a gun. I will try to address some of the terms and how they are applied in the shotgun context.



Shotgun Gauges:

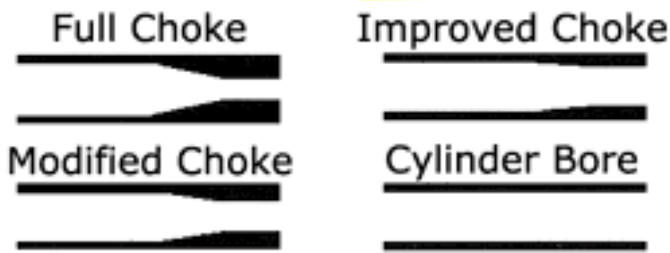
What is Gauge? Shotguns are generally defined by gauge for example 12 Ga or 20 Ga, this quite simply means that in the case of 12 Ga a lead ball 1/12th of a pound would pass down the barrel or in the case of a 20 Ga a ball 1/20th of a pound. The exception to this rule is 410 Gauge which is based solely on its calibre 0.410”.

The obvious choice for Australian shooting is the 12 Ga. Using appropriate ammunition the 12 Ga will shoot every thing from clay targets on the range to geese on wetlands. 12 Ga ammunition is relatively cheap compared to other calibres and is the maximum calibre that is permissible on an accredited clay target range.



Chokes:

The term “Choke” refers to the constriction of the barrel at the muzzle end. Choke constriction will vary between shooting disciplines. As a rule of thumb the tighter the choke the more dense the pattern and the longer the range.



Types of Shotguns:

What are the differences between a “Trap” gun, “Skeet” gun and “Field/Sporting” gun? On the range a shooter will see many different shotguns and to the beginner all will look the same, however subtle differences will define the purpose of the particular shot gun.

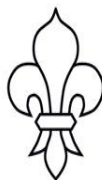
The trap gun is generally longer and heavier than a skeet or sporting gun. In trap the shooter addresses a rising target; the gun is therefore designed with a slightly higher point of impact. Trap guns will normally have longer barrels 30-32” being the norm. A trap gun will often have fixed chokes designed to shoot a retreating target with a half or modified choke in the bottom barrel and full choke on top barrel.

A skeet gun is designed to shoot point of aim, it requires the shooter to swing through the target. A skeet gun generally has a barrel length between 24 and 28” and is lighter than a trap gun.

In sporting and field shooting the gun is designed to be brought to the shoulder fast and efficiently allowing the eye to quickly align with the barrel. Sporting guns will shoot point of aim, are light and are designed to be easily carried.

Steel Proof

If you’re intending to use your gun for more than just clays its important to ensure the barrels are “steel proofed”. Nothing will destroy the barrels of a gun quicker than using steel shot in an un-proofed barrel. Steel proofing is indicated by the use of a “Fleur De Lys” stamp.



What's Right for You?

The answer to this question lies in the type of shooting you are going to do. If you are planning to shoot on the range with an occasional trip into the wetlands, a trap gun with chokes may be the optimal choice or if shooting in the bush with the odd range day to hone your skills a field or sporting gun may be appropriate. Any gun choice is a compromise between the two. My best tip for this is to grab a cup of coffee and talk to an experienced shooter as to what will best suit your needs.

What Matters:

Singularly the most important factor when buying your gun is the "Gun Fit". People come in all shapes and sizes and so do guns. A shotgun built for a tall man is not going to be a good fit for a small lady. Firstly we will talk about length of pull, this is the distance from the centre of the trigger to the butt pad of the gun. This measurement can vary significantly between guns and will also vary with the type of discipline you intend to shoot. A simple rule of thumb here is that with your gun mounted comfortably there should be between 4 - 8cm between your nose and the base of your thumb.

Drop at the comb refers to the height difference between the top of the comb on the stock and the line of sight along the barrel. This is again a very individual measurement. When mounting a gun your eye should come into line with the barrel with moderate cheek pressure on the comb, the front bead and centre bead if fitted should form a loose figure of 8 with your eye looking directly along the barrel rib.



Picture represents a good example of correct eye alignment.

What is an adjustable comb and do I need one?

An adjustable comb is fitted to the stock of the gun to allow easy adjustment of the shooter's eye position to correct align the eye both laterally and vertically with the rib of the gun. This level of precise mounting is not required on a field gun but in the target shooting it will aid the shooter in replicating his mount and ensuring consistent hits.

Cast:

Shotguns are generally manufactured in both right and left hand configuration, a right hand gun is cast off (angle on butt) to suit the right hand shooter and a left hand gun is cast on. Cast of the gun ensures a comfortable and consistent gun mount. Shooting a gun which is incorrectly cast can lead to greater discomfort whilst shooting and frustrations with lost targets.



Pitch:

Pitch is the angle of the gun butt in relationship to the line of the barrel. Pitch ensures even distribution of the gun recoil and can affect both the comfort of the shooter and point of impact for the pattern.

Balance:

A shotgun should feel good in the hand and swing smoothly both to the left and right. Gun balance affects the swing, speed and control of the gun. A poorly balanced gun will feel awkward to swing and will create a pattern of inconsistency in the shooter. The centre of balance for the gun should be located approximately at the hinge pin of the gun.

Cost:

Last and by no means least is “How much will my gun cost?” Shotguns are an item where you do get what you pay for. There is a myriad of over and under shotguns on the market today and prices range from the cheap Turkish made field guns to the very expensive custom made Italian guns. A cheaper gun will lack the refinements of the more expensive gun, refinements which are not always obvious. The poorly constructed gun will recoil much more harshly than a quality firearm and will induce shooter fatigue much sooner which will subsequently reduce your capacity to compete.

Once again the real question here is what type of shooting am I going to do? If your intention is to have a gun which you can “Throw in the ute” to shoot game a lighter cheaper gun may suffice. A look along the gun racks at your club on competition day will be a certain indicator of what’s a good choice in gun. Don’t be afraid to ask a shooter about his or her gun, most willing offer their experiences, both pros and cons. Many will offer you the opportunity to feel/ mount their gun. Take to the opportunity and always treat the gun with respect. Take note of how it feels, does it come easily to my eye and is the butt pad comfortable?

Major Brands and Approximate New Costs:

Here are a couple of new gun prices (2015) and are based on current information and best guesstimates.

Beretta (Silver Pigeon) - \$2500

Miroku Model 70 - \$1600

Browning GP Trap - \$3200

Perazzi MX8 Trap - \$9900

Beretta DT 11 - \$9300

When buying your gun consider, the quality (how long do I want to own this for), the servicing and repair (who can fix this how much will it cost), dealer support and re-sale value. A second hand firearm may well be a worthwhile option, again do your research. Dealer websites and Firearm sites like usedguns.com can provide a wealth of information as too can wise counsel by your friendly club members.

The Law:

As a minimum to purchase a firearm in the Northern Territory you will need a Category A firearms licence, an approved secure storage and a "Purchase Permit". All this information can be readily sourced via the NT Police Firearms website.

<http://www.pfes.nt.gov.au>

Resources:

www.usedguns.com.au

www.berettaaustralia.com.au

www.cleaverfirearms.com

www.adelaidegunshop.com.au