



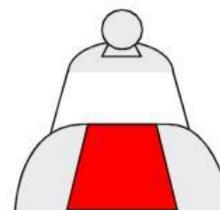
All of the volunteer instructors here at VOMTC have a wonderful time working with new and novice shooters. Our mission is to help spread the affinity we all feel for the shooting sports through education, ensuring all safety rules are followed and on going support as the novice shooters gain experience. We often find that we not only make prospective club members, we make safe shooters who become as interested as we are in our shared sport.

With so many new shooters coming out on public days, and who in many cases are bitten hard by the shooting sports bug, we are asked more and often than not about how to buy a shotgun. While on face that seems like a simple question there is much more to it than some might think, and not all of it involves the required paperwork.

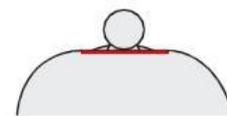
The one thing that must be stressed, when shopping for a shotgun, above all else is **proper fit**. A gun that does not fit the shooter is one that will not break targets for the shooter. There are many shooters who have semi-custom or even fully customized guns that can cost thousands of dollars, sometimes tens of thousands. Others, like myself, use essentially off the shelf guns with some minor modifications. For me I always have to have a bit of length added to the stock using recoil pads and spacers. Many shooters can and do shoot guns with great success that are straight out of the box. I've heard our club president, Charlie Marino, say more than once that a basic field or hunting gun will get the job done on clay targets just as well as a full on custom trap or sporting clays gun so long as it fits the shooter, and the shooter does their part.

The quickest way to see if a gun fits you or not is to have in mind a proper setup. Stand as you would on the firing line; feet at or about shoulder width apart, weight on your front foot and leaning forward slightly from your waist. Pick up the gun, making sure first that there are no shells in it, and bring the stock to your shoulder with the gun held level to the floor, just as you would if you were shooting. Then drop your cheek naturally to the stock. If the stock is a proper length for you the tip of your nose will be at or about two finger widths away from the knuckle on your thumb that is wrapped over the grip on the stock.

If you see the image on the far right, then the gun is a pretty good fit for you as is. If your thumb is touching your thumb then the stock is likely too short for you, and you'll probably see the image on the near right. In that case the gun would likely shoot very high and, worse, beat your nose up. If the bead is hidden below the top of the receiver when you have the gun shouldered then the stock may well be too long and would shoot very low.

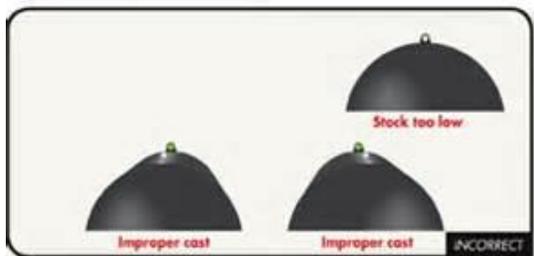


Looking over the bead



Correct bead alignment

Some shotguns will have two beads on top of the barrel; one about halfway between the receiver and the muzzle and the other at the muzzle. The bead in the middle is called, remarkably enough, a mid bead and it's purpose is to help you to align the bead at the muzzle in a straight line back to your eyes.



In the illustration to the left we can see how a two bead set up should look when we have the gun shouldered. At the top of the illustration is the correct view with the front, green colored, bead resting on top of the smaller, white colored mid bead. I visualize this with students by telling them they want to see an upside down snowman; the big part on top and the little part on the bottom.

In the lower portion of the illustration we can see three incorrect views. With the stock too low all we can see is the mid bead. If we see that we can assume the gun is going to shoot very low for us. The other two examples are of alignment errors caused by our eye being out of line with the barrel. Many shooters solve for this by having a gun with the top line of the stock adjustable for both vertical and horizontal. Getting that adjustable piece dialed in gives the shooter an exact and repeatable setup every time they put the stock to their shoulder.

The goal of the exercise I outlined above, and the illustrations, is to make sure the gun can be shouldered comfortably and that your head can drop into the correct position on the stock every time. Don't be afraid to shoulder several different guns from different makers and shoulder each one several times. No two are alike and each will give you different sensations as you shoulder them. It's also a good idea to evaluate guns wearing what you wear when shooting. If you wear a vest with a recoil pad, for instance, and you try the gun in shirtsleeves your results may not be what you expect. When it comes to shotguns and fit, minor changes can make major differences.

Aside from fit the next most important quality to consider is what type of gun to buy. Budget conscious shooters who may own only one gun that will serve several purposes will have the most to consider, but in the end it becomes more a matter of personal preference than anything else. If you are recoil sensitive your best choice may be a gas operated semi-automatic such as from Beretta, Remington, Mossberg or CZ, to name a few. Recoil, or inertia operated semi-autos such as those made by Benelli and the venerable Browning A-5 will actually give a bit more felt recoil. Pump guns will deliver even more energy back to the shooter and break open guns, with their fixed breech, deliver more still. Remember also that the lighter the weight of the gun the more recoil you will feel.

A 12 gauge will give you the most options on ammunition and I recommend that path. A 20 gauge will deliver a bit less recoil but still provide a good sized payload downrange to the bird, but ammunition selection can be limited. I urge novice shooters to stay away from the sub gauges, 28 and .410, as with their smaller payloads they are often better served in the hands of experts when it comes to the clay games. A 12 gauge, properly shouldered and that fits well will not beat you up so long as you keep mounting the gun correctly every time.

Remember, that there are NRA Certified Instructors at trap six and seven on every public day who can help you improve your skills and help you discover your personal solution.



See you again soon with another shooting tip, but in the meantime, remember to keep those muzzles pointed to the ground when not on the firing line, and keep those actions open whenever you are not actually shooting.

Safety first, foremost and always! -- Frank

