



To Bead, Or Not To Bead

As an instructor, and someone who has been involved in the shooting sports for over 40 years, I have seen and heard a lot of information about guns and how to use them. Some of it is good and some of it is not so good. This is particularly true when it comes to the Internet where, it seems, everyone is an expert on whatever the subject at hand is.

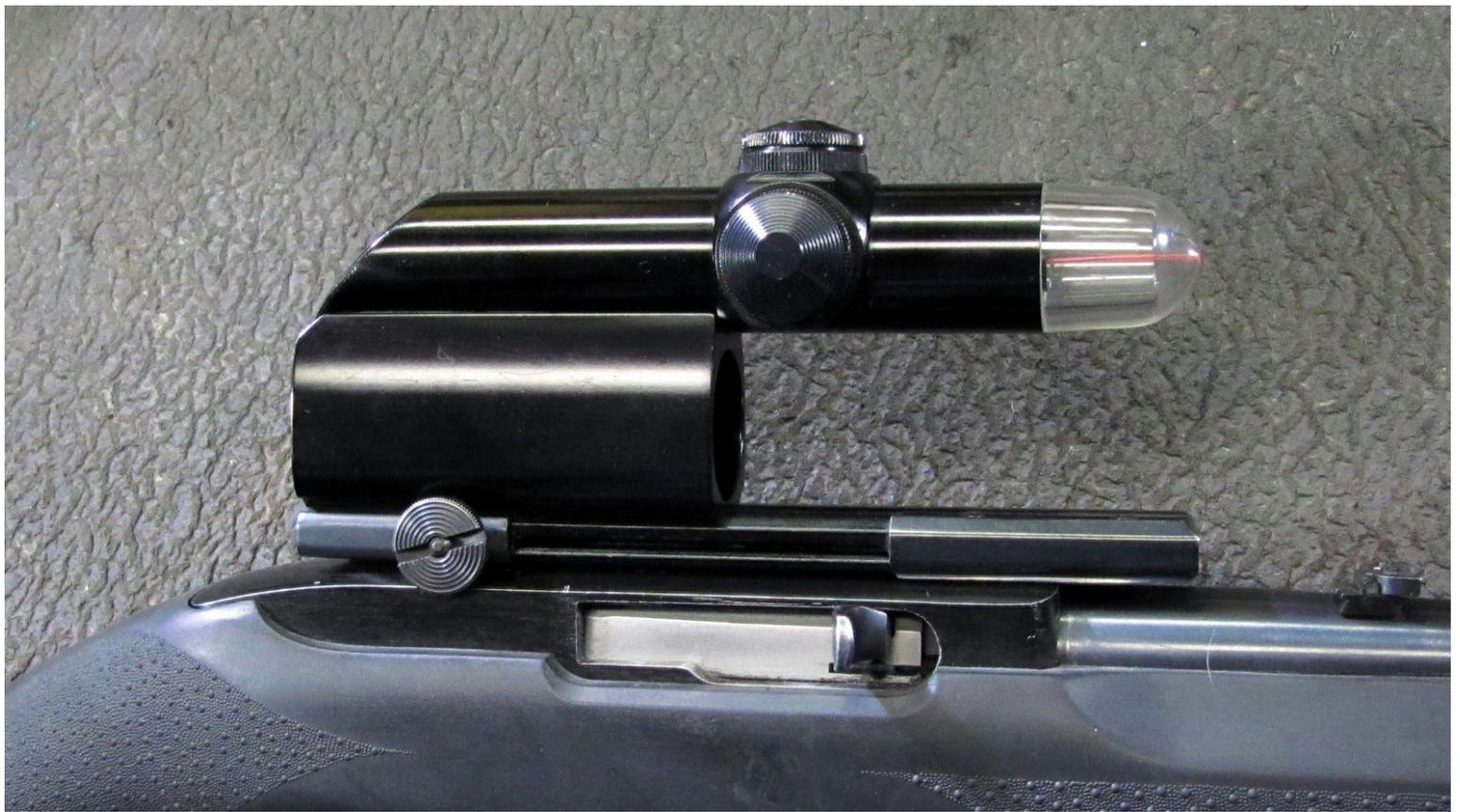
One of the areas of contention when it comes to shotguns, and shotgun sports, is around what type of sights to put on a gun. Just the other day I saw a post in an Internet firearm group from someone asking, "I'm not really feeling the bead sight, what sight should I get?" This question was asked by someone with exactly zero experience on shotguns and who had just bought their first, but it got me to thinking that there are many new or newer shooters that might be asking themselves the same thing. As shotguns are exceptionally versatile tools that can be used across a range of applications the right choice can be wholly different. And while rifle type sights, or even some type of optic, may be effective on a shotgun used for defensive purposes, for sport shooting, on clays or on game birds in flight, they simply do not get the job done in my experience.

I've seen new shooters show up on a trap or skeet field with ghost ring and blade sights, like these.



These are very popular on shotguns used for defensive purposes or for shooting in combat or “3 gun” competitions. They excel at delivering precisely aimed fire on fixed targets at short to intermediate distances, which sounds kind of like a rifle doesn’t it? Shooters trying these on clay targets almost always walk away shaking their heads not understanding how they could miss so many.

Likewise optical sights are very popular on shotguns used for defensive purposes. I can’t count the number of people who’ve mounted “red dot” optical sights, which are used heavily by the military on carbines and rifles, to their shotguns. These shooters too never seem to achieve the results they think they should given their ultra-modern equipment. In fact, the modern red dot sight has it’s genesis in the unit pictured at left; the Weaver Qwik Point from the early 1970’s.



It was originally designed and marketed as a sight for shotgunners; the shooter would sight through the lower half and see a red dot in the center of their field of view projected from a fiber optic rod in the upper half. While it worked optically for many shotgunners it put the bead so far over the bore line, that it was ineffective even though the bead could be adjusted for windage and elevation. After a few years it was realized that it was a much better tool for rifles and the red dot has largely lived in that world ever since.

Sporting shotguns are designed with a bead front sight above the muzzle, and sometimes with a second bead about halfway down the barrel to aid alignment. The rear sight is your eye, either right or left depending on which shoulder you mount the gun to. We've discussed how to sight with the bead and align a mid-bead [in a past article](#), so we won't cover that ground again here. The idea, unchanged through more than three centuries of shotgunning, is that you get your eye looking straight down the bore line, through the bead to the target. The bead is not meant so much for aiming as it is for a visual reference. Your eyes are focused on the target and so long as they remain on the bore line looking through the bead your chances of hitting the target are very good. That said, I'm also aware of more than a few really good shooters who've actually removed the bead from their gun as they find it unnecessary and a distraction. Their setup is so consistent and correct that they find they don't need the visual cue of the bead.

So now that we've determined that, for shooting clays and game birds moving through the air that a bead sight is really the best solution, then what bead is best? There are many, many types out there. For instance, I own guns with large white beads, others with small metal

beads, and others with both front and mid beads and all shoot equally well for me. Other shooters prefer large fiber optic beads which glow a bright color in the sunlight. I find those to be distracting but others have great results with them. At the end of the day, I think the real answer is the bead that is on the gun that best fits you is the best bead for you. Anything after that is largely cosmetic, in my experience. Remember the old adage that it's not the gun that makes the score, it's the shooter behind the gun.

But what about a new or novice shooter? Interestingly there is one sight, which some might term a gimmick, which I find an excellent training tool and heartily endorse. It is the Easy Hit sight from Champion, pictured here.



This sight is designed with either a red or green fiber optic rod about 2 millimeters in diameter so it is very unobtrusive. The rod ends inside a tunnel that is closest to the shooter. It's function is simple; if the shooter does not keep their head in the correct position on the stock they cannot see the bead. Since we know that our chances of hitting the target reduce dramatically without our face firmly on the stock, this sight gives the instant visual feedback a student can use to be successful quickly. I use this sight on two of my own guns that I keep for student use. Since it uses double sided tape to mount, the installation is not permanent and it can be removed if desired as the shooter progresses in skill. I find that when I am having trouble myself keeping my head on the gun, and we all do from time to time, that shooting a game or two with this sight gets me back to where I need to be.

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

