



Talbot on target!

5-Stand

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I've finally lived up to my name and got on target. Well almost, anyway. This month I went back to my clay target roots to shoot 5-Stand and while I didn't take out first place, I was happy and surprised with my performance.

The 5-Stand discipline is a great variation of sporting clays and competitions can be held in much smaller areas than traditional sporting clay courses. It uses five shooting stands or stations that are lined up in a straight line close to each other. The stands are surrounded by six to eight numbered traps, which throw targets in every possible direction, including from behind, towers, vertical shots and rabbits, with all targets generally converging in an area in front of the stands.

Competitors rotate through the five stands and receive an identical mix of targets in a random order, with single and double targets presented. This provides a real test of a shooter's ability to read targets quickly and shoot them before they veer beyond the effective range of a shotgun.

All 5-Stand courses can be as easy or as devious as the course-setter decides. One round comprises 25 targets, and because the competition is compact and relatively quick to shoot, it can be tempting to shoot five or six rounds in a day. Lots of clubs that don't have much space can still run effective competitions with a wide and interesting variety of targets.

Getting to a competition

I've been keeping my eye out for a local 5-Stand competition for a while. I find following the SSAA South Australia Facebook page is a good way to maintain tabs on competitions that are happening around me and if you are wanting to stay in the loop, I'd recommend following your state SSAA branch on social media as well.

This is how I discovered that despite their small shotgun range SSAA Para had

started holding 5-Stand competitions. That was all the invitation I needed and knowing my colleague Gemma Dunn is one of the best shotgun shooters going around, I invited her along as well.

Chokes

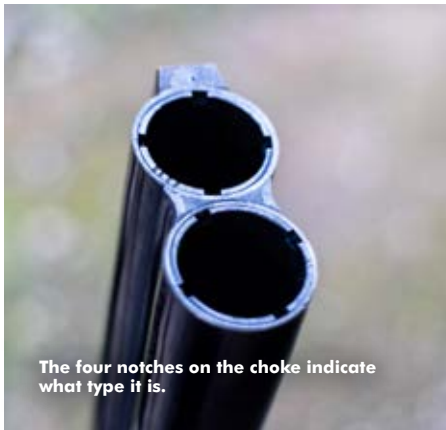
If rifle shooters spend all their time thinking about bullet speeds, shotgun shooters ponder their patterns. With each shot at a clay target, hundreds of pellets are sent into the air and at about 30 metres they are spread out to be roughly the size of a beach ball. It only takes about eight of those tiny pellets to break a clay but depending on your luck it might be a few more or less.

The size of the pellets and amount of powder is pretty well standardised across clay target competitions these days which basically boils down to cartridges with 28 grams and size 7½ pellets. However, the spread of pellets can still be manipulated quite a bit by using different chokes, which are the things you see screwed into the end of shotgun barrels. More spread might always sound better, but the faster your pellets spread, the less effective your pattern will be the further out it travels. A pattern that doesn't spread out as fast will be more effective against targets further away.

This means it becomes a balancing act with how far away the targets will be and how quickly you plan on shooting them. For example, if your 5-Stand course is very small and all the clays are close by, you probably want your pattern to spread out quickly because holes in the pattern that start appearing at 40m or 50m out won't be an issue.



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While there is still plenty of personal preference, a good general rule is your second barrel should be a bit tighter than your first barrel because clays will typically be moving further away from you (with the exception of incomers) and so you'll want your pattern to be a bit tighter.

Most shotguns, even the cheap ones, will typically come with a few different chokes. Depending on the brand and where your shotgun was made the choke sizes can go by different names though. Some use fractions (like $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$), some use the terms like cylinder, modified and full, while others will just use a colour. Your best bet is to use the manual that came with your shotgun or look up a chart online. Putting chokes in and taking them out is simple and just requires a small tool that will come with your chokes.

For my chokes I went with $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ which is pretty standard and as long as your chokes aren't one extreme or the other, they will probably play second fiddle to your skill level and gun fit, so don't lose

too much sleep over your chokes (because you'll end up choking in competition). However, if you want to investigate your pattern further ask your local club about using a pattern board. Shooting a blank board will let you see your pattern and how it looks at different distances.

Shooting glasses

Not only are shooting glasses used for safety, but they can make you shoot better. The first thing you will notice is that shooters often wear different coloured lenses. Different colours can be useful in various weather conditions and really makes the targets pop out. Whereas yellow is better in a challenging setting like rain or harsh shadows. And my \$20 servo sunnies are really good at just making everything darker, so I started with purple shooting glasses and switched to yellow between rounds because the sun had come out and the clays were darting in and out of shadows.



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Gemma also informed me that it's important to give your eyes time to adjust to the glasses. So, don't slip them on just as you are about to step into the cage and shoot, like I did. Put them on at least a few minutes before your round starts.

Also, an extra word of warning - yellow lenses can fatigue your eyes, so that is something to keep in mind when you are deliberating between lenses. And if you are really unsure, I would recommend just trying out clear and seeing how it goes. You can always test a different colour later. Everyone has different eyes, after all.

Competition

As you might remember from the last time I shot clay targets, the shotgun section at SSAA Para marches to the beat of its own drum and so unlike the regular 25 target rounds, we shot two rounds of 15. This meant we shot a single target followed by a pair in each of the five stands before moving to the next stand. The single target allowed the use of both barrels while the pair was either simultaneous (both clays came out at once) or on report (the second clay is released as soon as you pull the trigger for the first time).

For the first round I used the club gun which was a Lanber Armas before switching over to a much more expensive Mk10 Miroku Sporter. The engraving was a little better on the Miroku, but I didn't notice much difference in how they shot, except I did technically shoot better with

the Lanber, notching 11/15 in the first round and 9/15 in the second series.

My choke selection seemed fine, but since Para is quite a small range, some chokes with more spread may have been put to good use. Gemma and I discussed doing this but we were also used to how our patterns were performing and so decided to stick with what we had. Also, by the time we shot the first round the stands were brought back so we would be shooting from further away anyway. This is a little unusual for 5-Stand but certainly kept us on our toes.

A particularly difficult target was a simultaneous pair that came from a tower overhead. In my mind I thought for a split second about which target I should shoot first. Which as most shotgun shooters know is all the time you need to completely miss both targets, which I did. But while that simultaneous pair gave me trouble, I did manage to shoot a pair of concurrent rabbit targets with one shot, which is always a bonus and a good way to conserve ammunition.

Leading

Shooting where the clay is going to be, is the key to clay target shooting. The idea is to make your pattern intersect with the clay target. The clay will be dropping, going left or right, or rising which means you need to lead your shot.

The main method I use is to identify the target, start tracking it, bring the gun up, catch up to it, overtake it and finally >

What else can I shoot with?



Young Sean makes easy work of the clays with his .410.



Gemma cleans up a rolling rabbit clay target.



Gun shouldered and ready to shoot.

It is the 12-gauge shotguns that gain most of the spotlight and probably rightly so, but every now and again you'll see a .410 shotgun at a competition. The slightly smaller shotgun offers less recoil than a 12-gauge and is often used by juniors. Junior shooter Sean used his grandfather's .410 to good effect during the competition.

Seeing firearms like the .410 is one of the things I like most about local shooting competitions. If it works for you, then go for it. And that's just what a Practical shooter did who came by the 5-Stand competition to put in a little practice for his upcoming Practical shotgun competition.

Many Practical shooters use shorter barrelled shotguns because they need to move around stages with them and so he employed his 20" Churchill throughout the competition and despite giving up 8-10" in barrel length to the rest of us, he more than held his own.

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pull the trigger. I find that is the simplest and most consistent strategy and it makes a second shot more likely to hit as well. It also lends itself to shooting more on instinct and gives me less opportunity to overthink.

When the competition had finished and the scores were tallied, I was surprised to see I had managed to snag second place in the field of 20-something shooters. My 20/30 just tipped out the rest who all followed closely behind. It was a reasonably tough course which didn't give shooters much time to render their eyes in, something which clearly worked to my advantage. While there weren't any trophies on offer, it's always nice to receive a little recognition for your efforts.

Conclusion

A huge thank you to the shotgun shooters at SSAA Para, I had a great time and the hospitality was world-class. The fire kept us warm despite the cold conditions. If you are interested in shotgun shooting 5-Stand is a great way to start or fun to spice up trench shooting. Even rifle and handgun shooters should take some time out to see why breaking some clays is so enjoyable.



It's easy to learn and a great social outing – what more could you ask for?

The social outing was interrupted with shooting sometimes.

I'll be back next month shooting one of the most classic and popular SSAA disciplines that involves a bench and a rest. ●

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