



Talbot on target! Field Shotgun

Communications Officer Sam Talbot continues his quest to shoot the SSAA disciplines, this month setting his sights on Field Shotgun.



Howdy partner: Sam and Wildlife Officer Matt Godson.

This month I've put the rifle away in favour of a shotgun. Unlike the patience and steadiness essential for rifle shooting, shotgun requires sharp reflexes and instinctual spatial awareness. Instead of chasing the pinpoint accuracy of a tiny bullseye, success in Field Shotgun is much more easily seen and comes down to whether the clay target explodes into pieces or remains intact, slowly drifting to the ground in an almost mocking fashion.

SSAA Field Shotgun is a variant of Sporting Clays and is one of the easiest disciplines to learn and understand. Competitions throughout Australia are always popular and once people get a taste for it, they tend to be hooked. Unlike many other shooting disciplines, Field Shotgun is constantly changing with new courses and new targets being designed for each competition. The format also lends itself to being highly sociable, so shooters can enjoy a chat and laugh between rounds.

What is Field Shotgun?

As the name suggests, this discipline requires competitors to use any smooth-bore shotgun up to 12-gauge in order to shoot clay targets. Shooters overwhelmingly use 12-gauge but smaller people can have plenty of success with .410 shotguns which tend not to 'kick' as much. The targets are small discs made of clay which are thrown through the air, frisbee-like, by machines called 'traps'.

Competitions are usually held in a natural bushland setting, with the traps throwing clay targets to simulate a variety of hunting game including ducks, quail, pheasants and even rabbits. Traps can be placed just about anywhere, including concealed by bushes or on top of towers with the clay

often only visible for part of its flight. Some targets will be slow-moving and simple while others can be extremely challenging, resulting in a rewarding discipline for shooters.

To indicate they're ready, shooters stand in a shooting cage and call "pull", prompting the trap (or someone to press a button) to throw the clay. Both barrels of the shotgun are utilised and two shots may be taken at a single target, if the shooter misses with their first shot. Two clay targets can also be thrown at once, requiring the shooter to use one barrel on each target.

Ammunition

As for the ammo, the shot size must be no larger than number 6 for lead or steel and the shot load must not be more than 32 grams (1 1/8 ounces). Most shooters will generally opt for 28 grams or even 24. Some competitions, including Olympic-level clay target events, only allow 28 or 24 grams so there's nothing wrong with using these cartridges - and your shoulder might thank you if you're a beginner.

I used 28 gram Winchester AA Super Sport cartridges with 7 1/2 size shot for both my competitions. The labelling on shotgun cartridge boxes, which come in packs of 25, is easy to interpret so you can't really go wrong.

Extra gear

A shooting jacket is highly recommended, not only to provide extra padding for your shoulder but to hold your cartridges. 50 (one packet of cartridges in each pocket) is



Expert eye: Sam gets help from John Ward who recently won a gold medal, shooting a perfect 25/25.



Look up: Targeting a clay launched from the tower behind the cage.

a fairly normal amount to carry for a round of shooting.

Fortunately I already own a shooting jacket and while a jacket is preferred, it's not the end of the world if you don't have one. For beginners I'd recommend a jumper or jacket for added shoulder padding and some deep pockets.

Shooting glasses can also be useful, especially for the colour blind, since orange targets on green bushland is a common occurrence in Field Shotgun. My normal sunglasses did enough to reduce glare and protect my eyes but at higher levels a dedicated pair of shooting glasses would be essential.

Competition No.1

The Field Shotgun competition at SSAA Para is a hybrid of Sporting Clays and 5-stand disciplines. The course at Para is quite small compared to other ranges I've attended and there's only one stand which is encircled by a variety of traps. Pairs of



Sam used 28 gram Winchester cartridges.

shooters take turns stepping in and out of the shooting cage, shooting at the same target in turn. The rounds consisted of 10 targets which is a bit unusual - rounds of 25 targets are more standard - but over the three rounds it worked out to be a reasonable amount of shooting, especially as it was a social competition.

In the first round all the targets were singles so we were able to take two shots (both barrels) at each target if necessary. During the second and third round, more and more pairs of targets were introduced,

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meaning we only had one shot at each while also trying to spot the second target after shooting the first.

Typically, Field Shotgun is shot off-the-shoulder, meaning the shooter starts with the butt of the shotgun around chest height before lifting it to the shoulder once the target is sighted. However, being a bit rusty, I shot some of the targets with the shotgun already on my shoulder. Beginners and juniors are generally permitted to shoot on-the-shoulder as it allows them to ensure the gun is properly positioned and helps reduce the amount of kick they receive if the gun is mispositioned. Ideally though,

everyone transitions to shooting off-the-shoulder since it allows for much greater field of vision and it more closely resembles shooting in the field - plus it's in the rules!

During competition the faster-moving targets gave me most trouble. Giving targets the correct amount of lead in Field Shotgun is probably the most challenging aspect of the discipline. Unlike in rifle shooting where the target is stationary, you must think about where the target is going to be by the time your shot arrives - shoot where the target is going to be, not where it is.

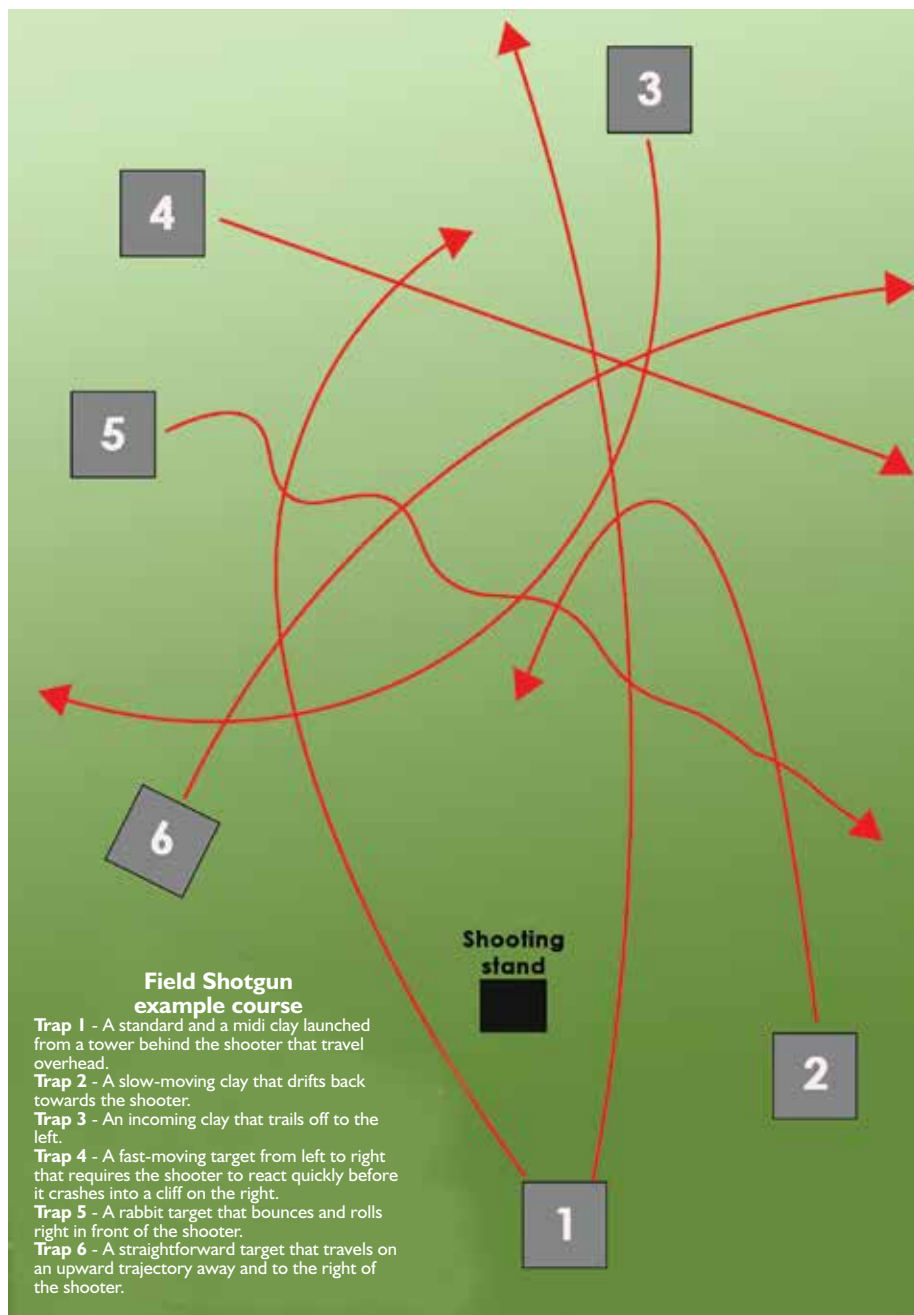
The faster and further away a target

is, the more lead you'll have to give it. Calculating where the target will be in a split second takes experience and proper technique. This is why shooters should rely on their eyes to follow the target and trust their shotgun is following accordingly. There simply isn't enough time to 'think' about it, instead shooters need to trust their brain has made the right calculation.

In the end I had a pretty good day, managing to shoot 20/30 targets which is just under par for the course compared to regular competitors. In the first two rounds I shot 8/10 and 7/10 respectively, before only managing a 5/10 on the last round. Since the second and third rounds utilised more pairs I only had one shot instead of two at each target, which explains why my scores got a little worse.

Shooting a pair

There are two different ways a pair of clay targets can be thrown - On Report and Simultaneous. A pair of clays On Report means the second clay is thrown as soon as the first shot is taken. This works the same



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way as a single target with the shooter calling “pull” and a clay being released. However, once the first shot is taken a second clay is released (from the same or any other trap, depending on how the round is set up) which the shooter must then shoot at whether they hit the first clay or not.

A Simultaneous pair means two clays are thrown at the same time. For example, a slow-moving clay from the left and a fast-moving from the right could be thrown, or a clay from overhead could slowly drift down as another comes directly towards the shooter, quickly vanishing. Simultaneous pairs require the shooter to decide which target they’ll shoot first, to give themselves enough time to try and break the other clay before it hits the ground or disappears.

Don’t worry if this sounds confusing, it’s much simpler when you’re out there. You also have the benefit of seeing other people shoot the targets before you since everyone shoots at the same targets. Plus, the order and type of clays you’ll be shooting are written down in front of the shooting stand.

Trickiest target

The most difficult target for me was a midi clay that came from a small tower about 20m behind the shooting cage. The clay flew overhead from the tower, eventually hitting the ground about 50m in front of the cage.

It wasn’t until the end of the day I realised I was shooting over the top of it and needed to be aiming much lower. Although it didn’t appear to be dropping from where I was shooting (directly beneath), the clay was falling quite sharply along its entire trajectory after it left the tower. This meant I should be aiming below the clay instead of at it.

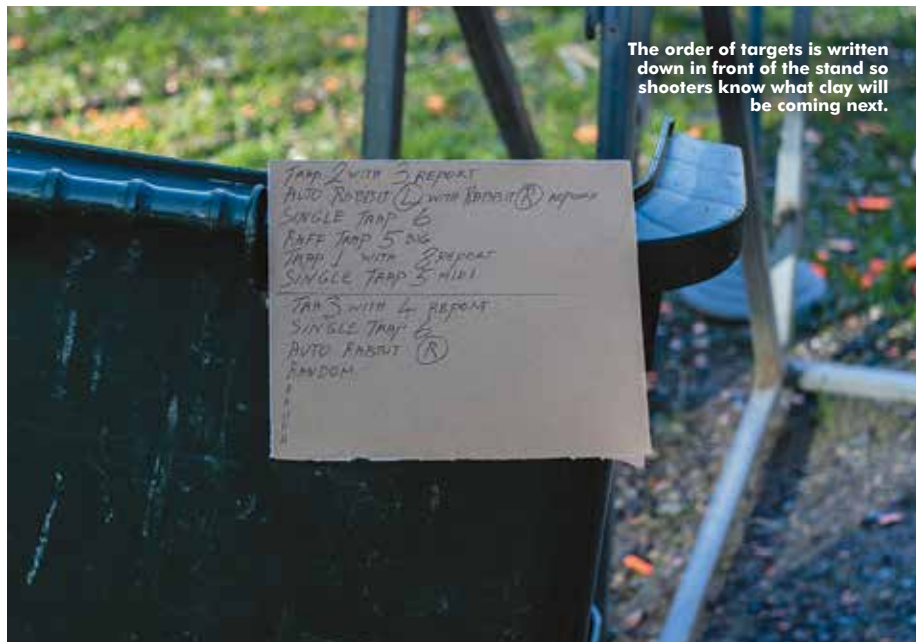
Different clays you may encounter

Standard: The classic clay target which flies uniformly and is about 110mm in diameter and 25mm in height.

Midi: Similar to the Standard but slightly smaller diameter at 90mm and flies slightly faster.

Batau: Roughly the same diameter as the standard but only half as high. Flies very fast then falls off quickly, simulating a landing duck.

Rabbit: Target rolls along the ground mimicking a rabbit. Same diameter as the standard but much thicker and sturdier.



The order of targets is written down in front of the stand so shooters know what clay will be coming next.

Leading your shots is a crucial part of clay target shooting and while it may be obvious to shoot ahead of a target moving across you, it equally applies to shooting beneath a falling target even when its trajectory is difficult to read.

Competition No.2

With a taste for shotgun shooting I made my way back for a special competition that featured ‘random targets’. This time I used the club gun, a Lanber Expulsor, as opposed to the Miroku I borrowed for the first competition. A problem I had with the Lanber was it was about 5cm too short for me. I was still able to use it but it made it much harder to consistently and naturally place the gun on my shoulder. The lesson is if you’re borrowing a gun, borrow from someone about the same size as you.

The random targets throughout the competition meant a clay could be thrown from any trap as soon as the shooter closed their gun. The random targets were easily my favourite part of the competition even though I completely failed to spot one, meaning I didn’t even fire a shot. Being more familiar with the course would definitely help this.

Random targets make you feel more like you’re really in the field, and your ears become as important as your eyes as you listen for the sound of the trap for a clue as to where the clay might be coming from. All shooters were at the mercy of the button-pusher and the cockier shooters were given harder targets accordingly. Random targets are not only fun but a great way to become adept at shooting off-the-shoulder.



Sam looks to add to the pile of smashed clays on the ground.

Conclusion

Shotgun shooting is a great discipline that offers a challenge as well as camaraderie. Although shotguns are louder and kick more than a .22 rifle, correct form can quickly be learnt and beginners soon become accustomed to the noise. Many teenagers and super veterans take part in the sport, proving these issues can easily be overcome and anyone can enjoy the discipline. While they don’t make for good eating, clay targets definitely make for a good time. ●