

## **Boobs, Buckles and Bones – Challenges of a LadyGun**

*Author - Denean Tomlin, NSCA Level 1 Instructor, Competitor and LadyGun (@CalgaryLadyGuns)*

Growing up on a farm, I was exposed to guns, hunting and sport shooting at an early age. My first shooting experience was shooting bottle caps off of the bushes with a .22 rifle from a picnic table. My dad took my brother and me out for an afternoon of fun and to learn a little gun safety. A few years later I worked on Saturday mornings (because I was told to) at the local trap club, sitting in the bunker setting clay targets for the shooting league. It wasn't until 30 years later, on a beautiful day in September when I was introduced to Sporting Clays. I was invited on a date to join an experienced shooter and give it a go. The reason I point out those two facts ladies, "on a date" and "experienced shooter", is to illustrate that there were so many reasons to be nervous. So many things running through my mind...guns are fun but kinda scary, what if I make a fool of myself, what do I wear, I think I like this guy...yikes!

6 years later, I can say I am completely head over heels in love with this sport and can't get enough. I get out to shoot whenever and wherever I can, be it at my home club Silver Willow, competitions in Canada or the US, or a shooting holiday in the UK. The journey from first time shooter to anytime shooter has been a very enlightening and totally frustrating experience. So, I am about to share a few things I have learned over the last 6 years in hopes to help LadyGunners find their way into loving the sport.

Shooting has traditionally been a man's game and, for the most part, it still is. The past 20 years, however, have seen significant changes and the industry is filling the girl-shaped gap in the market. Women want the opportunity to learn how to shoot in a supportive and relatively uncompetitive environment without fear of being humiliated. What can be done to make this happen?

The first step is of course the gun. They don't make guns for women (at least not until recently) and a normal first experience was getting to use our father or grandfather's gun. A huge amount of recoil is what we remember when taking those first shots and that is usually enough to turn a lady away before she even gets started! Why do we have so many problems? Simple really...guns are made for men. A standard shotgun is assembled for a 5 foot 9 inch, 175lb, right-eye dominant male shooter. It's no wonder we aren't comfortable. It would be like taking your husbands coat and trying to make it fit, it doesn't look quite right and the pockets are out of reach. We also have bumps located in very inconvenient places for those "of the shelf" guns and our undergarments get in the way (the wrong bra strap can be terribly painful). Ladies also typically have longer necks than men, so we try to roll our heads to have our eye over the gun, causing misalignment of sight picture and hunched shoulders. We constantly have to overcome our "boobs, buckles and bones", hardly a problem men can even comprehend. To that point, our shoulders are also shaped differently and smaller, as are our hands. A LadyGun can rarely find a comfortable spot to place the butt of the gun when it's "off the shelf" and we get grip fatigue due to the large circumference at the "wrist" of the gun and the forend. Lastly, guns are heavy. After lifting, swinging and moving the gun to hit those targets, some of those behemoth 12 gauge shotguns can exhaust a new shooter. Who knew we needed "gun muscles"?

A standard approach for a well-intentioned, husband, father or boyfriend is to find something small for us to start with. They find us a cut down version of a standard shotgun or a youth model thinking smaller is better. It's still not a proper fit and there isn't as much gun to consume the recoil so likely we are still feeling a wallop when we pull the trigger. A semi-auto is a good first choice and we can use reduced

recoil target loads which do help and are a good compromise for the youth or lady shooter just getting started. We can also choose a 20 gauge model that provides a lighter gun and enough load and speed to hit the targets. While all of these solutions are acceptable for a new shooter, they are not going to provide a LadyGun with the tools to advance. We always want to ensure a first experience is a positive one and we would like to see more women in the sport. So... what does all of this mean?

We need to look at gun fit of course. Just like down-hill skis and golf clubs...one size does not fit all. You wouldn't buy a pair of 8 ½ shoes because they were close enough and you are actually a size 7...even if they were on sale!

I started with a semi-auto, 12 gauge and lighter loads. Within a year I had that gun properly fit, my stance and mount corrected and a few lessons under my belt. I had decided this was a sport for me, so I invested in a better gun, smaller and lighter (a 20 Gauge over and under) another gun fit, more lessons and a pallet (yes, I said pallet) of ammunition...I like to shop in bulk. While I understand this isn't everyone's approach and not everyone wants to compete, I had helpful, friendly and supportive people ensuring my experience was positive and the tools were fit for me. It's likely that this and seeing those clays turn to dust on the horizon are the reason I keep coming back.

This LadyGun highly recommends having an experienced gun fitter that has worked with the ladies take a look at your gun. They will look at the way you mount it, your stance and your measurements (gun measurements that is) complimented by a few lessons to work on your move, mount and shoot technique. With all of that, a good technician can make adjustments to length of pull, comb and angle of the stock ensuring that you are able to work on your foundation and hone your skill, instead of trying to overcome the limitations and weight of the wrong gun. Shooting lessons and some "homework" on your mount after your gun has been fit for you, will give you the practice skills to take to the range. Once you have a consistent mount, a good gun and a positive attitude, the clay will turn to dust and the "x's" on your score card will increase. Whether it's days out for fun or shooting competitions at your local club, a well fitted gun will make the difference.

I have new friends from the sport, a network of like-minded LadyGunnery and a club that supports both youth and female participation. With ladies taking to the sport in numbers higher than ever, the industry is beginning to respond to form, fit and fashion. The days of "pink it and shrink it" have finally passed and a larger number of options for the club and the field are available online and in the stores. I would love to tell you all about the places to shop, gear for gunning and what "we" as LadyGuns need in our range bag, but those are better left for another day.

Ladies are a big part of the future of the sport and knowing how to be safe, successful and have fun will always make a difference. Get out and try it, love it or like it and if you want someone to shoot with...just give me a call.

*PS. Yes, I am still "shooting" with the guy I went on that date with, so I guess the first date must have gone well. I have yet to beat him on a course overall but I can happily say I do beat him regularly on a stand here and there. I will continue to hone my skills and will report back when the scales tip in my favour...*