**Shooting Vests**

***What should I look for in a shooting vest?***

First is fit. Not only must your vest look good, but it also has to provide you with unrestricted movement. Test your vest on crossing targets, overhead/tower targets and targets below your feet. A vest that fits well length-wise will also tend to have the front pockets at the correct height. A roomy vest with a drawstring comes in handy when adding winter clothes as under-layers. This adjustability also comes in handy immediately following overindulgences at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Then there is function. What characteristics do you want in your vest? If you live in the South, as I do, you might want to think about a mesh vest. Mesh panels will allow the vest to breathe as you are working up a sweat. The number and placement of pockets is also a factor. If you carry more than one type of shell when you compete, you might want to think about split pockets: two sections in each of your two front pockets. If you reload, you might want to buy a vest with a back pocket to slip your empties into. I also like a breast pocket where I can store my lens cloth.

Then there is the material and positioning of the gun mount pad. I strongly prefer a leather or imitation leather pad versus a cloth or suede gun mount pad. This helps to avoid getting your gun butt caught on your vest during the mount. If you mount more to the outside of the shoulder, you may want a wider pad than the standard.

Lastly, durability of the vest is important. The gun mount pad as well as the upper areas of the front pockets are high-friction areas and are most likely to wear out first. If you are “dimensionally challenged,” you might want to consider a custom vest from BEST (Ballistic Equipment & Sports Technology) or Shoot the Moon. Overall, I prefer shooting in a vest over a pouch because it ensures a consistent surface to which to mount your shotgun.

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