Ladies in the shotgun games

In the past few years, we have been witness to explosive growth of female participation in the shotgun sports. While there have always been those more adventurous ladies who have participated in the various sports, the women in the sport today are more than participants – they are good and they are expecting to win. Women are appearing in ever-increasing numbers in the RCMP’s Canadian Firearms Safety Courses (the PAL course), they are also more involved in competition and hunting. The demographics of shotgunning is changing – in what was once, in the not-too distant pass, a pastime dominated by older white men in now being enjoyed by younger men and women of every racial group.

Despite this growth and the realization that shotgun sports are for everyone, ladies are nevertheless still facing some systemic challenges that can tend to slow their entry into the game.

One of the most problematic aspects of ladies trying to break into the shotgun games is how the stock fits. No matter how keen someone may be to learn a new skill, having a gun that does not fit creates another set of problem for the new lady shooter to overcome. Nobody has ever met the “average guy” that most shotguns are made to fit, but it would appear that he would be a fellow about 5’10” in height and about 175 pounds. A lot of men, smaller and larger than this unnamed “average guy” can make most guns work for them, but the same cannot be said for many ladies.

Because of the physiological differences between men and women (namely, the tendency for most women to have higher cheekbones, longer and more slender necks, and lower, sloping shoulders) the gun that will fit most men is typically not suitable for most women. In many cases, the lady shooter benefits from a shorter, more closed-radius pistol grip, a shortened Length of Pull (the length of the stock from the trigger to the butt pad), a raised comb, a Monte Carlo style stock, which has more drop at the heel, and a recoil pad with some toe-out. Guns with are shorter and lighter also appeal to most lady shooters.

Another challenge many of the lady shooters face is the use of unnecessarily powerful ammunition for clay targets. The most common practice for new shooters is to get the standard load of 1-1/8 ounces (32 grams) of shot simply because that is what everyone else is shooting. Even in the lower velocity loadings, these cartridges will produce more recoil than a cartridge with one ounce (28 grams) or even 7/8-ounce (24 gram) loads. When both the payload of shot and the velocity are reduced, the recoil suddenly becomes much more manageable and the shooter can focus their attention on hitting the target. And these lighter loads are far more than adequate for breaking most clay targets.

Most experienced shooters are quick to acknowledge that the 20 gauge gives up very little when compared to the 12 gauge on the clay target range. In fact, there are many shooters who prefer the 20 to the 12 for upland game bird hunting. The firearms are typically smaller and lighter, and the ammunition is also lighter – important considerations when spending the day walking through fields.

Whether the lady shooter has a 12 or a 20, as long as the firearm fits her reasonably well and she is not shooting cartridges that will require her to visit her dentist, she will be well on her way to being a contender in any discipline she chooses. Removing two of the most troubling obstacles to the new lady shooter, namely, a poorly-fitted firearm and ammunition that is too powerful, liberates her to focus on developing the skills needed to break the target.