

Buying a Shotgun

When it comes to buying a shotgun, it can be a daunting and difficult task. There are many decisions to be made.....

- Over & Under, Side by Side, Semi-Auto or Pump Action?
- Which make of gun?
- Sporting or Game Gun?
- Stock size and Configuration?
- Barrel length?
- Gauge?

- Do I need to consider my physical size and strength?
- Do I need to do research?
- Where should I buy my shotgun?
- Second-hand or new?
- Budget/What will the cost be?

The decision-making process is the same whether you are a newcomer to the sport, or you are a seasoned shooter looking for a new gun for whatever reason you have chosen. If you have an Instructor or Coach, then that is the number 1 person you should talk to. They have the ability and knowhow to find and fit a gun to you. Quite possibly they have many guns you can try before you buy. Would you buy a pair of shoes without trying them on, or buy a new car without road-testing it? Probably not! So, there is the first bit of advice, Don't buy it if you can't try it!

I could stop there as between the two of you the above questions will be answered, and you will end up with a gun you not only like but can shoot to the absolute best of your ability. If that is what you choose to do then there is no need to read further.

For those of you who want to know and understand more read on.



Budget/What will it cost?

With shotguns you do not need to spend too much money if it is your first purchase, especially if you are new to the sport. Spending between £500 and £1000 will get you a good first shotgun. For those of you who are seasoned shooters looking for something different or better prices start from around £3000 and go into the tens of thousands and some are even in the hundreds of thousands.

Over & Under, Side by Side, Semi-Auto or Pump Action? Sporting or Game Gun?

Sporting guns are generally used for clay shooting, and Game guns are used for live targets. There are differences, such as game guns tend to be lighter with shorter barrels have a narrower top rib and an automatic safety catch.

Semi-Auto and Pump Action have more specific uses in the UK but the most used are the Over and Under followed by the Side by Side. The Side by Side is considered a more "Traditional" gun and its design has been around significantly longer than the Over and Under. It is more at home Game shooting but is used by some on the clay ground. The Over and Under is used in mass for both Clays and Game and comes in Sporting or Game configurations.

Gauge (Bore)?

There are only six to consider (10, 12, 16, 20, 28 and .410) and for most of us that can easily be reduced to two, 12 and 20. The 12 gauge is the most common and versatile of the gauge choices. The 12 gauge is one of the least expensive ammunitions to buy, due to the sheer volume of 12-gauge ammo manufactured. It's our "Go to, do anything universal shotgun".

The 20 gauge is recommended as the best starter or youth gun for the average built and is commonly seen being used by ladies as it is lighter than a 12 gauge. It is also now seen being shot by senior gentlemen as it packs enough power for serious game or upland hunting as well as shooting sports competition without the recoil of the 12-gauge.

The 10 gauge has massive recoil within an extremely heavy gun to help compensate. There are not many uses for 10 gauges these days. The 16 gauge is a compromise between the 12 and the 20, the 16 gauge is ideal for waterfowl because it packs the necessary punch to hit the heights and bring down the birds, but is still light enough on the recoil. The 28 gauge is the lightest shot and recoil available while still being able to do what a shotgun is supposed to do. But it is not ideal for shooting clays and is not necessarily the best for bird hunting either. It is however commonly seen and used for teaching. Especially for youngsters as a steppingstone to 20 or 12 Bore. The .410 calibre has more similarities to a bullet gun than a shotgun, the .410 is the lightest load available to any shotgun in the world today and used primarily as a first gun for the young.

Barrel Length?

This is a very subjective subject. There are people in the shooting world who think there is no place for 28" barrels! There are also people who consider there is no benefit from barrels over 32"! Longer barrels swing more smoothly and are considered better for predictable targets. Shorter barrels are both easier to manoeuvre in restricted spaces and are quicker to point, they are considered better for unpredictable bird shooting.

Do I need to do research?

Like buying anything of significant value you should research it beforehand. Read gun reviews, talk to your fellow shooters, find out about your local dealers, have they got the facilities to try guns before committing to buy.

Where should I buy my shotgun?

Avoid buying privately unless you have an expert who can accompany you when making your purchase. As I have said before the best place is a gun shop with a shooting ground. The next best option is a gun shop but ask about their returns policy just in case when you try it after parting with your hard earned cash you don't like it or it doesn't fit you.

Second-hand or new? And Which make of gun?

This is driven by your budget and personal preference to looks after considering all the above.

What do I need to consider about my physical size and strength? And Stock size and Configuration?

This is all down to gun fit and can be done roughly at time of purchase but cannot be done 100% without trying on the shooting ground.