



There has been much ink devoted to the 3/4 ounce load in the last couple of issues. You'll get no complaints from me – I've shot about 12,000 of them and know what they will do. But, they hold more potential than one first may suspect and we aren't just talking about breaking targets. For their full potential to be realized, the powers that be have to take a giant step – one that at first glance might appear severe, but when looked at in the big picture might be quite reasonable. That step is simply changing the rules to mandate a lighter shot charge weight for sporting clays.

It isn't a new idea to lighten up. Early trap rules permitted 1 1/4

ounce loads, so the 1 1/8 ounce current mandates were a small step downward that likely generated much grumbling at the onset. More recently, we've seen FITASC mandate the one ounce load. A short time later, nobody doubts their efficiency in breaking targets.

The International games mandate a 24 gram load, the story going that the move was made to lower scores with smaller patterns. Some say that the scores went up, but credible figures show that overall scores in subsequent years made no significant jumps upwards or downwards.

Skill is the criteria that competition measures. Often we

get caught up in scores, but scores reflect skill – which is why the International community decided to level their field and focus on skill.

GREEN ISSUES

Is it time to lower the allowable payload for the good of sporting clays? Let's leave the discussion that could arise, if just hitting the target was the only issue. The world isn't such a simple place and it may have just gotten much more complicated for shooters.

Green is in. Liberals are in. All green liberals are not our friends.

At best, one can hope they are ambivalent about shooting and find other crusades to occupy their time. However, they are not ambivalent about lead. It has a reputation that will never be politically acceptable – and we shooters scatter it all over the landscape with great abandon.

The problems would be few if science and logic prevailed, but alas, that isn't the case. One would be foolish to think that the green approach to lead will moderate.

So, let's look at what we do at a shoot. Let's use the recent



WOULD LIGHTER LOADS LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD?

ASKS **DAVE HOLMES**



Nationals as our test case. Fourteen hundred registered shooters is a bunch. If they each shot 500 shells during the week, we are looking at 700,000 shells. We know that those weren't all 1 1/8 ounce loads, but we're going to pretend they were for the sake of illustrating the potential political value of lighter loads. So, how much lead could have been sprinkled around the San Antonio Complex with 700,000 shells fired – if everybody shot 1 1/8 ounce loads? A measly 49,219 pounds, 24.6 tons, all in a week. If we look at registered target totals at the Complex for the year, it becomes even more compelling – 1,092,816 registered targets translates to 38.42 tons of lead. Figure that over ten years and it gets pretty heavy at 384 tons. And remember, they shoot skeet and trap there too.

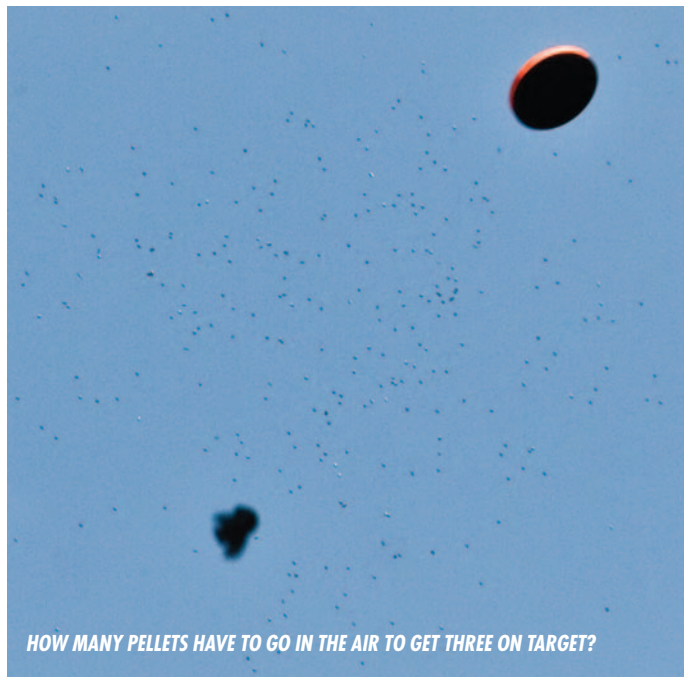
There are a few clubs that will throw way more targets than Headquarters. I just read of one that threw 3.5 million targets in 2007. If those were all shot with 1 1/8 loads, it would translate into over 105 tons of shot!

So, how do we react as shooters? Too often it's a "let them eat cake" attitude, yet there is a very simple way to appear at least responsible to those who don't understand – mandate lighter loads. Reduce the potential to damage the environment. Here are the numbers per 100,000 rounds per year. You can do the math for your club quite simply from these figures.

1 1/8 OUNCE	7031 POUNDS	3.52 TONS
1 OUNCE	6250 POUNDS	3.125 TONS
7/8 OUNCE	5469 POUNDS	2.73 TONS
3/4 OUNCE	4688 POUNDS	2.34 TONS

The simple math is that we can look anyone in the face and tell them we can reduce potential lead on the ground if we switch to light loads. All we have to do is reduce the mandatory load limit.

Do we really need reduction for the sake of the environment? No, at least not in most places, but it might have political value that outweighs a rational argument with irrational people. Would such a move keep the lions at bay? Might not. But at least it would show that shooters were willing to take some proactive measures to address the concerns of the body politic.



HOW MANY PELLETS HAVE TO GO IN THE AIR TO GET THREE ON TARGET?

The alternative is steel shot. If you worry about shooting targets with a light lead load, how do you feel about shooting them with a light load of steel? Long targets may become a thing of the past because of ballistic inefficiencies of the payload. Hundreds of thousands of reloaders will be rendered obsolete because they won't handle steel pellets. Full choke tubes may go the way of the Dodo bird.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

There are other considerations that weigh in favor of lighter loads. Lighter payloads reduce the cost of loading a shell. That

was my motivation in switching to 3/4 ounce loads – 533 loads versus 355 1 1/8 ounce loads to the bag. In terms of factory loads, a flat of 3/4 ounce loads contains 11.72 pounds of shot. The equivalent for 1 1/8 ounce loads is 17.58 pounds. Freight costs are reduced –146.5 pounds on a twenty-five flat order.

Mandating a light load means ammunition company inventories

LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

Light loads may also do something else for the sporting game, something intrinsic. There is constant discussion on appropriate levels of target difficulty. The problem is that there is no standard. Hence, some setters have opted for longer and faster targets to separate the cream from the milk. I happen to like long targets – they're more fun to break.

If there is indeed a scoring handicap to shooting lighter loads, one might well be able to set less demanding targets and still challenge the field.

If you buy into the light load theory, the debate is simply how light do we go. One ounce is easy – it matches sporting mandates in Europe and FITASC worldwide. However, it's really no different than shooting 1 1/8 in a practical sense and doesn't put much of a dent in lead 'redistribution'. Three-quarter ounce loads maximize all the benefits, but aren't currently loaded, other than in Europe. All things considered, I think that the 24 gram International loads might be the HOA of the lot. They offer all the aesthetic advantages of the 3/4 load, just at a slightly lesser level.

There might also be some value to the idea coming on the heels of an Olympic year because they are the Olympic load. Every major manufacturer currently offers them – so there would be no retooling costs and no R&D costs.

The most severe effect would be to re-emphasize shooter skill as the ultimate purpose of competition – and that may not be a bad thing. Would scores drop? Maybe. But there would simply be no disadvantage to any shooter on a level playing field. We would all shoot the same targets with the same shells. May the best shooter win. What do we have to lose? ■