

# SO YOU WANT TO BUY A

# SPORTER?

PART 2 OF A SERIES OF ARTICLES



BY ALAN RHONE

Part one of this series, in our last issue, considered the various action types for the ideal sporting clays gun and made it as far as choke choice. Before leaving the business end, I should make some mention of sighting equipment – that being the rib and bead sights.

Ribs come in all styles – wide, narrow, file cut, milled, grooved, high or low; you imagine it and someone has probably done it.

So what is the purpose of the rib? Well, believe it or not, it is the rib that makes it possible for us to see what we are shooting at. Without the rib we would have great difficulty in reconciling what we could see looking along

the top of the barrel with the point of impact of the shot. It was the great gun maker Joseph Manton, back in the days of flintlocks, who conceived the idea of fixing a rib on top of the barrels. At a stroke, he lifted the eye up above the clutter at the breech and made it possible to keep the target in view above the barrels and still hit the target.

Prior to this, it was a bit of a guess, but Manton's elevated rib meant that it was possible to lift the impact point of the barrels to coincide with the elevated sight picture along the rib. Gun makers today have the possibility to tune the shooting of their guns by altering the rib

profile. Semi-autos will typically feature a rib that is higher at the back than the front to compensate for the tendency of single barrel guns to shoot low. Krieghoff have taken this a stage further with the K-80 by elevating the rib at the breech to lift the eye above the barrels for quicker sighting but achieving this without the penalty of high shooting – helped in no small way by the flexibility of separated barrels. Other manufacturers have gone further still and lifted the rib high above the barrels for even better unobstructed vision and, by doing so, have lowered the position of the barrel in relation to the stock and reduced muzzle climb.

**WHICH IS BETTER?**

Not all follow this path though, and for good reason. It is still commonplace to see a rib as low and close to the top of the barrel as it is possible to put it – and these guns still shoot well and find favor. So which is the better? Like all such questions there is not a simple answer. For sporting clays the traditional argument has long been that the hand should be as close to the barrels as possible and the eye closer. The thinking being that to shoot well at sporting clays you need to be in touch with the gun in order to maximize your natural pointing ability. A wide fore-arm pushes the hand outwards away from the barrel, making it hard to point, and a high rib lifts the eye so far above the barrel that natural hand/eye coordination becomes difficult – or so the thinking goes.

The argument appears to have merit. But has it? All sport relies on hand/eye coordination, but few sports allow you the luxury of aligning hand with eye – yet the stars in baseball and golf seem to manage well enough. It could be argued that shooting a clay target



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requires greater precision, and that is probably valid. Centering a 4" target in a roughly 30" shot pattern when the target is traveling across the front of you at a distance of 30 or 40 yards is quite a lot different to hitting a golf ball down the fairway. Even so, some sports probably come much closer in terms of difficulty and yet manage without sighting aids.

Certainly in England, a high rib is not favored for sporting clays and the clear preference is for a flat rib or one reasonably so. The K-80 rib is well liked and used to good effect by many top shooters – World FITASC Champion Ben Hushthwaite, US shooters Bill McGuire and Jon Kruger for example. Few in Europe choose anything higher than that though, and the preference is for a lower rib. I am not sure if this is governed by tradition or practicality. From a purely technical viewpoint, there is no advantage to a rib flat to the

barrel but there are a number of potential disadvantages. Restricted view is probably the most important, but a low rib tends to promote a head down shooting position and this is not helpful to a natural shooting stance. I would, however, agree that a very high rib does tend to divorce the shooter from the gun. For the games of trap and skeet this is clearly no disadvantage, but I can see that for sporting clays it may well be.

As we all know, the targets in this game are unpredictable to say the least and the successful shooter will be the one who adapts the most quickly to changes in target presentation, angle and speed. Technical arguments apart, I believe that it is simply easier to respond with a gun that sits close to hand and eye. It may be that in the future, the game goes the other way and the technical advantages overcome what may be no more than a personal feeling.

**ADJUSTABLE RIBS**

This leads nicely to talk about adjustable ribs. Theoretically, this has to be the way to go as an adjustable rib means that any shooter can set up the gun to their personal preference and no longer has to live with what the manufacturer thought was best. These ribs have grown rapidly in popularity in the trap games for exactly this reason. Sporting shooters seem still a little cautious and probably for the reasons covered earlier. It is just not possible to have an adjustable rib lying real close on top of the barrel and so the feeling of detachment, in common with a fixed high rib, also comes as standard with the adjustable version. To me, the technical advantages just have to win in the end. An adjustable rib sitting acceptably close to the barrels has to be the way forward and the advantages for many

shooters will outweigh personal prejudices about how high a rib should be for sporting clays.

I am not going to say much about rib width and the way the top surface is cut, other than this. You can shoot just as well with any width so it comes down to what you shoot the best – but remember, wide ribs add weight so keep it in mind when choosing your gun. The top surface of the rib can have tramlines, be simply file cut or any of the other designs you will see around the circuit. The best designs will throw shadows so that the rib always looks black, but other than that it is down to your personal preference. If you do not like the top surface of your rib it can be re-cut to your preference. Few bother, which puts it into perspective. The best I ever saw was on an old Perazzi MT6 that featured shallow semi-circular overlapping undercuts facing towards the eye. Against any background it looked jet-black but I don't recall I shot it any better than any other rib. This is one area that you will probably have to accept what comes on the gun – as rejecting an otherwise ideal gun just because you don't like the rib is not reason enough.

**FRONT AND MID BEAD**

All ribs start out with sights. All will have at least a front bead sight of some description while others will have a second mid sight. Some shooters hate these beads and take them off and it surely does not seem to affect their shooting in a negative way – Ben Husthwaite being a notable example. Other shooters have the bead as bright and as visible as possible and many like the centre bead as added assurance that the gun mount is correct.

The “no bead” camp take the view that you should be looking at the target and anything coming

between that and your eye is a distraction. If you are 100% practiced in your gun mount and can put it in exactly the same place every time, then you do not really need any visible reference to confirm the mount is correct and that the gun is pointing at the target. If you are this experienced, then you just trust absolutely that the gun is pointing exactly where you are looking. The rib alone, seen with your peripheral vision, is sufficient to point the way to the target.

Please note though, that the words ‘practiced’ and ‘experienced’ carry a lot of weight here. If you are not a top shot, have problems with gun-to-eye alignment or have a poor gun mount, you will most likely need some kind of visual assistance to know where the gun is pointing. This is not to say that all top shots automatically remove their beads and we can clearly see that most do not. Many will be seen

using just about the brightest colors they can find with considerable success. These shooters will tell you that they also are looking at the target and pretty much ignore the bead – but the high visibility of the sight means that they are always aware of it in their peripheral vision without needing to check it. Against difficult backgrounds, especially on a dark day, this can be quite an advantage. This type of sight typically has interchangeable inserts and this allows you to choose the color best suited to the background.

In the UK, many competent sporting clays enthusiasts choose a very small front bead and no centre bead. Just as in the US, you will see other equally experienced competitors using conventional sights.

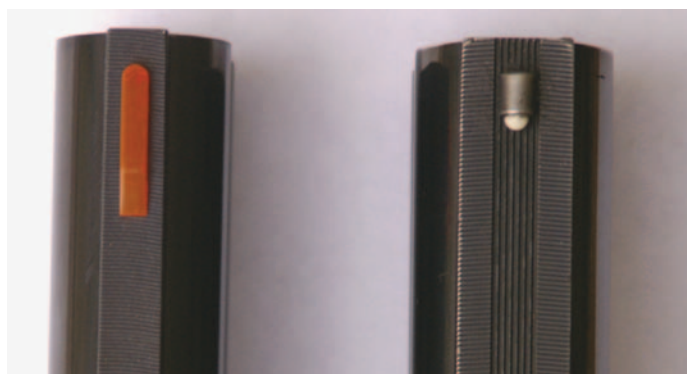
So who is right? And what is the best front sight for sporting clays?

You have probably guessed the answer already – it is whatever works for you. So, check out all available types and experiment until you find what suits.

So what about the middle bead, that tiny little thing stuck half way up the barrel? For the majority of sporting clays shooters I have to say that this is useful. If you fall into the bare rib camp then it is not relevant to your shooting and will have been removed along with the front sight. For just about everyone else it is a handy check on stock fit and gun mount. If you fail to put your head on the stock correctly you will immediately notice a gap between the beads and this pretty much screams “bad mount”. You will not be consciously looking at the bead, none of us do, not even trap shooters, but when making your move to the target the center bead will tell you if you are not staying



**A WIDE VARIETY OF FRONT SIGHTS ARE AVAILABLE – EVEN THOUGH SOME TOP SHOTS REMOVE THEM COMPLETELY.**



with the gun. That is all there is to say about mid beads. Useful if you have one – but if it bothers you just take it out.

Next month I will take an in depth look at stock fit and custom stocks – are they worthwhile and how you can learn to mount your gun like a pro. ■

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