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HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE GRIP DIMENSIONS OF A STOCK IN ARRIVING AT THE CORRECT GUN FIT? I HAVE LOOKED AT MANY GUNS AND ALL ARE DIFFERENT, EVEN WHEN THE GRIP STYLE IS THE SAME. I AM REFERRING TO COMPETITION STYLE PISTOL GRIPS AND NOT STRAIGHT-HAND STYLE AND OTHER 'HUNTING' GRIPS. IS A VERY FULL AND STEEPLY ANGLED GRIP BETTER THAN A MORE GENTLE SLOPE BACK AND WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OR DISADVANTAGES OF PALM SWELLS? LASTLY, IS IT POSSIBLE TO CHANGE A GRIP TO FIT AND HOW DO I GO ABOUT IT?

ALAN RHONE
ANSWERS YOUR
QUESTIONS



GRIPPING QUESTIONS



Unless you are having a custom stock built it is not likely that you will have much choice in grip size or shape. To do so would place an impossible inventory burden on the gun manufacturer. Even so, you should pay attention to how well a grip fits you and be prepared to have changes made if required.

The grip should fill your hand and should be deep enough to accommodate all your fingers. When the gun is mounted the grip angle should allow the top of your hand

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to sit in a more or less straight line with your wrist. If the grip is so steep that your hand is forced upwards you will find it uncomfortable. A correct grip angle allows for a relaxed and comfortable grip without any stress on the wrist. The grip should be big enough to fill your hand but should also allow your thumb and second finger to lock around the grip.

Palm swells are disliked by many but can add a lot to the security of your grip if they are correctly positioned. Ideally, the shape should provide a good grip without you having to squeeze it forcibly. If you are having a stock made you should get the grip shape sorted out before it is checkered, as if the smooth surface feels right it can only feel better when finished with the checkering.

It is amazing how the smallest change can make an enormous difference to the feel. Reducing the diameter just a fraction can make the grip feel very small. Likewise a small adjustment to the profile can provide a secure and positive feel to a grip that felt vague before. I do not

BEFORE DOING ANY OTHER WORK TO THE GRIP, CHECK THAT YOU ARE ACTUALLY HOLDING IT CORRECTLY. IT IS MY EXPERIENCE THAT THERE ARE MANY SHOOTERS WHO HOLD THE GRIP WAY TOO FAR UP, CAUSING THEIR THUMB TO SIT UP ON TOP OF THE GRIP.

subscribe to the theory that different disciplines require different grip profiles, so long as the grip is comfortable and secure it will work equally well for trap as for skeet or sporting clays.

There are however specialist grip styles in use, especially for trap, and these do not lend themselves well to gun-down shooting. I refer here to the thumbhole and reverse Etchen style grip shapes. The thumbhole grip does force a particular hand position but is awkward in use even for trap as it more or less forces you to change hand position just to load the gun. The Etchen grip was first designed by Fred Etchen and can be useful on a pump action type mechanism where the

significantly without taking off so much material as to spoil it for others.

The first and easiest to tackle is grip length. If the grip is too short to accommodate your fingers then it can be easily improved by adding a pistol grip cap. These are normally made from a contrasting wood, typically rosewood or ebony, but can be vulcanite or almost any other suitable material. Done nicely a grip cap can add to the appearance and seldom does any damage to the gun value.

Before doing any other work to the grip, check that you are actually holding it correctly. It is my experience that there are many shooters who hold the grip way too far up, causing their thumb to sit

up on top of the grip. This usually means that your little finger is not down at the base of the grip and that you are pulling the trigger upwards instead of backwards. The grip can be slimmed to allow your fingers to close around the grip, but note that even the smallest of adjustment makes a very noticeable difference. Palm swells can be slimmed, repositioned or even removed – but before doing that try to reshape them so that they feel comfortable. Correctly sized and positioned they do add to the grip security.

The nose of the comb should not dig uncomfortably into the base of the thumb and the undercut should accommodate the fleshy base of the thumb allowing the hand to get behind the grip. The nose of the comb should be far enough forward to prevent the hand from rotating over the top of the grip. Remember that the grip should encourage correct hand position and this function should be retained even if you feel it to be

more comfortable being able to put your hand anywhere you like.

The angle of the grip can be made more shallow if required but it is much harder to make it straighter. The only way of doing this is to insert a wooden panel and shape it into the grip profile. Palm swells can be added in the same way but both of these jobs involve a lot of work and are expensive. It is much easier to remove wood than add it, and this is another reason for keeping changes small until you are certain you have it right.

Once all the changes are made the grip can be re-checked and the work will be invisible. Don't skimp on this last operation as bad checkering stands out a mile and can ruin an otherwise well done job. You can make these changes yourself but should perhaps get the checkering done by an expert with the correct tools. That said, one of the best jobs I ever saw was home done!

To sum up, you are looking to make your grip secure and



hands are worked in opposing directions. This grip can also help control muzzle climb but it is not comfortable for most people.

If your grip does not fit, it is very possible to have small changes made that will improve it considerably. Just keep in mind that some changes may devalue your gun, so make sure they are done well and are not extreme. By that I do not mean that you should struggle with a badly fitting grip just to preserve the gun's value. It should be possible to alter the grip



comfortable with no stress on the wrist. It should be large enough to fill the hand but small enough to allow your fingers to lock around it. Above all, make changes in very small steps and be careful not to slim the grip to the point of weakening it. Any grip changes will almost certainly void any warranty you have on the stock, so you might want to check with the manufacturer first of all to see if they can offer a different grip style or perhaps will do the work for you. ■