

# Introduction to Shooting Sports



## Introduction to Trap Shooting

Trap is the most popular shotgun shooting sport in the United States with well over one-half million active shooters. In trapshooting, you shoot clay targets thrown from a single trap machine that's situated in the "trap house" in front of the shooters. There are five positions on the trap field itself laid out in an arc behind the trap house. When a round of trap is shot, shooters are usually formed into squads of five shooters. Each shooter takes five shots from each of the five positions on the field (moving left to right), for a total of 25 targets.

Like all games, trap shooting has its rules, and one of the first you'll need to know is that the shooter starts with the shotgun in the "mounted" position with the butt stock mounted to the shoulder. In this game, there's no surprise as to when the clay pigeons start flying because targets are released when the shooter calls "pull."

### Events

There are three basic types of trapshooting events. The most basic event in trapshooting is the 16-yard event. In this event the shooter stands on a line 16 yards behind the trap house, which is obviously where the name comes from. The targets come out of the trap house at about 60 miles per hour and go out away from you about 50 yards, but most shooters hit them when they're about 36 yards out. The targets are thrown at different angles from 45 degrees to the left or right, however, you don't know which way they'll fly until you see them.

If you are an average shooter, you could expect to break around 13 out of 25 targets on your first try at trapshooting and gradually improve your score through the high teens and into the low 20s. But a perfect score of 25 is certainly a reasonable goal for every trap shooter. When you start "bustin" every target out of the trap, you'll hear some excited talk about shooting "straights", as in 25 or 50 straight.

Probably the next most common trapshooting event is called the Handicap. In this event you take a stand anywhere from 17 to 27 yards behind the trap house, depending on your previous scores. The better you shoot, the farther back you are "pushed"—which means more difficult shots.

The third common event or game in trapshooting is called doubles. Standing on the 16-yard line, you're faced with two clay targets launched at the same time. In doubles, the targets are thrown the same each time, usually 35 degrees to the left or right of straightaway. You get one shot for each target. A standard round of doubles consists of 25 pairs, or a total of 50 targets.

If you shoot a tie in competitive trap events, a "shoot-off" is held to determine a winner of the prize money or trophy.

You can shoot an informal round of trap for practice or for fun; you can also be involved in registered shoots. To shoot registered targets, you have to be a member of the Amateur Trapshooting Association (ATA). In registered trap, your targets are all recorded by the ATA, and you will be placed in different classifications according to your previous scores. In addition, your average is published each year in the Official ATA Average Book.

## **Equipment**

**Firearms** - The typical gun for trapshooting is a 12-gauge shotgun, with a full or improved/modified choke and a long (30-32 inch) ventilated rib barrel. Although many top trap shooters favor over/under shotguns, single barrel, pumps and auto-loading shotguns are also common. If you're going to shoot registered trap, you always shoot with a 12-gauge.

**Ammunition** - The shotshells used in trapshooting may vary slightly with a shooter's preference and wind conditions. The shells most people use for trapshooting are typically labeled "target loads" and use # 7-1/2 to 8-1/2 size shot. Lighter loads (with slightly less shot and powder) are also popular. If you're going out to shoot for fun, just ask your sporting goods or ammunition retailer for "target loads."

**Other equipment** - Safety glasses and hearing protection should definitely be worn when you're shooting. Some ranges make them mandatory. If you intend to shoot regularly, a shooting vest or a shell bag might be a wise investment. They're both convenient and functional for holding shells that can get bulky and providing a little extra padding for your shooting shoulder.

## **Costs**

Equipment and range fees will vary according to where you go to shoot, but you can use the following as a general guideline:

**Shotguns** - Expect to pay from \$425 to \$700 for a new, entry-level pump or semi-automatic shotgun. Used guns can be purchased for less at most sporting arms and ammunition retailers. Sporting enthusiasts can spend a lot of money to get custom-made, richly engraved and inlaid firearms. You will also want to talk to a shooting instructor or a sporting arms retailer about selecting a gun that "fits" you physically.

**Ammunition** - Trap loads can cost from \$4.00 to \$6.50 for a box of 25, depending on your location, the brand and the "load" or size shells you select. If you shoot a lot, "reloading" shotshells with components purchased in bulk can save you money and, for a lot of shooters, is an enjoyable pastime all on its own.

**Range fees** - You can expect to pay from \$3.00 to \$4.00 a round at most public shooting ranges. Most of these places will have free or inexpensive hearing and eye protection available for new or infrequent shooters.

## Introduction to Skeet Shooting

### History of Skeet

In 1920 in Andover, Massachusetts, a small group of upland game hunters took to shooting clay targets as a means of practicing their wing shooting. As friendly rivalries started to develop amongst the group, a uniform series of shots was developed to keep the competition fair and even for all. It was from this crude beginning that the modern day version of skeet shooting developed into what is now an international sport practiced by hunters and non-hunters alike.

At some point, years ago there was a nationwide contest held to name this new shooting sport that tested a marksman's ability to shoot quickly at a challenging target, chamber another shell, refocus on a second target with a completely different flight path and then make him or her do it again from a different angle. The winning entry was taken from the Scandinavian word for "shoot," and "skeet" became part of the American language.

Skeet has developed into much more than just an aid to better wing shooting or a substitute for hunting. It is now a competitive sport equaled by few in universal appeal. Matches are conducted for all gun gauges, against others of like ability. Competition is held for four gauges of shotguns, 12, 20, 28 and .410, though many people never use more than one.

Guns must be capable of firing two shots since four sets of doubles are included in the regulation 25-shot round. In addition, competitive Doubles events are offered at many tournaments. The gun may be a double barrel (side-by-side or over-and-under), a pump gun or a semi-automatic, depending on the shooter's preference. Major manufactures offer specially made skeet guns, and you should consult them or a good gunsmith before buying a shotgun for skeet. Details such as weight, choke, drop and pitch and fit of the gun vary with individual shooters. It is actually better to try out several guns, all types if possible, before buying.

### Gauge

The "gauge" of a shotgun, as it refers to guns and shells, originated from the number of lead balls the diameter of the barrel needed to make a pound. For example, a 12-gauge shotgun had a bore that, without a choke, would be able to take one ball, 12 of which would weigh a pound. This outdated terminology does not apply to today's standard of measuring a gauge, but it is still used in shotgun marketing. Referring to current day shotguns, the smaller the number means the larger the gauge. This means that a 12-gauge gun has a larger barrel than a 16-gauge gun, and a 16-gauge gun larger than a 20. Because the bore is larger, a 12-gauge shot shell holds more shot than a 16-gauge shell, allowing the larger gauge to hit a flying target easier.

The .410 is the smallest commercially available shotgun, but is probably not the best choice for the beginner due to the small amount of shot in its shell. A better choice is the 20-gauge shotgun. The amount of shot is less than the amount in a 12-gauge, and it produces lighter feeling recoil against the cheek and shoulder, which encourages accuracy. A 12-gauge "kicks" back against the shoulder more and can be responsible for eye closing and flinching. This can result in poor accuracy. The 12-

gauge, however, is the most versatile and widely used shotgun. Other gauges available include 10, 16 and 28.

The rules of skeet shooting allow for the use of any gauge smaller than 12 for shooting 12-gauge events. Examples of 12-gauge events would be league shooting, recreational shooting and the 12-gauge or “all bore” event at a registered skeet shoot.

### **Types of Guns**

There are a wide variety of guns available in all gauges. Several manufacturers produce “pump” shotguns in all 3 gauges and the 410 bore. In addition to pump guns it is possible to buy semi-automatics, side-by-sides and over-under shotguns in 12,16, 20, 28 and .410. The advent of the “tube set” allows for even greater variance in gun usage.

Most people shoot skeet using either a semi automatic or an over-and-under, but all of the following guns can be used in the sport:

**Pump gun** - Shooters operate the pump gun by moving the forearm in a backward motion followed by a forward motion. This action unlocks the breechblock, extracts and ejects the fired shot shell, transfers a live shell from the magazine to the chamber and relocks the breechblock.

**Semi-automatic** - The semi automatic is so named because all the shooter does after loading the 1st shell is pull the trigger and the gun ejects the used shell and chambers the new one on its own. There are two basic types of semi-automatic shotguns: the gas operated and the recoil operated. As you might guess the basic difference is whether or not the expanding gases from the shot shell are used as part of the cycling process of the guns action. Gas operated shotguns tend to have less recoil while recoil operated guns tend to jam less.

**Side-by-side** - The side-by-side is a double-barreled shotgun with the barrels located in a side-by-side configuration. Some people regard the side-by-side as the “classic” shotgun. It is mainly used for upland game hunting instead of clay target shooting. Many models are relatively expensive, and some users say that target sighting is hindered because the width of two barrels tends to obscure the target. Some grades also have two triggers, which makes it slightly more difficult to fire in competition.

**Over-and-under** - This is a double barrel shotgun but with the barrels one above the other. These are available in some 12-gauge models suitable for special sets of insertable tubes or with interchangeable barrels of differing gauges or as a dedicated gun in the gauge of your choice.

**Tube Set** - Tube sets are used to change the gauge of double-barreled shotguns. This is accomplished by sliding a precisely dimensioned “tube” down the barrel of the shotgun. In most instances the tube is custom built for the gun and the inside dimension of the tube is that of any alternative gauge you wish to select.

### **Ammunition**

There is a wide variety of ammunition available for today’s shooting sportsman. There are four specific types of ammunition used specifically in skeet shooting. The rules stipulate that shot shells

not be longer than 2-3/4" long (except the .410, in which 2-1/2" is the maximum size). The general specifications for skeet shells are outlined below:

<b>Shotshell Characteristics</b>	<b>Weight (Ounces)</b>	<b>Weight (Grains)</b>	<b>Shot Size</b>	<b>Shot Diameter</b>	<b>App. # of pellets per load</b>
12-gauge	1 1/8 oz	492	9	.08	658
20-gauge	7/8 oz	383	9	.08	512
28-gauge	5/8 oz	273	9	.08	366
.410 bore	1/2 oz	219	9	.08	293

In shooting skeet, a squad of five shooters is placed on a semi-circular course with eight different shooting stations. Each shooter takes his/her turn at every station during the round. The targets are launched from two locations or "houses." A "high house," which is 10-feet above the ground is on one side of the course and a "low house," that is no higher than three feet above the ground, is on the other side. In this shooting game, you can start with your gun in either the mounted or unmounted (off the shoulder) position.

There is no guesswork in skeet shooting about where the targets will come from because targets always follow the same sequence:

Stations 1 and 2:

A single bird (called a "single") from the high house;  
A single from the low house;  
Two birds (called a "pair") ,shooting the high house bird first.

Stations 3, 4 and 5:

A high house single, and  
A low house single.

Stations 6 and 7:

A high house single;  
A low house single;  
One pair, and  
shooting the low house bird first.

Station 8:

A high house single, and  
A low house single.

The 25th shot, completing the round, is called the "option" and it can be taken at the time of your first miss, or, if you break 24 consecutive straight, from Station 8 shooting the low house bird again.

## **Skeet Shooting Events**

Competitive skeet shooting has four basic categories or events, based on the gauges of shotguns used. As the gauge decreases, shooting becomes more difficult. (Remember that a 12 gauge (bore) is larger in diameter than a 20 gauge, etc.)

All Bore Event: Open to 12 gauge or smaller.

20 Gauge Event: Open to 20 gauge or smaller.

Small Gauge Event: Open to 28 gauge or smaller.

Sub-Small Gauge Event: Open only to 410 bore.

According to tests performed by the National Shooting Sports Foundation in 1980 and repeated in 1995, as a typical beginning shooter you can expect to break 11 out of 25 targets in your first try and, like trapshooting, gradually improve through the high teens and low 20s. A perfect score of 25 is a reasonable goal to shoot for. You can shoot skeet for practice, for fun or as a "registered" event. To shoot registered targets, however, you need to join the National Skeet Shooting Association (NSSA).

## **Costs**

Shotguns - Prices will vary by locations, but in general you can expect that shotguns will range from around \$425.00 for a basic 12-gauge to \$700.00 for an average skeet gun in the same gauge. While a full range of models and prices are available, 20-gauge shotguns are typically slightly less than 12-gauges, but the lower price does not necessarily hold for 28-gauge and the 410. Again, used guns are also usually available from local retailers.

Ammunition - These are the same as for trapshooting, costing from \$4.50 to \$6.50 for a box of 25, depending on where you buy them and the brand and load you select.

Range fees - At a typical public range, expect to pay from \$3.50 to \$5.50 a round.

## Introduction to Sporting Clays

Sporting clays is an exciting, relatively new shotgun game that is designed to mimic actual hunting conditions. It is thus both challenging and fun. It uses clay targets similar to those of trap and skeet, but the launching machine and course layout differ considerably in order to simulate, as closely as possible, actual field conditions of shooting game birds. The lure of the game lies in its realism.

### History

The sport had its origins in early twentieth century England where live pigeons were used as a teaching and practice layout for developing wing-shooting skills. Introduced to the United States in the early 1980s, sporting clays is one of the fastest growing shotgun sports. More than several hundred courses have been established throughout the country and there are many more informal courses at smaller gun clubs and shooting preserves.

Sporting clays are shot for fun, hunting target practice and as a competitive shooting game. As with other shotgun games, sporting clays is usually shot in groups of shooters, (called squads) with two to six competitors per squad. Each shooter fires from a shooting "cage," which restricts gun movement within a safety zone. A "round" of sporting clays in a registered National Sporting clay Association (NSCA) event consists of a minimum of 50 targets with additional targets being added in increments of 50 targets.

Sporting clays uses a number of different types of clay targets. Combining different speeds and angles with different types and sizes of targets makes the game challenging. Six target sizes are available and these vary from the standard trap/skeet clay bird to the smaller "midi" and "mini" targets, to flat, disc-shaped targets such as the "battue" target. All shooting is from the standing position, but can be from either a low gun (off the shoulder), like in skeet, or as of 1997, a "free mount" position such as a previously mounted gun.

Stations can present the shooter with a single or a variety of types of paired targets. The delay between targets can be up to three seconds. Paired targets are of three types: simultaneous pairs, following pairs and report pairs; the latter is where the second target is launched upon the report of the first shot. For some targets a second shot is allowed. Courses are laid out in natural surroundings and typically include 10 to 14 shooting stations with shooters moving from one station to the next to complete the course. The order of shooters usually rotates at each station. Types of shots and target numbers are at the discretion of the shooting officials and thus vary from course to course. Details on the type and number of targets are posted at each station.

There are several "standard" shots that reoccur at most sporting clay courses:

Woodcock – a flushing, outgoing target

Passing mallards – often launched from a high tower or hill that cross from one side to the other

High pheasants – often launched from a high tower or hill that pass high overhead

Driven grouse – incoming targets that generally start low and rise up over the shooting station

Springing teal – typically a pair of targets thrown steeply upward

Floating duck – a propelled floating target, often moving toward the shooter

Rabbit – the target rolls and bounces along an uneven ground surface

Most hunting and field conditions can be simulated on a sporting clays course. Most courses make use of natural features such as woods, ponds and topography to create a realistic setting for each type of shot.

Though not part of official NSCA matches, some courses offer "poison targets" which are identified by color. These give negative points if shot and help to simulate hunter discretion such as is needed for determining gender or species of bird.

For those who shoot sporting clays for competition, it should be noted that no two sporting clays courses are alike and target angles and speed at individual stations may be changed from time to time. As a result, sporting clays scores are generally not as high as the scores in traditional clay target games such as trap and skeet. For example, the average necessary for an AA classification in trap is 97%. The average necessary for an AA rating is 80% for the United States Sporting clays Association (USSCA) and 75% for the National Sporting clays Association (NSCA). The typical sporting clays shooter will break 35-40% of the targets on his first attempt and 50% is a reasonable goal for a shooter just getting started. New shooters can attain an NSCA classification after shooting 300 (classification or registered) targets.

## **Equipment**

Firearms: Sporting clays is essentially a field game and an upland gun is well suited to this shooting sport. The most popular guns for this game, especially on the competitive side, are 12-gauge autoloaders and over-and-unders. Hunters who prefer the 20-gauge may certainly use their smaller gauge guns on the sporting clays course, and some sporting clays courses occasionally sponsor 20-gauge shoots. Skeet, improved-cylinder and modified are the chokes most often used in this game. It's not uncommon for the avid sporting clays shooter to use interchangeable choke tubes to accommodate different stations during a round. No matter what your choice of gauge, use an open choke since most shooting is done at close range. Trap and skeet loads are used in sporting clays.

Other than the obvious shotgun and shells, a shoulder bag is the next most important piece of equipment since you'll be carrying shells and accessories from station to station.

Ammunition: Trap and skeet shot shells (shot sizes #9, #8, and #7-1/2) are the appropriate loads for sporting clays. Rules prohibit the use of shot sizes larger than #7-1/2, more than 1-1/8 ounces of shot or a powder charge in excess of 3-1/4 dram equivalent. Skeet loads are ideal for close targets while trap loads may be used at other stations where the targets are farther out.

## Further Information

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