

Fit *for* a king

Running through the basics of gun fitting, **Tim Greenwood** advises on the best techniques



Tim Greenwood has more than 30 years' gunsmithing experience and is relied on by many of the top names in clay shooting

Due to the popularity of *Clay Shooting* magazine, I am inundated with requests from many shooters each day for help with their gun fitting problems. Unfortunately, as a one-man-band I cannot help everyone that contacts me, as work that I have already committed to, both private and through the trade, has to take precedence. So this month, especially for all of you who are struggling with your gun fit, I have decided to go back over the basics of what steps to take to ascertain, and then improve, gun fit problems.

Picture [1] is quite typical of the most basic gun fit problems. The comb of this gun is far too low for the shooter when their cheek is in contact with the proper place. If the comb is too low the shooter cannot see up the rib to the target. The tendency then will be to lift your head to be able to see over the back of the action, which will make you lose the correct contact with the comb, leading to an inconsistent mount and a reduction in broken targets.

Using just a few bits and pieces you may have lying around the house [2] you can easily create a small pad on the top of the comb so that when



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The Gunsmith



your cheek is in contact you can just see over the back of the action. You would be surprised how many people come to me and say, "That's what I am supposed to see."

You should be able to mount your gun without it catching in your clothing on the way up or down. You should not feel that you are reaching for the trigger and grip. To start with, if you think it is too long, unscrew the plate or the pad on the back and have a few shots. Be warned, it may kick a bit if you are used to a pad and the edges of the stock can be quite sharp and uncomfortable under recoil, so only do as many shots as you are comfortable with.

It is also vitally important that the gun sits comfortably and consistently in the same shoulder pocket every time the gun is mounted. People often exhibit the most awful bruises to the tops of their arms or to the lower part of the shoulder pocket area. If you are bruised on the top of the arm it is usually because the gun is too long or the pitch is incorrect for the shape of your chest.

Pitch is the angle that the gun sits away from vertical if the butt plate is stood on the floor. Generally, the stockier your build, the more pitch is required (the angle increases from vertical) to be comfortable in your shoulder. Picture [3] shows an easy and inexpensive way to experiment with pitch using bits of plastic pipe or washers. Take out the top screw securing your butt plate and half remove the bottom screw. Behind the top screw insert a piece of pipe or a few washers until the top of the plate is away from the top of the stock (known as the heel), roughly 6mm. This is always a good starting point and can be increased or decreased until you achieve comfort without bruising to the shoulder area. Retighten the bottom screw carefully so that you don't crack the back of the plate.

Should you find that either the length or the pitch need altering to be comfortable, you can try making these alterations yourself but I would strongly recommend talking to your local, proficient gunsmith. At least by having played around with the gun yourself you will at be able to advise him as to what you require having already tried it without permanently altering your gun incorrectly. It is a very rare occasion that I alter anyone's gun permanently before they have shot with it as mistakes can be costly to rectify, and I have over 32 years of experience.

Another problem that can be easily addressed before visiting your gunsmith is the drop to the back of the stock. If you have a long neck or high cheekbones, you may find yourself rolling your head forward and down to the stock to make contact with your cheekbone. This can cause you to lift your head off the stock



when the target is called for, with all the subsequent problems described earlier.

Unscrew your pad or plate and slide it down 15mm from the heel. Tape it into position [4] and mount it into your shoulder then let your cheek drop onto the comb. There should always be a slight downward movement so that your head and neck are in line with the rest of your body, which should lean slightly forward after the gun is mounted. Keep moving the pad up and down until you feel the gun is coming up to your cheek instead of you going down to the gun. While undertaking this experiment you can also play with the twist of the toe, or lower point, of the stock. Picture [4] is twisted to the left for a left-hander, right for a right-handed shooter. The correct twist combined with the perfect pitch will give the most comfortable and consistent mount in the shoulder pocket. As you can see in picture [5] these few temporary additions can totally transform the ease and comfort with which you can mount your gun.

If you are still struggling with your mount and tending to roll your head over the stock, get someone to check you have the correct 'master eye'; right for right-handed, left for a left-hander. If in doubt, mount your gun with both eyes shut wearing your shooting glasses. Open both your eyes but don't move your head up in an attempt to see the rib. Get a friend to stick a small dot over the pupil of the eye that does not look up the rib and try mounting the gun again with both eyes open. This should clear up any head rolling, double vision or looking up the side of the barrels [6].

Most of these temporary alterations can be negated if you have the budget to buy a gun with an adjustable comb and by having an adjustable heel plate fitted. Pictures [7] and [8] show my daughter Flo with her Browning – with both fitted to compensate for her long neck and cheekbones – and Steve with just an adjustable comb as he has high cheekbones but quite a stocky build. Most gunsmiths can fit both alterations as an aftermarket option but they are not to everyone's taste.

Mark, the gentleman in picture [9], decided adjustable was not for him and commissioned me to alter his existing stock by cutting in two pieces of wood [10] then re-finishing the gun to match. Believe it or not, there is very little difference in the cost between fitting the adjustable stock or changing the wood and re-finishing it. This is a question of taste and how experienced a shot you are. As a novice, an adjustable stock can be changed in minutes as your style develops; a permanently altered stock in wood takes hours to change and costs a considerable amount of money because of the time spent. Even Mark shot the gun for nearly 12 months before I finished it to make sure we had it absolutely right for him.

Of course, if all of this playing around with your stock seems a bit too long-winded for you, make an appointment with your local recommended shooting school and have a session with their 'Try Gun'. Picture [11] shows one of the Try Guns available at my local ground, West Kent Shooting School, with whom I work very closely. They will provide you with a full set of measurements for you to take away or even offer to have your existing gun altered by a certain gunsmith whose article you have just been reading – that's if I can fit you in, of course. ■



What can Tim Greenwood do for you and your gun?

- Tim offers a full gunfitting service and free help and advice
- He can do anything required to your stock, barrels or action
- He specialises in wooden stock extensions matched to your existing stock
- Tim will also make any specialist parts as required and offers full servicing and maintenance services
- Visit the website: www.greenwoodgunsmiths.co.uk or ask Tim's advice by emailing asktheexperts@blazepublishing.co.uk