

# **SHOTGUNS**

The SASS legal shotguns are: any side-by-side shotgun with extractors, pump action shotgun with external hammer, and lever action shotgun. Shotguns must be in 10, 12, 16, or 20 gauge.

A 12 gauge shotgun may be the best selection. The reason is that both the 12 and 20 gauge shotguns use similar powered loads. The 12 gauge sends the shot out through a larger bore than the 20 gauge, spreading out the recoil. In addition, the 12 gauge is generally a heavier gun than the 20. That also helps to reduce the perceived recoil.

The most important thing on a shotgun is the fit. If you find that you are bruising your cheek or are having trouble manipulating the action or reaching the triggers, then you ought to take your shotgun to someone experienced in fitting. Fitting a shotgun is generally a matter of taking some wood off the butt-stock. Once the shotgun fits properly, then it will be much more comfortable to shoot and easier to manipulate.

*Competitive Note: It doesn't really matter whether you shoot a pump, side-by-side, or lever action shotgun. The key to shooting fast with a shotgun is practice! However, shorter barrel shotguns tend to swing faster to target than the longer barreled ones.*

## **Dry Fire Practice:**

Most shotgun practice can be done at home. Make up a few dummy shells (a quick and easy way is to take some empty hulls home from the range and fold the crimps back in). If you have a shot shell press, then make some dummies out of empty hulls by adding 4.3cc's of corn meal, a Winchester red wad, and 1 oz of shot. Alternatively, there are several manufacturers of shot shell snap caps. Look for ones that mimic the weight of a full shell.

There are three basic types of shotguns used at CAS matches; the double barrel, the pump action, and the lever action. Each one of these requires different approaches and loading techniques. The basics of grip, stance, and sighting are similar. The differences show up in the loading procedure. In CAS, the shotguns are always staged open and empty. As a result, the loading procedures become very important. Each type will be outlined below in the "loading from leather" section, but it is up to each shooter to choose his/her preferred shotgun and to master its peculiarities.

Shotgun fit is very important. If your shotgun doesn't fit well, the recoil is going to hurt, and shooting the shotgun will not be a pleasant experience! If you are unsure if your shotgun fits correctly, take it with you to a gunsmith for a professional opinion.

### *Grip:*

**Before we start, make sure there is no ammunition in the area, and your shotgun is not loaded.**

Shoulder your shotgun. Your front hand has probably found a comfortable location. We won't change that. As with the rifle, your front hand should be pulling the shotgun into your shoulder. Your right hand should naturally grip the shotgun around the stock in a position to put your forefinger on the trigger(s). Your thumb should wrap over the top of the stock in order to provide control during the recoil. If you are using a double barrel, your thumb may also need to push the safety forward. In addition, your cheek should be tight to the stock with your eyes looking down the rib to the bead. That's about all there is to it.

Practice shouldering your shotgun until it becomes natural and automatic.

### *Stance:*

**Before we start, make sure there is no ammunition in the area, and your shotgun is not loaded.**

Shoulder your shotgun (you are holding it the way we discussed, right?). Are you standing up straight or are you in an athletic posture? Is your cheek tight to the stock so you can look down the barrel and see the bead?

You should be in an athletic posture with your feet about shoulder width apart, weight distributed evenly between your feet, knees slightly bent, and ready for anything. This position helps your body to absorb recoil while keeping the shotgun under control. This is the same basic stance used for the revolvers and the rifle.

Your cheek should be tight to the stock so that you can look down the barrel and see the bead. Otherwise, you'll probably find that you are shooting over the targets.

Set up to and point the shotgun at a target. Lower the shotgun and relax. Close your eyes and shoulder the gun. Open your eyes. Are you on target? If not, shift your feet until the shotgun is on target. Lower it again, close your eyes, and bring it up to position. Open your eyes. You should be on target. If not, shift around and try it again. This is your natural point of aim. This position should be the one that you use when you pick up your shotgun from a staged position.

Practice your stance until it becomes natural and automatic. You are using the grip that we discussed, right?

### *Sighting:*

**Before we start, make sure there is no ammunition in the area, and your shotgun is not loaded.**

Sighting the shotgun is just a matter of looking down the rib, through the bead to the target. The best shotgun shooters “point” their shotgun naturally. This will come with time. In the meantime, focus on making sure that the bead is on the target when you pull the trigger.

Give it a try and repeat as often as needed to make the action automatic and natural.

In order to practice, you will need eight dummy shells or snap caps. When you practice, do runs of eight shells. This will help build muscle memory and get you used to and comfortable with the procedure.

### *Loading from Leather:*

Loading the shotgun from leather is a skill that takes a lot of practice to do well. There are several techniques the shooter can use to load a shotgun. Try each of them out thoroughly and select the one that works best for you. Then practice this method until it becomes natural. You need to be able to load your shotgun without having to think about it.

#### **Pump Action:**

Marlin, Winchester, Spencer, and some other companies all make pump action shotguns that are SASS legal. There are a few recent replicas of the Winchester pump shotguns (Models of 1897 and 1893) that are either current or due out soon (at the time of this writing). All of the pump guns share one feature that enable the shooter to use one technique, regardless of the shotgun used. They all have the ejection port on the right side.

The first technique (and the easiest) we will talk about is single loading through the ejection port. It varies slightly depending on whether you are right or left-handed.

- Shoulder the EMPTY shotgun and hold it tight to your shoulder with your left hand.
- With your right hand, reach to your shot shell belt or slide and pull one shell.
- Feed it into the ejection port making sure to WATCH it all the way in. Just drop it in, don't try to put it into the chamber.
- Slide the pump forward to chamber it, aim and shoot.
- Pull the pump back aggressively for sure ejection and repeat.



*Slick Silver Kid demonstrates the single feed.*

***Authors Note, added October 2007:*** This technique is a good one to have in your repertoire in order to pick up single missed shots on knock down targets. It's faster than grabbing one in your left hand and going over the top.

The second technique we will examine is a little more complicated and requires slightly more dexterity.

- Shoulder the shotgun and hold it tight to your shoulder with your strong side hand around the grip.
- With your other hand, reach down and pull two or more shot shells. You will need to experiment to determine the number of shells that works best for you.
- Put one shell into the ejection port (if you are right handed you'll feed it over the top from the left side, if you are left handed just watch it in with your right hand).
- Slide the pump forward.
- Aim and fire.
- Pull the slide back firmly for positive ejection.
- Put the next shell into the ejection port.
- Repeat for the number of shells pulled, then pull the same amount from your belt or slide.



*Walker Colt demonstrates the “over the top” method.*

There is a third technique often used for loading a pump shotgun. That is to load one in the chamber and one in the magazine, then shoulder and fire both. Evil Roy (for example) has perfected this technique.

- Stage your shotgun on a table or rest.
- Bring the gun up to your torso and clamp it under your elbow, tight against your body.
- While you bring the gun into position with your off hand, use your strong hand to pull 2 shells from your belt.
- Load the bottom one into the ejection port and close the action.
- Roll your hand under the receiver and slip the second shell into the magazine tube using your thumb.
- Shoulder and fire both.

You will need to practice these techniques over and over with snap caps or dummy shells to determine the best way to make it work. You can use either hand to pull the shells. Make sure to practice, and practice, and practice!



*Evil Roy demonstrates the double load technique*



## Side-by-Side:

You can load with the left hand, load with the right hand, and there are two different ways to hold your shells. This one can be complicated or simple. The two different methods for holding the shells are pictured at right. Practice both and select the one that works best.



Here's how to do it if you are loading with your weak side hand (this method is faster than loading with your strong side).

- With your shotgun open and empty, holding it by the grip with your strong side hand, shoulder the butt.
- With your weak hand, rotate 2 shells together forward out of the leather.
- Shift your eyes to the open chambers.
- Set them against the shotgun on the open chambers.
- Rotate them into the chamber.
- Slide your hand forward closing the shotgun.
- Aim, and shoot.
- Break it open and shuck the shells out with a sharp rearward or forward motion.
- Repeat.







Black Barth demonstrates the weak hand loading technique.

To load with your strong side hand:

- With your shotgun open and empty, holding it by the front stock with your weak side hand, bring it down to even with your belt or slide.
- With your strong hand, rotate 2 shells together forward out of the leather.
- Set them against the shotgun on the open chambers.
- Rotate them into the chamber.
- Close the shotgun.
- Shoulder, aim, and shoot.
- Break it open and shuck the shells out with a sharp rearward motion.
- Repeat.



*Big Fred demonstrates the strong hand load.*

***Author's Note, Updated October, 2007.*** Since I wrote this (and shot the pictures), I've found it much more efficient to load the shotgun with the stock shouldered. This provides a much more stable platform for loading, and gets the chambers closer to your eyes for better visibility.

Try both methods and select the one that works best for you. However, it is faster to load with your weak side hand (first example).

Some of you may have external hammer shotguns and would like to know the best way to load. Here's how I do it:

- Stage it with the hammers back. This way you don't have to cock them for the first pair of shots.
- Load using the weak hand method (see above); aim, fire, aim, fire.
- With your strong hand, cock the left side hammer and open the shotgun and shuck out the shells.
- Load with your weak side hand (see above).
- Cock the right hammer as you close and shoulder the shotgun.
- Aim, fire, aim, fire.
- Repeat as needed.



*Big Fred demonstrates the external hammer shotgun.*

***Author's Note, Updated October, 2007.*** Since I wrote this (and shot the pictures), I've found it much more efficient to load the shotgun with the stock shouldered. This provides a much more stable platform for loading, and gets the chambers closer to your eyes for better visibility.

With enough practice, it is possible to work an external hammer shotgun almost as fast as an internal hammer gun. Most people watching won't even see when you cock the hammers!

Three last words about loading your side-by-side shotgun: PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

Lever Action:

There are currently two SASS legal lever action shotguns; the Winchester models of 1887 and 1901. Tristar is trying to have one built. The project has been on going for several years, and they do not have an anticipated release date.

There is really only one good way to load this shotgun. That's with the strong side hand. Here is the technique that I have found most effective:

- Shoulder the open shotgun and hold it in place with rearward pressure from the weak hand.
- Pull two shells with the strong hand.
- Put the first on the carrier and push it down, then start the second shell into the chamber.
- Close the lever, aim and fire. Lever out the first one, close the lever to load the second and aim and fire.
- Open the action hard! Otherwise the second shell may not come out of the action.
- Repeat from step two.

Three last words about loading your lever action shotgun: PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!





*Doc Shapiro demonstrates the lever shotgun.*

## Live Fire Practice

The shotgun should be pointed at the target and not aimed. The goal of this drill is to learn how to adjust your stance so you naturally point at the target.

In order to accomplish this, we'll want to pattern the shotgun. That means you'll shoot at a very large sheet of paper or white steel target (about 3 foot by 3 foot should be big enough) from a distance of 50 feet. The center of the target should have a 6 inch black circle painted or inked on the center of the target.

1. Load two shells if you are using a double barrel, one shell if you are using a pump or lever action.
2. Shoulder the shotgun using the grip and stance we discussed earlier.
3. Point the shotgun at the target and squeeze the trigger. You don't actually aim a shotgun – you point it at the target. The exception is for small knock down targets. Make sure to practice both aiming and pointing.
4. Examine the target to see where the shot pattern is. Adjust your stance and repeat until you are on the black circle.

The purpose of live shotgun practice is to master the loading procedure you practiced at home. When you add recoil to the procedure it will change the dynamics.

## Building Speed

Building speed with the shotgun is done through diligent dry fire practice, focusing on one loading technique, and working it over and over again. Continue to use a timer as a start signal, keeping in mind that the timer is not going to pick up your shots.

When you take your shotgun to the range for live fire practice, you will find that the recoil changes your loading dynamic to some degree. Do several repetitions of eight shot runs, timed, in order to practice. Pay attention to what you are doing and work on positive loading without fumbling shells. Record your times so that you can record your improvement.

*Authors Note, Added October 2007:* I've found some other techniques for loading the '97. They are outlined in the 'Tips and Help' section on my web site at <http://www.jspublications.net>