

GAUGING



Finding the Right Gun and Load for Spring Turkey

story by
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NOT TOO LONG AGO, all turkey hunters had was some spare squirrel loads or even duck and goose BB loads. We've come a long way since then. We have seen great strides in the pursuit of effectively and efficiently hunting gobblers.

With the growing popularity of the sport of turkey hunting came innovation in products designed specifically for serious turkey hunters. Among these innovations are specialized shotgun configurations and premium high-performance shotshells.

In conversations with fellow hunters, I often say we are in the Golden Age of firearms and ammunition—especially with modern day “turkey guns,” shotguns built with the turkey hunter in mind.

GOBBLERS





**Two of the author's favorites:
Mossberg 935 and Remington 870 12
gauges.**

At no time in our rich history of fire-arms and ammunition have we had so many breakthroughs with the incredible technology available today. Gun and ammunition manufacturers now have the ability to push the envelope

on what can be done.

Finding the perfect blend of gun and load takes a little fine tuning. But with so many options available today, it is not hard to

find the right shotgun paired with the right shotshell load.

First off, let's talk about the shotgun. The first rule for buying a new or used shotgun is to find one that fits you properly. Visit a local sporting goods or gun store and try some shotguns out for size.

You want to make sure the weight is comfortable and that you can easily mount the gun into shooting position without

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undue movement or effort. It's no secret that turkeys have great eyesight, so keeping movement down to a minimum while shouldering your gun is a must.

Is the gun suited for you to hold it steady for a long period of time? How does the shotgun carry for the long distances that turkey hunting sometimes demands? These are all good questions to

consider when choosing the right gun.

One of my personal favorites in the turkey shotgun realm is the Mossberg 935, which is a semi-auto, camo-clad shotgun. It has a great balance of weight, fit, and excellent performance and also has an option for a barrel specially designed for turkey hunting.

I also own a Mossberg 835 shotgun which is a pump shotgun that has also proved its worth as an excellent shotgun for turkey.

Just about every major gun manufacturer in the firearms industry that makes shotguns makes some models with turkey hunters in mind. Other shotguns on my all-time favorites list are the Remington 870, Remington 11-87, Benelli Super Black Eagle, Ithaca 37 Turkey Slayer, Winchester 1300, and the Beretta Xtrema 2.

With all of the competition in the firearms industry, it is hard to find any shotgun that isn't well made. Consider a shotgun an investment, not simply an expense of hunting, and don't be afraid to spend a little more money for extra features that will aid you in your hunting success.

Remember, the standard rules with shotguns have changed because of the more powerful ammunition available today. Bigger does not always mean better. With the new high-powered turkey loads and choke tubes available today, 12-gauge shotguns aren't the only main player on the field anymore.

Many hunters feel that 20-gauge shotguns are a better fit for their spring turkey adventures and I am one of them. I highly recommend the 20-gauge shotgun especially for young shooters and adults just getting started in the turkey hunting world, largely due to the recoil and weight factors. Although effective range of a 20-gauge

might be less than a 12-gauge, the chances of getting a hunter started on the right path are far better.

Take time to pattern your shotgun with premium turkey loads. Try different shot sizes and even choke constrictions. Also, consider some of the aftermarket choke tubes as many of them have shown excellent pattern performance in the field.

For ammunition, my favorite load is the Winchester Supreme in 12 gauge which packs a hefty load of two ounces of No. 5 shot. Other ammo I highly recommend is the Winchester Long Beard XR and Double X, Remington Premier and Nitro Turkey, Kent Ultimate Diamond Shot, Federal Premium Heavyweight Turkey, and Hevi-Shot Magnum Blend and Hevi-Metal.

The only way to determine what ammo to shoot is to shoot a variety of shot sizes and brands from multiple distances to find the best combination of shotgun and ammo. Pick the one with the most consistent pattern.

I recommend patterning your turkey gun at 25 yards for 20 gauges and 40 yards for 12 gauges. The ideal pattern is 100 pellets in a 10-inch circle. For initial patterning tests, use a large piece of butcher or craft paper.

Consider a shooting rest like the Hyskore DLX Precision Shooting Rest, which you can fire remotely after you set up the shot on target. You can also use a regular gun rest and a recoil pad that goes around your shoulder to help reduce potential recoil anticipation since turkey loads pack a magnum punch.

Know the limitations of your firearm and, if coaching a young hunter or adult beginning hunter, consider the limitations of the hunter as well. This will help you in deciding what shots to take and when to wait or pass on a shot.

We can learn what those limitations are by practicing and experimenting with different loads and chokes as well as practicing real hunting scenarios while at the gun range. Be safe, have fun, and enjoy the outdoors this spring turkey season!

To learn more about Dustin Warncke's work, visit www.dustinsprojects.com.



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