

Adam Calvert is a freelance shooting instructor with a global reputation, offering bespoke shooting instruction in addition to being a Fabbri ambassador.



Expert instruction

You have to find the right combination of cartridge and choke for your chosen quarry.

PHOTOGRAPHY: BOB ATKINS



Q I shoot with a multi-choke over-under. Is it ever worth changing the chokes for high bird days?

A In more recent years it has become fairly standard practice for over-unders to be multi-choked, thereby opening up a dilemma for many shooters about what choke to use.

I think this decision is best made by answering the following three questions: what are you going to be shooting, over what distances, and more importantly, with what cartridges?

The first thing we need to deal with is the quarry; we all know that partridges are much easier to kill than pheasants. As a result, I tend

to favour much larger shot sizes on pheasants. For high birds I shoot 32gram No.4s and for extreme birds I shoot 34gram No.3s. For my partridges rarely do I shoot anything smaller than a No.5 shot.

I am a big believer in picking a cartridge which I have confidence in and sticking to it. This gives me two advantages: firstly, I build faith in that cartridge and secondly it allows me to work out the correct cartridge and choke combination.

In years gone by the good quality gunsmiths all regulated guns to fire perfect patterns with a particular cartridge. I strongly believe in this. Everyone gets excited about chokes when what they should be getting excited about is patterns; after all, it is pattern that kills, not the choke.

Take some time in the close season and buy a selection of cartridges and pattern boards, mark out your different ranges and get busy with different chokes and cartridge combinations. You will eventually find the right mix of choke and cartridge to do what you want it to do.

Be aware though that when choosing big load cartridges (30gram plus in 20 bore and 34gram plus in 12 bore) they have often been slowed down to make them pattern. Personally I much prefer a faster cartridge.

A much easier option of course is to get someone else to do it for you! I use Teague to regulate all my client's guns and let them do the hard work for me.

With plastic wads I tend to shoot with less and less choke, usually 3/8 or 1/4 even for the highest birds, particularly with bigger loads. As mentioned I am not a fan of anything bigger than 34gram but if you do use these bigger loads then be very aware of tighter chokes.

If my clients are using fibre-wadded cartridges, then again I tend to look at less choke than you would expect. Probably a tight 1/2 or 3/4. My personal experience of full choke and big loads is blown patterns, but every gun, choke and cartridge combination is different.

If you are not a choke changer and have multi chokes but are not really sure which to shoot, then in my mind you will struggle to go wrong with 1/2 and 1/2 at everything. ■