

Parts of a Shotgun



The Stock

The *stock* is the part of the shotgun the shooter grasps. It has a special significance in proper shooting. It is designed to let you point and shoot accurately. Each part of the stock has a special name.

The *butt* is the rear end of the stock. It's the part that rests against your shoulder when you point the shotgun.

The *comb* is the part of the stock that is brought to your cheek as you assume the shooting position.

The *grip* is the part of the stock held with the trigger hand. It sometimes is referred to as the *small* of the stock because it is where the stock narrows. The part of the stock that lies under the barrel is called the *forearm*, or *fore-end*. On most shotguns, the forearm is separate from the rest of the stock.

The Barrel

The *barrel* is the metal tube through which the shot passes on its way to the target. The inside portion of the barrel is called the *bore*, and its diameter will vary depending on the size of the gun. Most shotgun bores are designated by a term known as *gauge*. The smaller the gauge number, the larger the bore diameter. Starting with the largest bore, most modern shotguns are available in 10, 12, 16, 20, and 28 gauge. The lone exception to this measuring system is the .410 bore shotgun, the smallest of the modern shotguns. It has a bore measured by the same standards as rifles and pistols. Modern shotguns are loaded at the rear, or *breech*, end of the barrel by inserting a round of ammunition known as the *shotshell* into the part of the barrel called the *chamber*. The front of the barrel—where the shot exits the gun—is called the *muzzle*.

The Choke

Most shotguns have, near the muzzle, an important constriction called the *choke*. Shot begins to spread out as soon as it exits the muzzle, so the more constricted the shot is at the time it's expelled, the farther it will travel as a compact group. The choke's function is to constrict the shot. The greater the choke, the greater the constriction and generally the greater the effective range of the gun and shot pattern. Most commonly, a full-choke shotgun barrel has the most constriction and the greatest range. However, at close range a full-choke pattern may be too small to consistently hit moving targets or so dense that game is ruined by blanket shot. Modified choke creates somewhat less constriction than full choke. Improved cylinder choke creates even less constriction, providing a shot pattern that widens out more quickly than the preceding two. A shotgun barrel that has no choke at all is referred to as a *cylinder bore*. Generally, choke designations are indicated on the outside of the barrel. Many companies today manufacture shotguns with interchangeable screw-in chokes. Or, a device known as an adjustable choke can be placed on the end of the barrel to allow the user to adjust choke selections. Both of these options are good if one gun is to serve multiple purposes.

The Action

The moving parts that permit you to load, fire, and unload your shotgun are known as the *action*. Most of these parts are housed in a metal frame called a *receiver*. Many different methods have been designed for operating the action. Among the most common types are *break action*, *pump*, *hinge*, and *semiautomatic*. In each case, the ultimate function is the same. By opening the action, you usually are causing the *firing pin* spring to compress and allowing a shotshell to be loaded into the chamber at the breech end of the barrel. Closing the action on most shotguns means the gun is cocked and ready for firing.

When the gun has been loaded and the action closed, place the *safety* in the "on" position. Move the safety to the "off" position right before firing. Once the gun is cocked and the safety off, you can point the shotgun at the target and pull the trigger, which drives the firing pin forward. When the firing pin strikes the *primer* in the base of the shell case, the shotshell will fire. Once the shot is fired, you can reopen the action to either eject or remove the fired case. On most shotguns, opening the action will eject the fired case automatically. Then, a new shotshell can be loaded, the action closed, and the gun fired again.

The Magazine

Most shotgun actions can be loaded manually, one shell at a time. Many, however, have a *magazine* to help speed up loading. The magazine is a container attached to the gun into which several shells can be placed. Closing the action on loaded shotguns equipped with a magazine will allow a new shell to be placed in the chamber. The gun can be fired successively until the magazine is empty.

The Safety

Regardless of the type of action employed, all modern shotguns come equipped with a mechanical *safety* to help guard against unwanted firing. A loaded shotgun should be carried only when the safety is on. Under no circumstances should a gun's safety be substituted for a shooter's good safety habits. As mechanical devices, safeties are subject to malfunction and shooter error. Therefore, even when the safety is in the "on" position, the responsible shooter always treats the gun as if firing were possible.