



TIME TO GET THE SCATTERGUNS READY!

By Michael Ware

Scatterguns are being yanked from the gun safe this time of year. Many put them away cleaned, oiled, and ready for service at a moment's notice. Others? Not so much. Whether you were diligent in your care of your shotgun or something a bit less, let's cover what we need to do to get them ready for fall.

If you haven't given your shotgun a deep cleaning, that isn't the end of the world. I do recommend it from time to time, but honestly unless you're introducing lots of water or debris into the weapon, I don't get in a twist over practices like that. For clarity, a deep cleaning constitutes a complete teardown, including disassembly of the bolt, gas system if your weapon has one, and cleaning of things that rarely see attention like the magazine tube.

A light annual cleaning and oiling is wise. Many folks use one shotgun and swap barrels. This is economical and can also lend itself to a higher degree of weapon familiarity since you're running the same gun all year round. There's merit in choosing that route. Let's assume you have both barrels – a field barrel and a slug barrel.

The field barrel can get some lead build up or can just plain be dirty. We tend to shoot inexpensive shot shells through guns for practice, so a buildup of gunky stuff is par for the course. Lots of cleaners exist, so I'm hesitant to recommend one over another since so many do a great job. You may or may not need a lead remover or some of the nastier cleansers to free up debris for cleaning. Let your experience or pain in cleaning be your guide in this regard. Pay particular attention

to the chokes themselves and the threads in the muzzle end of the barrel. These areas see quite a bit of fowling and also require some thorough cleaning. If you skip them or don't give those areas enough attention there are possibilities that you'll over torque the chokes or have thread problems as a result of dirty threads or gummed up chokes.

We see a lot of over torqued chokes through our shop. The small wrenches provided with the weapons when new use plenty of leverage to tighten them into place. If your knuckles are turning white as you grunt to tighten your choke tube, you're over tightening them. It is better to check a choke periodically than to over torque in the hope they'll stay in place.

In the case of your slug barrels you'll see both fowling and leading along with plain ol' dirt and debris. As long as you follow the instructions of the lead remover and cleansers you use, you'll do well. When those harsh chemicals advise you to only allow the chemical to set in the barrel for 20 minutes, that's exactly what they mean. If you lather it on, and leave to go on vacation, chances are you won't like the results upon your return. If the cleansers aren't getting all done, then reapply, and do it again. There are times when you need more 'soak' but they are rare.

Some are especially hard on surfaces and wood!

Be extra careful you don't slop some of the nasty stuff onto areas where it doesn't belong. I know a guy that uses automotive brake cleaner to douse everything. He routinely bragged about how great it worked. I agreed, but with a caveat. Brake cleaner tends to react poorly with wood finishes, various metal surface treatments, etc. I was standing next to him when he slopped a bunch of brake cleaner onto a shotgun. We both watched it run out of the action and down the stock as it immediately turned the stock varnish bright white as it ran. He looked at me, handed me the shotgun, which was beautiful except for the horrid streaks he had just made, and said "fix it" as he turned around and walked off. He has since discontinued the practice of slathering everything with brake cleaner!

As far as oil goes, that too is a tough call. I was formerly pretty particular on what oil I'd use in certain applications. Granted, in very cold conditions some of the semi-automatic guns require a very light oil to work properly. If you dowse

an 1100 down with stuff that looks like maple syrup, don't expect it to work when you're out there in 15 degree weather. Oil brands are plentiful. Yes, there's Rem Oil and Hoppe's. Those are still great choices. But things like SLIP 2000 and Froglobe along with many others are really taking things to the next level. Their synthetics, which are essentially the premium level oils they skim off the top, are really great. Temperature and dirt aren't quite the problems they were in the past when it comes to some of the really great synthetic lubricants.

No matter what you choose, pay close attention to what you oil and how much. Not every problem is cured with oil. Pay attention to the wear points as they are easy to spot. If you see bare metal showing through some place, then that spot needs lube. Any place where you see two pieces of material are contacting one another as they move is a place you need lubrication. If your oil choice is a quality one, then you won't need or require too much of it. It isn't uncommon to cycle the action a few times and see some oil come out here and there. If you're shooting it and after two boxes of 25 oil is still dripping out, then your application of oil is overzealous.

In terms of dirt and debris removal, compressed air is your friend. OSHA says don't do it. Michael says, use your safety glasses and OSHA can take the day off. Things like Q-Tips, rags, etc. are all acceptable to get your weapon clean. In the case of cleaning rods, I prefer one piece coated rods as a long habit of using them on precision rifles. This isn't a big deal when it comes to shotgun barrels, but you don't want to push them so hard they flex. If this is happening, you need to back off the number of patches or thickness you're using. I have used nylon and brass wire brush cleaning jags, but prefer to avoid the stainless steel ones. If you see your buddy with a cut off cleaning rod and the end formerly holding the handle chucked up into a battery drill, get out your smart phone and video it. You're bound to have some YouTube worthy material, as calamity will ensue shortly after filming begins.

We've hit on basic lubrication and maintenance, so we need to consider last minute set up and periodic changes. Whether you're using a shotgun for one season or multiple types of game, you need to think through what and how it'll be used.

If you use your trusty 870 for turkey and pheasant, that's super. Keep in mind the

"drop" in the stock is calculated so your eye is looking right down over the top of the action to that handy dandy little bead. Provided you place your mug on the stock consistently in the same place, lay the bead on the target, and pull the trigger appropriately, you won't go hungry. Now add a scoped cantilever barrel to that same 870. The new sight line for you eye is nearly an inch and half higher all of a sudden. Can you rest your cheek bone on the same place in the stock? Nope. Not even close.

What can you do about this? After all if your "cheek weld" isn't intact you won't pull up quickly and you are far less likely to be accurate. I've seen guys tape on a chunk of cardboard, and improvise in lots of ways. I have no problem with this. I encourage it. Most people don't even consider doing this. Not attaining your natural and consistent cheek weld is a fundamental flaw in accurate, or lack thereof, shooting. We've installed adjustable cheek risers and cheek pieces for folks, but one of my favorites is the stock pack. Eagle Industries came out with them years ago, but Steve from Triad Tactical in Kansas City improved the design. They are not permanent, are installed with heavy duty Velcro, and serve a nice purpose. We routinely use a couple or three strips of cardboard strips underneath them. In order to attain a rise in your cheek weld, folks cut cardboard into strips 3/4" x 5" and lay them along the top of the stock one after another until you achieve the right height for you. When you find the right combination of them, remove one of them, add your stock pack over them and you're set. When you pull up your shotgun and are looking down your scope or optic, do so with your eyes closed and your weapon shouldered comfortably. Open your eyes. If you're not looking right down the optic correctly without moving up or down, you're not set up correctly yet. Keep adding or subtracting over and over with eyes closed pulling up. Once you get that instant shouldering of the weapon and your eyes pop open to see things perfectly without moving, you'll be in tall cotton.

If you clean your weapon, maintain and prepare it, along with set it up correctly ahead of time, you're far more likely to shoot well and make humane effective shots on game. I've led you to water. Are you the kind of horse that's going to drink?

Safe hunting and shooting all! 🦌

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