



Tim Greenwood has been a gunsmith for almost 30 years and his skills are relied upon by many of the top names in clay shooting

Do try this at home

Trying the Blue Peter method before visiting your gunsmith to get a permanent alteration could save you money and hassle says *Clay Shooting's* expert gunsmith **Tim Greenwood**



Veteran shooter Johnny Walker shows us all how to stand to be a champion

eye sight and want to shoot like them. However, it may not and instead you could end up struggling to adopt a style and gunfit that is totally unsuitable for you.

What's even worse: if you carry on shooting this way for any length of time, you will have to unlearn any bad muscle memory you have entrenched in your method when you finally find the correct advice on style and fit in the future. An experienced gunfitter should be able to call on their deep knowledge and suggest the best fit and style especially for you. Most shooters have never even sought advice about gunfit. They have bought a gun from their local retailer, trusting them to sell them something that will fit and do the job. They then cobble together a method that allows them to shoot their gun to a reasonable standard, but find they can only get to a certain level.

It's like breaking your leg, going to the shed, putting some splints on yourself and letting the leg heal. You may be able to walk on it, but you will never be able to run a marathon or be a top sprinter. To get better, you would have to visit an orthopaedic surgeon who will re-break your leg, re-set it correctly and then offer months of physiotherapy to overcome your bad muscle memory – it's the same with a bad gunfit. If you have shot for a long time with a bad style or gunfit, don't expect miracles straight away with your shooting, it will take a lot of time and effort.

So, what is the correct gunfit?

Before dealing with this we must first look at shooting style: how you stand when shooting greatly affects your gunfit. To achieve consistent scores, you must adopt a stance that you can produce every time. When you're standing and having a conversation with someone, you don't lean heavily to one side or the other; your feet are not very wide apart or very close together – you are standing upright in a relaxed, comfortable position, one that you adopt without thinking, time and time again. This is the best basis for your shooting style.

Look at the picture of Veteran Skeet shooter Johnny Walker above. He is upright, both knees equally flexed, feet roughly shoulder width apart, with just his head dropping onto the stock to give a final contact between the front of his cheek bone and the

Whenever I go to a clay ground I can almost guarantee at some point in the day the subject of gunfit will be raised. Indeed a lot of the phone calls and emails I get are on that very subject.

"Is my gun too long or too short?" and "have I got enough cast or drop?" are the most frequently asked questions, both of which affect the fit of your gun but are not, in my opinion, the most important factors in gunfit.

Gunfit is the ability to mount the gun comfortably and consistently to the same place every time in your shoulder and to your cheek so that your master eye, probably the right if you are right-handed or the left if you are left-handed, is looking straight up the rib of the gun and therefore, providing you are looking at the clay, the gun will be pointing at the target when you pull the trigger. If the clay breaks and you can do this consistently, well done, you are well on the way to being a champion. But how do you achieve this perfect gunfit?

When asking someone's advice about gunfit, it is always worthwhile remembering that whether you ask a professional coach or one of your shooting buddies, gunfit is very much a subjective issue. In other words, good gunfit is a matter of personal opinion – the personal views of the person you are asking. What they suggest will be based on their own experience and style and it may work as well for you as it does for them, if you are a similar build with similar

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....simply taping a few pieces of vinyl to the comb can help ...



A few drops of super glue can be used as a temporary fix to hold the pad in a dropped position....





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comb. A relaxed, comfortable and easy stance that can be repeated over and over again – the sign of a champion. This is my personal suggestion as a starting point from which to develop your own style. This basic way of standing can be applied then adapted to any discipline you may wish to shoot.

Anybody who comes to see me and seeks my advice on gunfit will know that I am a great advocate of the Blue Peter method of gunfit. What’s the Blue Peter method? I hear you ask. Basically, when you come to my workshop, I use pieces of vinyl, tape, washers, pipe and wood to temporarily change your gun to fit your style of shooting. In my opinion you should never have your gun permanently altered until you have gone through this stage. Until you have shot the gun for a while in your usual club setting after it has been changed it is difficult to know if what has been suggested works for you, and it’s too late to go back if you have already had your stock permanently altered.

The other great thing about the Blue Peter method is that you can try a few changes for yourself without it costing you a fortune or doing any permanent damage to your stock.

For instance, if the comb of your gun is too low, so that when the front of your cheek is in contact with the comb you then have to lift your head off the stock to see up the rib, a few pieces of vinyl cut and fitted in the required position can correct this problem. It also helps if you are getting kicked in the face by your gun. Later on, once the correct amount of alteration has been established, either an adjustable comb

can be retro-fitted, or the stock can be cut and a piece of wood inserted to give the stock its new, permanent dimensions. If the alteration required is only minor, this can sometimes be accomplished by having a good gunsmith bend the stock up or down, as required. Please refer to my previous articles regarding this somewhat hazardous undertaking, bending wood can cause your stock to break or crack if not done correctly.

If you have to roll your head forward onto the stock to make contact, the chances are you have quite a long neck and possibly high cheek bones. This can sometimes be overcome by raising the shoulder during your mount to a higher than comfortable position, but I will guarantee that as you get tired, your shoulder pocket will gradually drop away, leaving you with your head lifted off the stock and not looking down the rib.

Once again, the Blue Peter method can be used to see if by dropping the pad down on the back of the gun to form a Monte Carlo, it can overcome this problem. In this case, simply unscrew the pad and use either a few drops of super glue or some tape to re-secure the pad in the position you want to try. If this helps by giving you a better, more natural, upright head position, you may consider having an adjustable plate fitted as a more permanent solution, or once again, having wood inserted into the stock and then re-finished.

Both these methods cost about the same, but one can always be tweaked if needed and although the other can’t, it perhaps looks better when finished if you are not keen on adjustables.

Achieving a consistent comfortable mount in your shoulder pocket is of



The angle produced by the barrels from the perpendicular when the butt is rested on the floor is called the pitch.

paramount importance when taken in conjunction with your style, stance and gunfit. Most people lean forward to change the angle of their shoulder pocket because the toe of the butt is digging in causing bruising when the gun is fired. Unfortunately, leaning excessively forward can cause all sorts of problems, and will nearly always lead to lifting your head as the gun will always be low in your shoulder pocket when mounted.

The angle the butt is set at in relation to the gun is called "the pitch" and in my opinion is one of the most important gunfitting measurements to be considered. Most guns bought off the rack for clay shooting have a zero or slightly negative pitch designed to be shot at targets or live quarry flying above about 45 degrees. Unfortunately, if you are of a stocky build or shooting any of the clay target disciplines, a lot of the targets are much lower than this. Gun manufacturers are addressing this issue, most modern guns have far more negative pitch than they use to, but it is still not enough for a lot of people.

Try unscrewing the top or heel screw on your pad and inserting some washers, a piece of pipe or any material that will effectively wedge the top of the pad out from the butt of the stock. Re-tighten the screw GENTLY so as not to crack the backing of the pad and now try shooting the gun. Try packing it out first by about 1/8", progressing up to 3/8" until there is even pressure over the whole of the pad when it is mounted in your shoulder. You will also find that you will be able to mount the gun higher in your shoulder pocket; the top of the pad should be just below the top of your shoulder. If this has been beneficial to your shooting, later on the stock can be cut at the correct angle and a new pad fitted to make this a permanent alteration.

There is no substitute for visiting a top coach or gunfitter and getting their advice, but before rushing out and getting your gun altered, why not try the Blue Peter method of alteration before having the gun permanently changed. It gives you time to make sure that the new fit is right for you and could end up saving you money on unnecessary or incorrect alterations. ■



By inserting a wedge between the top of the pad and the butt, the pitch can be easily changed, then later cut to the preferred angle

What can Tim Greenwood do for you and your gun?

- Tim offers a full gunfitting service and free help and advice
- He can do anything you need doing to your stock, barrels or action
- Tim specialises in wooden stock extensions matched to your existing stock
- Tim will also make any specialist parts as required and offers full servicing and maintenance services
- Visit Tim's website: www.greenwoodgunsmiths.co.uk or ask his advice by emailing asktheexperts@blazepublishing.co.uk

