

# SHOTGUN COMPARISON

## GAUGE-CONVERSION SETS: WORTH THE HUNTER'S DOLLAR

By GGG Staff

Upland bird hunters always look forward to late-summer and fall dove, quail, pheasant, grouse, chukkar, and ptarmigan seasons with a mixture of anticipation and anxiety. Of course, we're all eager to get back in the field and snap the first cap of the new season, but for most of us, there's a lingering worry about how well we're going to shoot. Certainly, every hunter wants this year to be his breakout season, when he goes 7 for 10 on doves or quickly fills a quail limit and is back at the lodge sipping coffee at 10 a.m. Trouble is, that safe, reliable break-action 12 gauge shotgun—side by side, over/under, or single shot—that serves so well on waterfowl or turkeys seems a bit much for taking smaller upland birds. Besides, it packs quite a wallop during practice sessions or during days when you may shoot a box or two of shells.

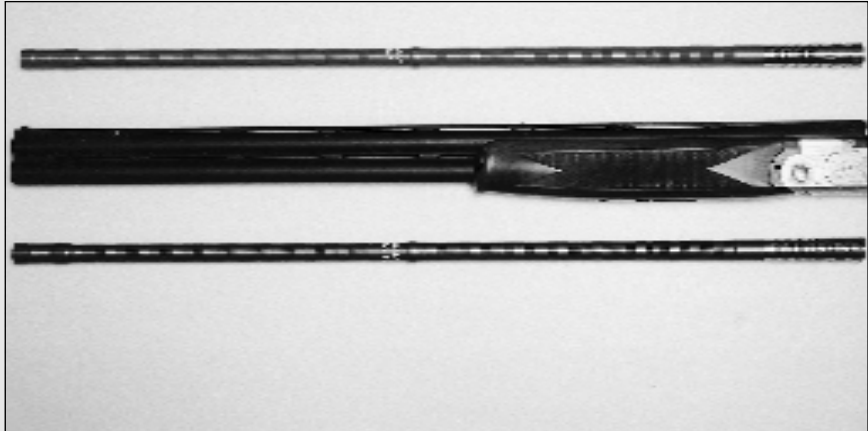
But what if you can't afford a second, smaller-gauge gun? A 20- or 28-gauge upland-bird gun is well suited to putting delectable quail or mourning doves in the skillet, but they cost real American dollars, and the hunter must learn how to shoot with another shotgun.

Without shelling out more money for a gun that will sit on the shelf most of the year, there is a less expensive way to diversify your gauge offerings—all while using your current break-action scattergun. Sub-gauge tube sets, commonplace in the world of skeet and sporting clays, also have a role in the field, as recent GGG testing shows.

### History

Sub-gauge tube sets were originally designed and developed by several individuals, but choke-tube wizard Jess Briley was instrumental in the popularization of sub-gauge tube sets. What he and other shooters envisioned was inserting a smaller-gauge barrel inside an existing larger barrel, and adapting the smaller barrel to utilize the existing breechwork. Originally designed for the skeet shooter, the gauge-conversion tubes, usually made of lightweight aluminum, allowed a shooter to use his 12-gauge gun in every gauge competition. Obviously, this was cheaper than buying replacement-barrel sets or additional guns. Moreover, the shooter could employ the same stock, trigger pull, and gun feel for 12-, 20-, and 28-gauge and .410 competitions. Current tube sets on the market add about 10 to 14 ounces to the overall weight of a 12-gauge gun.

In the last decade, gauge-conversion kits have become popular in some field-hunting situations where



Above: A gauge-conversion kit from Briley Manufacturing allowed us to change a 12-gauge over/under to a 28 gauge in about 5 minutes.

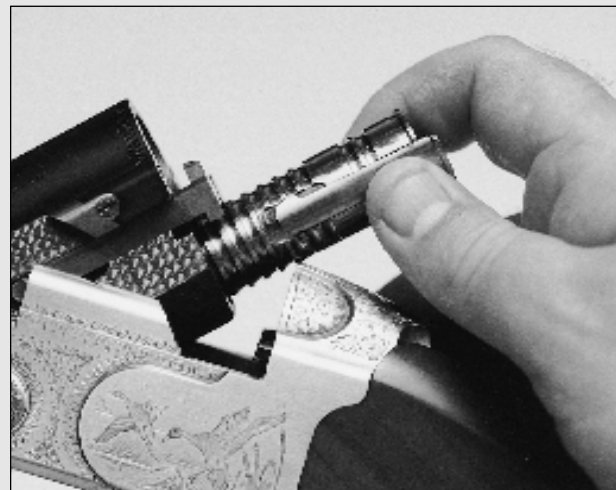
the shooting volume is likely to be high, such as in South America or Mexico. Drop-in tubes enable the hunter to use smaller gauges, which offer less recoil. They're also more economical than a second gun. If you've already invested in a break-action gun you like, you can add a gauge-conversion set for as little as \$350, or half that for a single-barrel gun.

Even though the concept makes sense and the dollars seem reasonable, the skeptical hunter has to wonder if the gauge-conversion sets really work. Based on our recent experience and the advice of shooters we respect, we have to vote an unqualified yes.

### Using A Gauge-Conversion Kit

We first encountered a gauge-conversion kit in Alabama, at White Oak Plantation. There, shotgun shoot-

Below: From the breech, the hunter carefully slides the 28-gauge conversion kit into place. He taps in the last fraction of an inch to seat the barrels fully.



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ing instructor Steve Schultz was applauding the concept of shooting 28-gauge tubes inside existing 12-gauge barrels. He noted that the 28-gauge shotshell patterned very efficiently yet shot softly, making it a good training round. But with the relative paucity of 28-gauge guns, it wasn't reasonable to buy a 28-gauge gun to learn to shoot well.

With this in mind, we conducted head-to-head testing of identical shotguns, S687L Silver Pigeon Beretta over/unders, with and without a 28-gauge Briley tube set installed. We were very surprised by the results.

## How We Tested

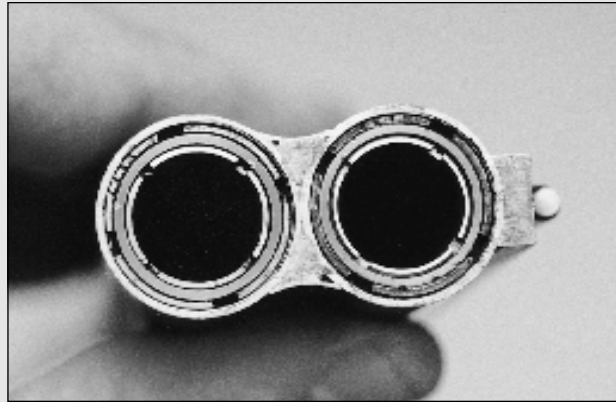
We tested the tube sets using a Laporte 185 Sporting Clay Trap throwing standard targets at various angles and yardages. To chronograph our data we used an Oehler 35P chronographing machine. We tested the sets using Winchester Target AA289 2 dr. 3/4-ounce #9 shells and Winchester Super-X X28H8 MAX 1-ounce # 8 shot. We collected pattern data on 48-inch square kraft paper. We shot three rounds for each choke and each ammunition for an average pattern percentage at 20 yards with the 28-gauge tubes

To install the tube set, the shooter should remove the barrels from the action and clean the barrel to remove any residue in the main barrels. If you don't clean the barrels, powder residue and plastic build-up can make for a tight fit and possibly damage the tubes' exterior metal. Even more important, the outside of the tube should be wiped down to remove any grit that might have collected on it. If this is not done, then the inside of your regular shotgun barrel could be scratched.

Once the gun is clean, the tube is inserted from the breech by hand, sliding the tube fully into the shotgun barrel, up to the last 1/2 inch. At this point you do the final seating with a nylon hammer or an optional Briley Power Knocker. Also, it is important to insert the tube in the proper barrel, making sure in the last 1/2 inch to align the extractor with the integral extractor on the tube. To remove the tubes, the first 1/2 to 1 inch must be tapped out from the muzzle end of the barrels before being gently removed by hand. Cleaning inside of the tubes is the same as on any other shotgun.

Briley tube sets are made of aluminum and have stainless-steel or titanium chambers. Some of these products come with optional screw-in chokes. Briley offers sub-gauge tube sets for 12-, 16-, 20-, and 28-gauge guns. Our test tube set was the Briley Ultralite 28-gauge for a Beretta 687 with 28-inch barrels. This tube set came with four, series 51, screw-in chokes: two skeet (0.005 constriction), one I/C (0.008 constriction), and one modified (0.014 constriction). Bore size of the tube set was 0.549 inches.

The newest sets from Briley come in color coded tubes to help the specification of the barrels. Ours were red for the top barrel and blue for the bottom.



*Below: The 28-gauge conversion runs to the end of the barrel. To return the gun to its 12-gauge configuration, the hunter taps the liners loose and slides them rearward.*

## At The Range

The purpose of our range testing was to determine if a gun's handling characteristics were markedly altered by the presence of tubes. Also, we wanted to know if shooters performed differently with the 12-gauge and 28-gauge versions of the gun. As we noted before, we were surprised with how well the tubes performed. We expected sizable changes in gun movement and target breakage, but our expectations didn't prove out.

Overall, shooters couldn't feel much difference in how the guns came onto target or how they tracked. Though some weight is added to the front of the guns, it didn't seem to matter to our shooters. Ditto that in scores. On targets within 30 yards, in fact, our shooters did better with the 28 gauge than they did with the 12. On longer shots at 40 yards, however, the higher pellet count of the 12 gauge proved a decisive advantage. Conversely, after a couple of boxes of shells, the shooters gravitated to the 28, which because of its lighter payload and heavier gun weight, had noticeably less kick and stock slap on the shooters' faces.

## Guns, Gear & Game Recommends

The advantage to purchasing tube sets instead of a brand-new gun is obvious. We would all love to own more single shot, side by side, or over/under .410s and 28-, 20-, and 12-gauge break-action shotguns, but when this isn't practical, we see tube sets as a good alternative. For situations where a smaller gauge will do the job—such as dove, quail, pheasant, and other upland-bird hunting—you don't have to purchase a gun dedicated to that task. Briley's drop-in gauge-conversion sets can give you the flexibility to change shotshell gauges in an instant, and save you hundreds of dollars in the process. We recommend them.

For more information, contact Briley Manufacturing, Dept. GGG, 1230 Lumpkin, Houston, TX 77043, telephone (800) 331-5718, fax (713) 932-1043.