



A pair of Winchester 1897 12-gauge shotguns. The top is an original that has been reblued and the original wood refurbished. The bottom is a replica imported by TTN that has had some action work done and the stock shortened and recoil pad installed for the author's daughter.



A trio of hammer shotguns are excellent for the Classic Cowboy category. Top: An EAA Bounty Hunter II SASS 12-gauge made by Baikal in Russia. Middle: The 1878 Colt Old West Express model 12-gauge imported by TTN made in China. Bottom: A Liberty 12-gauge imported by KBI-HBG made by AKKAR.



Hammerless double-barrels are excellent for the Frontier Cartridge category. Top: Stoeger 12-gauge coach gun. Bottom: Ugartechea Model 30 12-Gauge made in Spain.

# GETTING STARTED

# SHOTGUNS

By: Smith n' Jones

Using a shotgun in cowboy action shooting is completely different from its normal/standard use. The shotgun was the second firearm that I was introduced to, not long after my dad gave me his Remington Model 12-A .22 rimfire rifle. That great old gun that he had nearly worn out during his life time got a lot more wear and tear from me over the next 50+ years, and is still in shootable condition. The only problem is that you can now place a .22 Short in the muzzle and the only thing that keeps it from dropping on down the bore is the rim, but I digress.

At the tender age of nine I shot my first pheasant with my mom's Winchester Model 12 16-gauge, and since that time I have owned and/or shot literally dozens of smooth bores as I hunted and shot targets. But never, during all those years of shotgunning, did I ever use a shotgun in any type of shooting event in the way we do in CAS. Including a shotgun in the list of needed firearms when participating in a SASS-type CAS shooting event has been necessary since the beginning. The idea of using the shotgun as a self-defense firearm is the logical idea behind its inclusion, and by so doing the game is expanded and enhanced.

Historically, the shotgun was an extremely common firearm used during the Western Expansion and throughout the next 125+ years that have followed. Due to the low cost and availability the double-barreled shotgun, both breech and muzzleloading could be found in nearly every westward bound wagon and in every ranch house and home. Utility and relative low cost were the reasons. The trusty side-by-side could be used to take game birds and animals up to and including the American Bison. Wyatt Earp claimed to use a side-by-side short-barreled shotgun exclusively during the two years that he made his living as a buffalo hunter in Kansas.

Today, in the cowboy action world, we have a wider selection of shotguns to choose from than could have been imagined at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Depending on the category one shoots and/or personal preference, a CAS shooter can shoot an exposed-hammer pump, most often seen as a Winchester M-1897 (or one of the many Chinese manufactured replicas), or a lever-action exposed-hammer Winchester M-1887 (or a replica thereof), or one of the many original, replica, or foreign-made original double-barreled side-by-side guns that are available today.

Because this series is on "getting started" and about the entry level costs associated with that, I will try to cover some of the avenues that one can take when selecting his/her first CAS shotgun.

As with the selection of a sixgun or rifle, you must first make the basic decision about what type of shotgun you wish to use. The best way to do that is, again, to go to a local match and ask a lot of questions and try out a few of the guns being used. With some category exceptions, the decision as to whether to use a double-gun, pump-action, or lever-action shotgun is strictly your own. There are of course cost considerations associated with that decision, but unless you are going to shoot in the Classic or Frontiersman categories the choice is wide open.

From a purely economic perspective, the hammerless side-by-side double-barrel is usually going to be the best bargain. Whether new or used, you can find doubles at very attractive prices. The Stoeger Coach Gun (available in blue and nickel finishes) or the Baikal imports from EAA can be picked up for somewhere around \$300 to \$350 and used samples, both domestic and imported, can often be found for \$175 to \$225. Most any used gun that is proofed for smokeless powder will be safe and serviceable if there are no obvious external problems like bulged

or split barrels and the action is solid and tight. Loose and wobbly are not attributes to be sought in a double gun. Note: In CAS, double-barrel shotguns can have extractors but not ejectors. This is something to keep in mind while shopping for your shotgun.

Now, if you desire a more original, early period look or are participating in the Classic category you should look for a good exposed-hammer gun, either original vintage or modern replica. When you go this route you can plan on spending a few more dollars, but not a lot more. EAA imports the Baikal line of shotguns from Russia, which includes an exposed hammer gun. While this gun looks correct and meets the requirements of Classic category competition, the hammers are "non-functional" which means that while they have to be cocked in order for the gun to fire, the hammers themselves do not strike the firing pins. They still look right and are a very strong and serviceable shotgun. There are a few other imports being made, usually in the Middle East, but one gun that is getting a lot of attention and is indeed a true replica is the TTN imported Chinese manufactured, replica of the Colt Model 1878. This strong and good looking shotgun has no secondary safety latch and is one of the better overall values for the money spent and will set you back a few more bucks than some others, about \$475 suggested retail. Price may vary at your local gun shop.

Another direction that many shooters go is to one of the "repeater" shotguns, most notably the Winchester Model 1897 and its many replicas. Original '97s really vary in price and that price has gone up significantly over the last 10 years due to the growing interest in Western-action shooting, primarily cowboy action shooting. I still see solid, howbeit well-worn originals for around \$225 to \$300, but really nice samples can set you back \$700 or more. Typically, you can find one of the many imported '97 replicas for around \$350 to \$485 that in many cases are stronger and more reliable than the originals. Norinco has been importing their Chinese built '97 for many years and there are a lot of very satisfied users. Other importers are bringing in replica '97s, including TTN a company that claims several improvements in the original design and retails for about \$485.

For most folks just getting into CAS the purchase of a good, functional shotgun is going to be the least expensive cash outlay they make in terms of firearms. There are a lot of good shotguns out there and a lot of them are very reasonable. Used shotguns, be they original or imported replicas, are very common and inexpensive. Just make sure that the one you pick is solid and safe. It is always best to get the opinion of a competent gunsmith when thinking of purchasing any gun, and that includes shotguns.

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