

Defensive Shotgun Selection

A shotgun used as a defensive firearm is nothing new, however having them purpose built from the manufacturer is relatively new. Not many years ago most selections were limited to purchasing a hunting or sporting shotgun, then customizing to your desired platform whether it be a composite stock, a magazine extension, single point sling, or other accessories.

The 12-gauge shotgun has matured to fit the needs and tastes of any shooter. Customization options now include illumination systems, red dot and ghost ring sights, a variety of specialized home defensive loads and enough stock options to make your head spin. However, even though two shotguns may be accessorized in different fashions, proper technique changes little from one to the other.

Unless that is, one is a pump-action and the other is a semi-automatic. Choosing an action that's right for you is arguably the most important step in buying a defensive shotgun. You can swap out just about any shotgun part you can find, but not the action. So, if you're in the market for a new defensive shotgun, here's a guide to determining which type of action is right for you.

Semi-Automatic



Not long ago, semi-automatic shotguns were not considered reliable enough for tactical use. While they have improved

considerably, reliability remains their biggest drawback.

"The semi-auto shotgun could be the most devastating type of action, because it can potentially put the most lead on target in the shortest amount of time. Note the "could be," since it also has the greatest potential to malfunction.

Semi-automatic rifles and handguns have overcome the reliability problems that once plagued them, but the semi-auto shotgun is slightly more finicky. Shotgun chamber pressures are comparatively lower, making it more difficult to fine tune the rate of cycle, and plastic shotshells create more fouling and don't cycle as well as brass.

Despite these weaknesses, the semi-auto shotgun will soon overcome its issues just as rifles and handguns have. Engineers are making progress and semi-auto shotguns are fast

becoming more prevalent as defensive firearms.

The average semi-automatic shotgun is not home defense ready but certainly some models are. The Benelli M4, trusted by a variety of law enforcement agencies and the military, is a shining example, as is the FN SLP tactical semi-automatic shotgun offering a host of fitting and adjustment **features not** found in any other autoloader.

As with any self-loading firearm, the key with a semi-automatic shotgun is buying a quality model, finding a load it likes and frequent function testing to ensure it's in working order.

One last consideration is the fact that pump shotguns can also fail; almost always owing to user error. Ask yourself the following question: For every 1,000 rounds, how many times is a good semi-automatic likely to fail, and how many times are you likely to short-stroke a pump-action, especially under duress? We hate to admit it, but I'll bet most of us would be more consistent with the semi-auto.

Pump

The pump shotgun remains the most popular choice for tactical use, and for good reason. There's little that can go wrong with them mechanically, and companies like Remington and UTAS make affordable, highly customizable, trustworthy guns.

The pump is perhaps the most useful, practical and versatile option. There are increasing aftermarket accessories and modifications available for the semi-auto, but the pump still reigns supreme. It's available in enough configurations to suit the advanced operator, and yet its basic use can be mastered quickly by most willing participants.

Another advantage a pump has over semi-automatics is the speed with which an experienced user can change ammo. Need to switch to slugs? To buck? No problem with a pump. A different shell type is easily installed in the tube magazine and chambered quickly.

The pump shotgun has a sound advantage. The sound of a pump shotgun being cycled is rumored to be universally recognized and feared and is believed to have prevented more attacks than the actual firing of the shotgun itself. While this may be accurate or simply an urban myth, a recent study from the criminologists at the University of Florida shows that firearms in general are used 2.5 million times per year without a shot ever being fired.

As with most firearms, your choice in shotgun actions boils down to your experience level and preference. For the majority of people the pump is king. Much like a revolver, it will always work as long as you do and, in a gunfight, reliability and simplicity are often the keys to victory.





Ammunition

Ammunition selection will vary with the environment in which the shotgun is being utilized. Common loads will be bird shot, buck shot and slug.

One of our primary safety rules is “Know your target and what is beyond and around the target”. Keeping this rule in mind, we need to fully understand our environment. In a home, what are our surroundings? Sheetrock walls are the norm in most houses and apartments. Do you want to use a slug or buckshot and have over-penetration through the sheetrock into the bedroom of a family member? If your outer structure is not brick, you must consider over-penetration outside the house itself.

Ammo selection must consider these criteria. Bird shot is a good load for the home. Your shotgun should also have a side saddle carrier on the receiver holding an additional six shells, in addition to the standard seven shot magazine on the shotgun. You can load this carrier with three buck shot rounds and three slug rounds. These shells can be tactically loaded if necessary when you know your target and surroundings.

Your standard bird shot shell will contain about 425 pellets and have much less danger of over-penetration than will buck shot or slug shells. Also consider the purpose build home defense loads available on the market.

Remember to purchase the correct shells for your shotgun. Check the owner’s manual and the barrel for the length of the shell for which your shotgun was made. Never insert a shell longer than that which is stated on the barrel and obviously use the correct gauge stated on the barrel!