



CLOSE QUARTER TACTICS

COMBAT SHOTGUN

THE ULTIMATE HOME DEFENSE WEAPON!

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About The Expert

This report was prepared in part with the input of the late Louis Awerbuck. Louis served in 1 Special Services Battalion in the South African Defence Force and was a member of the National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA), the International Association of Law Enforcement Firearms Instructors (IALEFI), and the International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association (ILEETA). He was employed by Colonel Jeff Cooper at the original Gunsite Ranch as Chief Rangemaster until 1987, attaining the title of Shooting Master.



With three decades of instructional experience, Louis was a contributory adjunct instructor to the Marine Corps Security Force BN Atlantic combat small arms program and an adjunct firearms/tactics instructor for the Central Training Academy, Department of Energy. He trained extensively in the police and civilian firearms field, and instructed military personnel from various United States bases, including Special Forces units.

Louis authored four books: *The Defensive Shotgun, Hit or Myth, Tactical Reality*, and *More Tactical Reality*. He co-produced three videos, including "The Combat Shotgun," "Only Hits Count," and "Safe at Home," and was Tactical Consultant and a contributing author to *SWAT* magazine.

To learn more about Louis and his training, visit his website at...

www.YFAINC.com

The Combat Shotgun

The shotgun. For many, it is the end-all, be-all of home-defense, the mighty “boomstick” that, on television, cleaves automobiles and walls in two as if it were some kind of handheld howitzer.

The shotgun isn't THAT powerful – no firearm could be – but it is a very popular choice for defending the home.

There are those who might claim the combat shotgun is ideal for home defense.

There really IS no "ideal" gun, not for all people in all situations.

The combat shotgun, however, has a lot to recommend it.

Shotguns have a lot of close-up power.

They also don't produce as much over-penetration as rifle or handgun bullets.

Shotguns are also relatively simple (especially where pump action shotguns are concerned).

Easily purchased in most states, they are arguably the most readily available firearms in the United States, primarily because they are seen as hunting tools first and weapons second.

A simple combat shotgun with the right accessories (and without the WRONG accessories) is, however, one of the better tools for defending your life, your home, and your family.

But why is that?

What is the least you need to know to make informed decisions about defending your family with a shotgun?

Read this report carefully, and you will be equipped with a basic working knowledge of this powerful and easily acquired weapon.

Shotgun Terminology

Shotguns can be pretty complicated, even for a relatively simple weapon.

Let's get some basic concepts straight from the start.

We'll cover some of these concepts in more detail as we move on, but I want to get them all out now, before we go any farther.

A shotgun is a rifle-sized long gun with a **smooth barrel**, meaning the barrel is not rifled (it has no grooves in it).

We call the shotgun a **smoothbore** for this reason.

A shotgun can fire **slugs** (large bullet-like projectiles).

A **rifled deer slug** is a big bullet that has rifling carved into it, so that when it travels down the shotgun barrel, it spins like a football.

This helps it to travel farther and straighter.

A shotgun can also fire **shot**, which is smaller metal pellets.

Shot can be very tiny, in which case the shotgun shell is packed with a lot of it (such as **bird shot**, which is very fine, smaller than the BBs from a BB gun).

Shot can also be larger, such as **00 Buck Shot**.

A shotgun shell loaded with 00 Buck has a handful of metal balls in it that are each comparable to a nine millimeter bullet.

It is often advocated as an antipersonnel load.

People who advocate shotguns for self-defense often believe their advantage lies in their ability to fire shot.

Because the shot spreads as it gets farther from the barrel, the area each discharge hits gets larger with distance.

This, at least in theory, increases the chance you will have to hit something.

It is because of this that mythology has developed around the shotgun, such as the idea that it is a super-powerful cannon of a weapon (it isn't) or that you don't really have to aim it to shoot your target (you do).

Shotguns may be **single-** or **double-barrel** (the very simplest of shotguns, which are limited to one or two rounds of ammunition before they must be reloaded).

Shotguns may also be **pump-action** (the simplest repeating shotguns) or **semi-automatic** (which fire quickly but are believed by many to be less reliable and more prone to jamming than pump-action shotguns).

There are a lot of factors we must examine when considering the shotgun.

The first of these is the most obvious one, and the thing for which the shotgun is named.

That is its ammunition.

The Versatility Of The Shotgun

Before you can understand how to use a shotgun most effectively, you have to understand its ammunition.

If you've grown up shooting but never fired a shotgun, you have never really experienced what it's like to work with ammo of this type.

A shotgun is a weapon with a smooth bore.

That means that, unlike rifles, there is no "rifling" in the barrel of the weapon.

Rifling is what imparts spin to a projectile.

A bullet, when it leaves the rifled barrel of a handgun or a long gun, spins like a football.

This makes the projectile travel more accurately for a longer distance.

Before gunsmiths figured out how to rifle barrels to impart this spin, smoothbore weapons were simple metal tubes through which a lead ball was launched.

The shotgun remains true to this heritage of early firearms.

The shotgun is also the most prolific of all American firearms.

Even "anti-gun" households, and individuals who would never think of owning a gun for self-defense, have a long-barreled shotgun handy for hunting, or for sports like trap-shooting and skeet-shooting.

(If you've never heard of shooting skeet or "clay pigeons" before, this is the sport of firing clay discs into the air and shooting them out of the air with the shotgun.)

A shotgun shell is a charge of powder sitting behind either a single metal slug or a whole lot of smaller metal pellets.

If it's a single slug, that slug typically has rifling of its own.

The idea is that because the barrel has no rifling, the slug will have to impart spin to itself.

Slugs are therefore rifled for that reason.

If you don't fire a single shotgun slug, you have the option of firing a burst of individual pellets, which can vary in size.

This is why the shotgun has so much close-range knockdown power, and why various myths have grown up around the shotgun (such as the idea that you don't really have to aim it).

The farther away you are from the target, the more those pellets spread out, increasing the chance of hitting something -- but decreasing your chances of actually doing enough damage to the target to bring it down.

For this reason, shotguns are short-range weapons.

At longer distances, you need a rifle or even a pistol to have a hope of hitting what you want to hit with any accuracy.

Up close, though, very few weapons are as powerful as a shotgun shell.



A rifle can only fire a few different types of bullets and bullet weights, such as round nose, hollow point, and so on.

A shotgun can fire an amazing variety of different shotgun shells.

There used to be a specialty ammo company that made all kinds of exotic shotgun shells for self-defense use.

Some were loaded with metal flechettes, like tiny arrows or spears.

Some were sabot loads, that allow you to fire a smaller-diameter specialty projectile of some kind from the wider barrel of the shotgun.

Some had pyrotechnic loads so the mouth of the shotgun practically spit fire.

Law enforcement even makes use of some less lethal shotgun shell options.

You couldn't shoot a bean bag or a rubber pellet from a rifle, but you can shoot them from a shotgun.

You can fire rock salt from a shotgun, but don't kid yourself -- it's not like setting a shotgun on "stun" the way you see in the movies.

Getting blasted with rock salt will still kill you; it's just less effective than getting hit with metal pellets.

In the old West, you could load a shotgun shell with metal discs or washers (like dimes), the idea being that all that flying metal did a great deal of damage when it reached the target.

Of course, the more weird shapes you pile into the shotgun shell, the more unpredictable will be the **shot pattern** when your shotshell load reaches the target.

What all this comes down to is that shotguns are not just powerful, but very versatile, given the wide variety of shotshells you can fire through them.

Shotgun Gauges And Sizes

If you've never done much shotgun shooting, you're accustomed to ammo being measured by a caliber that is typically expressed as some fraction of an inch in diameter.

A .45 auto shell, for example, is less than half an inch in diameter.

For perspective, a 12-gauge shotgun is about .72 caliber, meaning it's almost eight tenths of an inch in diameter.

The shotgun shell is the largest ammo most people will handle.

Yes, there are hunting rifles that are larger, and there are rifle cartridges that kick more (sometimes a lot more), but in terms of the size of the hole it makes, the shotgun is the big boy on the block.



That brings us to the discussion of what "gauge" is.

If you took a solid ball of lead that was .72 inches in diameter, that ball would weigh one twelfth of a pound.

That's where "twelve gauge" gets its name from.

It's always the fraction of a pound that a lead ball (of the same diameter as the shotgun barrel) would weigh.

A lead ball the same diameter as a 10-gauge shotgun, for example, would weigh one tenth of a pound, so the smaller the number, the larger the gauge.



Let's run down, from smallest to largest, the most common shotgun calibers:

- **.410 bore** — This is a common shotgun caliber that is not expressed in terms of the "gauge" system we just described (it's the one exception of the calibers we're going to discuss here).

A .410 shotgun shell is the same diameter as a .45 Long Colt cartridge. There are handguns, like the Taurus Judge, chambered in .410, which means such a pistol (an overgrown hand cannon, really) can fire either the .45 Long Colt bullets or .410 shotgun shells.

There are lots of options in .410 ammo out there because it's a very popular cartridge.

The .410 is often marketed as a good home-defense choice because it is relatively light but gives you some of the same ammo versatility as a shotgun.

- **20 Gauge** — This is a relatively small, light shotgun gauge (although .410 is smaller and lighter) that is popular in youth guns and with some female shooters.

It's not as popular as 12 gauge, but it's often a good choice when considering all of the potential home defenders in your household (we'll get to that in a bit).

- **16 Gauge** — This round is not as heavy as 12 gauge, but still heavier than 20 gauge. You can still get 16-gauge shells, but they're few and far between.

The popularity of this cartridge has pretty much fallen off to the point that it's not worth considering.

- **12 gauge** — The 12 gauge is the most popular shotgun shell in North America (.410 and 20 gauge are also very popular, but not as popular as 12 gauge). It is powerful without being so powerful as to be overwhelming, at least in large men. (12 gauge may not be the best choice for smaller people, and again, we'll get to that.)

Because of its popularity, there are a LOT of options in 12 gauge shotguns, 12 gauge ammo, and accessories for both on the market. This is absolutely the best option for a home-defense or self-defense shotgun. It's the one that most people should select unless they're so small or physically limited that they must choose 20-gauge or .410.

12 gauge is available in three different shell lengths: 2-3/4 inch, 3-inch "Magnum" and 3.5 inch Magnum. The most common is 2-3/4. 3-inch Magnum gives you more power, and many 12-gauge shotguns are chambered to handle both 2-3/4 and 3 inch shells (you just choose which you want to load because either will work).

The 3.5 inch Magnum 12 Gauge is an exceptionally powerful shotgun shell. It probably isn't necessary for you to go quite this heavy in a self-defense or home-defense shotgun.

Your shotgun's barrel will indicate what caliber/gauge and what length of shells it handles. Always keep these guidelines in mind. A 3.5 inch Magnum shell won't fit in the chamber of a shotgun that is chambered only for 2-3/4 inch and 3-inch shells.

- **10 gauge** — This is the biggest of the commonly available shotgun shells. Depending on how the shell is loaded, it doesn't necessarily give you more knock-down power than a 12-gauge.

There was once a bigger market for 10-gauge than there is now, but you can still get it.

There really is no additional advantage in choosing 10 gauge over 12 gauge, but you'll have a lot fewer options for accessories and firearms, so it's best to avoid 10 gauge altogether.

Understanding Different Shotgun Types

There are different types of shotguns available, some of which are more suitable for self-defense than others.

Now, in any case, having a shotgun of any type is better than being totally unarmed.

As we'll discuss, though, there are some shotgun designs better suited for self-defense than others.

Let's run down the basic types of shotgun you'll find when you go to your gun store.

- **Single Shot** — These are any shotguns in any caliber that have the capacity to hold just a single round. While having one shot is better than having no shots, single-shot shotguns aren't the best choice for self-defense or home defense.
- **Double Barrel Side By Side** — This is what most people think of when they think of double-barreled shotguns. If you grew up like I did watching Looney Tunes cartoons, the shotgun that Elmer Fudd carried was a side-by-side. A lot of Westerns and action movies have romanticized the double-barreled side-by-side, either cut down as a "pistol" or in a short-barreled version with the stock as a "coach gun."

This design gives you two shots, and for a lot of self-defense scenarios, that's enough. There's been something of a resurgence in the popularity of coach guns in the last few years. It may have started with the popularity of Cowboy Action Shooting, but at this point you can buy a "tactical" side-by-side 12 gauge that has accessory rails for mounting optics and lights.

The basic limitation of the double-barrel side-by-side is the fact that, while it's better than just one round, having only two rounds is still pretty limited, which makes a lot of people nervous.

- **Double Barrel Over and Under** — This is a double-barreled shotgun where the barrels are arranged on top of each other instead of side by side. This is generally the type of sporting gun that people use for fowling (hunting birds), for trap shooting and skeet shooting, and for other "legitimate sporting purposes." It's extremely uncommon as a self-defense weapon and almost never makes it into the movies (where the shotgun is

heavily romanticized). The one exception I've seen is Chuck Norris wielding a chromed over-under sawed-off shotgun in the action film "The Hitman." There are probably others, but my point is, the over-under is less popular than the side-by-side.

There's no real advantage to choosing an over-under compared to a side-by-side, other than that the shotgun is less wide (but taller). Both types of double-barrels limit you to two shots only, but because there is no action to cycle (you shoot, then manually remove the empty shells) you can pretty much fire whatever shotgun load you like out of a shotgun like this and never worry about it jamming.

- **Traditional Pump Action** — This is the shotgun, arguably, that most people think of when they think of a shotgun. It uses a tubular magazine that holds three, four, five, or more shotgun shells, depending on the length of the shells you load (you can hold more 2-3/4 inch shells in the same shotgun than you can 3-inch magnum shells because the shells sit end to end in the tubular magazine). Pumping the action ejects the empty shell, if one has been fired, and loads the next shell from the magazine.

Pump action shotguns are in use by military and law enforcement all over the world. The pump action is probably the most popular home-defense shotgun on the market, too. That's not, contrary to what you may have heard, because the sound of racking the pump action puts the fear of imminent doom into the black hearts of evildoers. It's because these are simple, robust weapons that are very reliable.

Because you pump the action manually, there is no need for individual shotshells to have enough power to cycle the weapon's mechanism. This means you can fire anything in a pump action from the lightest of ultralight target loads, to the heaviest of Magnum rounds (if your gun is chambered for that length of shell and your shoulder can take the pounding).

Even when artificially limited (by a dowel in the tubular magazine) to three shells for hunting season, as is done in some areas, the pump-action shotgun holds more rounds than a double-barrel, giving you more firepower from this type of shotgun. It is less likely to jam than a semi-automatic shotgun, even when dropped in the dirt or mud. It is also simple to use and easy to learn.

Without a doubt, the pump-action shotgun represents one of the great options for self-defense and home-defense.

- **Bullpup Pump Action** — These were once popular before the “Crime Bill” of the 1990s made them hard, if not impossible, to get. Recently, we’ve seen some new designs bring back the concept. This is basically a pump-action shotgun that has been placed inside a special “bullpup” stock that puts the trigger and pistol grip forward of the receiver instead of behind it. In the 1980s and early 1990s you used to see regular pump-action twelve-gauges that had been converted to these pistol-grip stocks and made shorter overall (with the same length barrel).

Newer models of combat shotguns sort of borrow this concept and use multiple tubular magazines to produce a very short, pistol-gripped shotgun with a legal barrel length. These are still relatively rare and are harder to learn to use than a standard pump-action shotgun. The shorter barrel also represents a danger to the user; I have seen at least one example of a guy whose pistol grip for the pump-part of the action broke during use, causing him to blast his own hand with the weapon.

Avoid bullpup shotguns simply because they represent added expense without really improving the combative benefits of the weapon.

- **Rotary** — These are kind of rare. The most common of the rotary shotguns was the Street Sweeper, but that was legislated into extinction by the assault weapons ban in the United States that happened in the 1990s (and the Street Sweeper simply wasn’t that great of a shotgun). There are some shotguns in .410, like the Circuit Judge, that are basically revolvers firing shotgun shells from long barrels, which can be classified as rotary shotguns.

Especially in .410, a rotary shotgun like the Circuit Judge might be a good option because it gives you more firepower in a fairly reliable format. In larger calibers like 12-gauge, I’m not aware of any really great rotary shotguns that you can legally buy and own, so it’s best to avoid these altogether, even if you could get your hands on a vintage Street Sweeper.

- **Semi-automatic** — Semi-automatic shotguns are probably better described as “self-loading” shotguns. When you pull the trigger on a single-shot, double-barrel, or pump-action shotgun, you get a single shot. Pulling the trigger again has no effect because the shell in the chamber has been fired. With semi-automatic shotguns, the act of firing a shell causes the action of the shotgun to cycle, ejecting the spent shell and automatically chambering a new round.

With a semi-automatic shotgun, therefore, it’s possible to keep pulling the trigger and empty the weapon very quickly. Semi-automatic shotguns are

popular with hunters, especially bird hunters, because it gives them the quick follow-up shots they need to hit moving targets.

While there are many great semi-automatic shotguns on the market, they are slightly harder to learn to use, and a bit more complicated, than a pump-action shotgun. What they do offer you is the ability to get multiple rounds on target, or engage multiple targets, much more quickly than a pump-action shotgun.

A semi-automatic shotgun is more prone to jamming than a pump-action shotgun. That makes a semi-auto slightly less reliable than a pump gun, and it also means there are fewer ammunition types that you can choose from if you want your semi-auto to function reliably. This will constrain your options a little bit, but that doesn't mean the semi-auto isn't right for you.

Choosing a shotgun may come down to preference, but there are some universal factors you should consider.

Should You Load Slugs Or Shot?

We've talked about the fact that the shotgun lets you load slugs or shotshell loads.

So which SHOULD you use for self-defense and home defense?

The issue of over-penetration — shooting through a wall or a person and into someone you DON'T want to shoot — has prompted some “experts” to advocate bird shot for self-defense.

The theory is that up close, the bird shot still makes a large hole, but after distance, it spreads and slows down and won't penetrate through walls as badly.

The sad reality is that bird shot simply is NOT effective for self-defense.

It doesn't hit hard enough up close and it is almost useless at a distance.

Sure, it can maim, but it's not a reliable stopper against a combative opponent.

The fact is, though, you will have the best results for self-defense from a TACTICAL perspective if you load with slugs only.

The reason for this is that every shotgun patterns differently.

That's every single shotgun, even identical models.

Now, yes, a shotgun slug will make a hole that is just under three quarters of an inch in diameter.

That's a hole the size of a quarter.

The problem with buckshot, or birdshot, or anything else, is that using it violates a fundamental rule of firearms safety.

You know what the rules are:

1. All guns are always loaded.
2. Never let the muzzle cover anything you are not willing to destroy.
3. Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot.
4. Know your target and what is beyond it.

Using shot violates the fourth rule, which means being sure of your target AND your backstop.

Now, at very close quarters, such as a foot or two away from a sheetrock wall in a corridor, the shot doesn't have time to spread at all.

That means it's going to punch through that wall just as easily and you may as well be shooting a slug.

At distance, however, when the shot spreads, you really have no idea what you're going to hit with it.

You have a vague idea of what is downrange, but unless you've conducted an extensive and exhaustive study of where specific shot patterns at specific distances, you won't really know how big the spread will get when it finally hits.

As a result, you don't REALLY know what is likely to be struck beyond the center of the cloud of pellets you're firing.

With a slug, you can be pretty confident that it's going to go in a straight line.

It's a single projectile.

Shot, on the other hand, spreads.

That spread looks like the cone of light from a flashlight.

To be sure of your target at varying distances with shot, you absolutely have to know what the overall diameter of the pattern is.

This is where things get confusing, because you start dealing with choke tubes and shot patterns.

At a certain distance, a full choke could have a 20-inch diameter spread pattern.

That means that 74% of the shot is within a 30-inch circle at 40 yards away

What that means is that you have no guarantee the REST of that shot, the other 26%, isn't flying all over the house and striking people, animals, and other things you don't want to shoot.

Chokes are performed on *density*, not diameter, and are therefore not a guarantee you won't have a stray pellet outside the pattern.

That's the problem with shot for self-defense.

In a self-defense shooting, you need to be aware of that overall diameter.

Take 00 buck shot, for example.

These pellets are fairly large. Each one is about the size of a 9mm bullet by itself.

One buckshot pellet can kill you at 98 yards out.

Bird shot won't kill you at that distance, but it sure can hurt you.

Remember when Vice President Cheney shot a hunting partner during a bird-shooting trip?

The bird shot didn't kill the man, but it injured him badly, and he had some complications from the injury.

A single birdshot pellet at ANY distance could blind you if it strikes you in the eye.

Stray pellets are therefore no good at all for innocents who happen to get caught in the pattern.

But that doesn't mean the problem with bird shot is just that it's underpowered!

You might be thinking you should load your shotgun with 00 Buck or something powerful, in order to have a better chance of hitting your target, but hold on a minute.

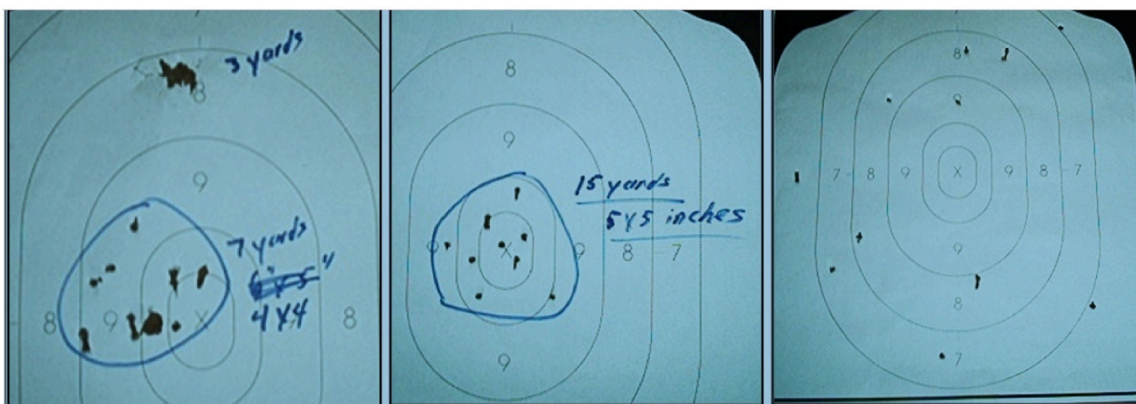
Consider how shot spreads when it leaves the smoothbore barrel of a shotgun.

It spreads out in a cone, like the beam from a flashlight.

At varying distances, therefore, because no human being can estimate distances with split-second accuracy while firing a shotgun, you have no real idea just where on that cone pattern your target is standing or sitting.

This means, at varying distances, you have no idea what is the OVERALL DIAMETER of the cone of shot as it hits its target.

Let's look at one example.



From 3 Yards Away

(Photo 1 on the left; the distance of about a common house bedroom or hallway), the shot made a tight hole, not much bigger than a slug.

From 7 Yards Away

(Photo 1 on the length across a typical living room), the widest spread pattern was only 4" apart.

From 15 Yards Away

(Photo 2 in the middle; the distance of an open living area home), As you can see, the shot was still only 5" apart at its widest spread.

From 25 Yards Away

(Photo 3 on the right; the distance if you were defending your home from attackers who haven't made it inside), the rounds were all over the body.

Your flying ball of shot could punch a target the size of a child's fist at close range... or spread out to the size of a dinner plate, or a waiter's serving platter, at extreme ranges.

When you mix in **choke tubes**, though, everything gets worse.

If you don't know what a choke tube is, you need to know just enough so that when you buy your shotgun, you don't get one that is choked.

Read on, and we'll explain.

Don't Choke

A choke tube is a device like the spigot on a hose.

You know how when you change the settings on your garden hose, you can get a very diffuse spray of water that covers a large area, or a very high-pressure stream of water that hits only one spot with precision?

That's what a choke tube does, to oversimplify it.

When you install a choke tube in a shotgun, you install this type of spigot, controlling how the shot from your shotgun will spread.

Different choke tubes make shot spread differently.

With some types of chokes (say, a Number Four Choke), your shot could spread over an area 20 inches in diameter.

At 40 yards away, a shotgun equipped with a Number Four Choke will put 74 percent of its shot in a circle *thirty inches across*.

For defensive shooting, you cannot afford to be hitting targets of such highly variable area.

Don't worry if the term "Number Four Choke" doesn't mean anything to you.

For purposes of the combat shotgun, you don't need to understand different chokes.

Chokes adjust shot spread, but we're not going to be messing around with that.

Remember that we said Buck Shot was very large?

At 98 yards, a single pellet of 00 Buck Shot could kill you.

That's because getting hit with that single pellet is like getting shot with a bullet from a nine-millimeter handgun.

When shooting shot, you can't afford to have even one pellet stray.

Yes, the lighter the shot, the less injured people will be who get caught in the cone when you don't want them to.

Remember the hunting accident involving Vice President Dick Cheney?

He shot a hunting partner in the face. Because he was bird hunting, the shot was very light bird shot, and at the great distance away that Cheney shot his friend, he did not do any mortal damage.

If one of those bird shot pellets had struck the man in the eye, however, that man would be blind today.

I'm willing to bet that a lot of people who own shotguns who load them with any kind of shot haven't stopped to consider just how that weapon patterns at different distances.

For our purposes, then, the only "choke" you need to remember is **"CYLINDER CHOKE."**



This is shotgun speak for a shotgun that is wide open (it has no choke).

This means it can shoot slugs.

Slugs are incompatible with choke tubes, you see.

The only choke you can have and still shoot slugs...

...is no choke at all.

The good news is, most shotguns will say, right on the barrel, that they have no choke, right where the gauge and chamber length is specified.

Because barrels can be interchanged on many pump shotguns, this information is typically readily available to prevent problems, accidents, and mistakes.

Aiming A Shotgun

Most shotguns have a simple bead sight and no real rear site to speak of.

That means you'll have to aim down the barrel and put that bead on the target.

It looks like this:



Some shotguns have “ghost ring” sights, or more substantial sights, and this is not uncommon on combat weapons.

The basic combat shotgun, though, just makes use of this bead arrangement.

Do NOT make the mistake of thinking that this means you don't have to aim!

It's not enough to just point the shotgun in the direction of the bad guy.

Especially if you follow our advice and load slugs instead of shot, you'll need to be very careful where your rounds go.

If you find that the bead and channel arrangement on most shotguns isn't sufficient for you to put your rounds where you want them to go with reasonable

accuracy, you may want to look into more substantial combat sights for your weapon.

I know one fellow who mounted a scope on his shotgun for deer hunting, and he was practically a surgeon with it.

That's more than you'll need to do for a home defense shotgun, but it's something to consider.

Going Operational

There is a certain methodology you should follow when operating a shotgun.

One of the first things you should do, when you pick up a shotgun that is anything but a double-barrel or single-shot shotgun, is...

PRESS CHECK THE MAGAZINE TUBE.

In other words, check to see if there's a round in the tube as opposed to a round in the chamber.



This varies from the manual-of-arms for most other weapons, such as pistols, carbines, and so on.

The reason for checking the magazine tube is that when you press the trigger on a pump-shotgun or a semi-auto shotgun, and *it does not fire*, you know whether you have more rounds in the weapon available to you.

In other words, if you point the shotgun, pull the trigger, and nothing happens, if you hadn't checked the magazine tube, you would have no idea whether there would be another round available once you pumped the slide or ran the bolt back.

By contrast, if you check the chamber but DON'T check the magazine tube, you know at most that you have just one round.

That's the only thing you're verifying.

In most shotguns there is no way to drop the magazine and check its contents (although some "tactical" models do have a box magazine).

The rest of your manual of arms for your shotgun will be weapon-dependent.

It varies depending on exactly which type of shotgun you have.

For example, depending on the model of shotgun you have, when you unload it by shucking rounds out of the gun using the pump or the semi-auto lever (for example), different models behave differently.

One model will take the shells from the magazine tube first and the chamber last.

Another model will take the round from the chamber first, then the ones from the tube.

If you don't know the difference and you haven't checked, you could unload your shotgun and believe it is empty when, in fact, you still have a round in the chamber, ready to go.

Therefore, when checking a shotgun to ready it for firing, always check the magazine tube.

When unloading that same shotgun, always check both the tube and the chamber to make sure both are empty, and know precisely how your shotgun operates.

By way of further example, there are some semi-automatic shotguns that, unless you press a "drop lever," won't cycle a round up from the magazine tube.

You can't load the gun if you're not familiar with the way this system operates, therefore.

Also, while we're on the topic, I should point out that I do not recommend you ever load shotgun shells through the port on the side.

That port is an EJECTION port, not a LOADING port.

It is never meant for loading rounds.

To safely load rounds in a shotgun, load the magazine first, then operate the action.

This is a seemingly small but important distinction, mechanically.

As we'll see, however, mechanical differences can be a matter of life and death.

Which Shotgun?

Choosing a shotgun is arguably a matter of personal preference, but everyone's requirements may be different.

Remember also that when you work the pump on a pump-action shotgun (which is the most common form of combat shotgun), different guns empty differently.

When you pump a Winchester or a Mossberg shotgun, for example, the guts of the shotgun, the mechanics of the weapon, empty the magazine tube first, then the chamber.

Remington and Benelli shotguns, by contrast, shuck the round out of the chamber first.

This means that if you're emptying a shotgun that empties the chamber last, if you aren't careful to check the chamber after you've emptied what you THINK are all the rounds in the weapon, there might still be one live round in there, ready to go.

Take the Benelli semi-automatic shotguns.

If you don't hit a little lever called the "drop lever," it won't pull a live round up out of the magazine tube.

Those rounds will only come up when you pull the trigger in semi-automatic firing, or when you press the drop lever.

If you repeatedly work the action of the Benelli (by operating the cocking handle, let's say) without pressing that drop lever, you won't actually empty any rounds from it.

This is an excellent fighting system because it allows for switching ammunition types... but if you're not familiar with how the gun works mechanically, you'll screw something up fast.

The topic of mechanics brings us, naturally, to selecting our combat shotgun in terms of hardware.

The answer to the question, "Which shotgun should I choose," is that it really doesn't matter.

Whether pump or semi-auto, if you keep the weapon cleaned and lubricated and it is made by a named manufacturer, you won't have any issues with it.

The old-standbys, like the Remington 870 and the Mossberg 500 series, have been around for decades.



Both are extremely reliable and that's why they are two of the top selling shotguns in the world.

There are also plenty of great semi-automatics. Remington's shotguns are good, and the 1187 Winchesters are fine weapons.

Benellis and Berettas are also great guns, but like all semi-automatic shotguns, they do need to be cleaned and lubricated more than a pump gun.

Then there are the Saiga 12-gauges, which are weapons based on the Kalashnikov action.

You can brutalize these weapons and they will still function.

For that matter, a good pump gun is a lot like a Kalashnikov.

They'll work under adverse conditions and when relatively dirty.

Now, on some guns, the location of the safety and the release lever (which must be pressed to run the pump back on pump guns, for example) may be more convenient or comfortable for you than on other models.

If the only gun you have ever trained on is a specific model, though, you would be well served to choose THAT gun.

When it comes to almost everything else, though, you don't have to spend too much time or energy.

Buy a basic gun.

Don't waste a lot of money taking things off or adding gadgets and gizmos.

Here are the basic guidelines for buying any gun in general, and a self-defense or home-defense shotgun in particular.

We'll explain in more detail in the following sections about WHY these guidelines fit.

Modern Combat and Survival's Shotgun Buying Guide

When buying a shotgun, and especially when shopping for your first home-defense or self-defense gun, consider the following guidelines:

Buy A Reputable Name Brand

You may be tempted to buy a brand of shotgun you have never heard of because it's cheaper.

Those off-brand guns usually do cost less.

The ones you have never heard of, though, have a tendency to disappear as quickly as they appear on the market.

You won't get the same useful life from those brands you've never heard of, and accessories will be hard to find.

For that reason, it's best to go with a very well-known brand name, like Mossberg, Winchester, Remington, etc.

That's not to say these companies never produce a bad gun or miss a quality control check, but going with a known name brand, something established, gives you a better chance of finding accessories for the gun, and you'll usually get a better gun out of the gate.

Choose One Simple Enough And Small Enough For Anyone in the Home to Use

When you are shopping for a home defense shotgun, you have to consider all the members of your family.

A very powerful twelve-gauge might make sense for you, but that weapon might not be something your wife or your older teenagers can operate.

Even if the gun is not physically too large, you the recoil may be too much for some smaller or more petite family members.

A .410 shotgun, for example, might be a better choice than twelve gauge because it is smaller but still effective for home defense.

A pump action is definitely more simple to operate than a semi-auto.

And what if one of your family members can't operate the pump action easily?

You could go with one of the new generation of "tactical" double-barrels, which gives you two shots but does not require that you manipulate anything to get that second shot off.

Choose One Short Enough To Maneuver Around Corners If Needed

There are a lot of shotguns on the market.

Many homes already have shotguns in them.

When shopping for a home defense shotgun, or when choosing one from among those available, make sure you don't choose one that is too long.

A shotgun with a barrel suitable for skeet and trap shooting is generally too long to be manipulated indoors, where you have to be able to move in and around obstacles, or use cover and concealment.

When shopping for your home defense shotgun, therefore, don't select a shotgun with a barrel length of greater than 20 inches.

The legal minimum is just a hair over 18 inches, so the shortest you are likely to find is about 18 and a half.

Beyond 20, however, the gun will simply be unwieldy.

We'll chat a bit more about that a little later in this report.

Also, consider this: A big man can adapt to a stock that is too small much more easily than a smaller person can adapt to a stock that is too large.

Consider that when making your choice.

Choose A Shotgun Light Enough That Anyone In The Home Can Pick Up and Operate

When shopping for a home defense shotgun, don't forget that a shotgun that is too heavy to lift and use is useless to any member of the family who finds it so.

There are lots of fancy tactical shotguns you can buy that are just too much for some smaller members of your family.

Opt for a simpler pump gun or double barrel in order to prevent that from becoming an issue.

Consider Accessories Carefully

When you buy a shotgun, you may feel tempted to start hanging all kinds of accessories on it.

You'll want to consider that carefully.

We'll talk in this report about the accessories you really do need.

Read on to find out more.

Pistol Grips And Short Barrels

If you go to a gun show, you will see a LOT of inexpensive pump-action shotguns being sold that have pistol grips instead of shoulder stocks.

The idea of having a shotgun that is essentially just a gigantic pistol is appealing to many people.



Let's be honest: they look fierce and there's something very appealing about that.

We've also been conditioned by television and movies to see pistol-grip shotguns as... forgive me ... BAD ASS weapons.

But are they?

To be perfectly frank, I think the choice of using a pistol-grip shotgun is just another personal preference.

If you're used to using a carbine with pistol grips, for example (such as an M4 or even a submachine gun or semi-auto submachinegun clone), using a shotgun that is similarly set up with pistol grips (with or without a shoulder stock) may be what is most familiar to you.

There is a certain logic to having all of your personal weapons exhibit the same characteristics, and if most of them have pistol grips, there is no reason your shotgun should be the lone exception.

Remember that if you don't have a shoulder stock on your shotgun, however, you simply can't hit anything at a distance with any real accuracy.

With most shooters firing slugs from a pistol grip shotgun, accurate fire is possible within only 7 to 12 feet.

No matter how much you practice on the range, you're going to miss for real in an adrenalized combat scenario if you're trying to shoot a shotgun that you cannot brace with its shoulder stock.

Shooting from the hip is something that is best left to movies!

The same is true for shotguns with extremely short barrels.

For most of us, a short-barreled shotgun is not a legal option, because there are Federal laws that limit shotguns to 18 inches in the barrel (anything less is considered a "sawed off shotgun").

It is, however, possible to obtain shotguns with shorter barrels, if you fill out the appropriate paperwork and pay the necessary fees (at least in most states).

Unless you're using that very short shotgun for breaching doors and breaking locks, it's not going to be very useful to you.

The short barrel is like the absence of a shoulder stock.

It makes it almost impossible for you to hit with any accuracy at distances greater than walking across your living room.

Pistol grips do, however, offer you a few storage options that a shotgun with a shoulder stock can't fit.

Just keep in mind that if you put a pistol grip on your shotgun, you're basically hamstringing yourself before you get started.

You're making that shotgun suitable only for relatively inaccurate, very close-range fire, and you're making it that much harder to aim down the weapon's rudimentary sights.

To Convert Or Not To Convert

There are so many shotgun accessories and aftermarket conversions available that it's sometimes hard to choose from among them.

You could take a common, long-barreled hunting shotgun that you (or your father) were using to hunt deer and convert into a "tactical shotgun."

When you're done, that shotgun could have a shorter barrel (drop-in barrels of many lengths, down to the legal minimum, are commonly available), a carrier mounted to the side for extra shotgun shells, a flashlight mount, a fancy sling, and pistol grips.

Knowing that you can do all that to a shotgun, should you?

Is it WORTH converting an old hunting gun, or should you buy the latest and greatest?



Well, to be honest, when choosing a combat shotgun, I basically start with something... well, *basic*.

The Winchester 1300 is a good example.

It's a solid pump gun, popular with some law enforcement agencies, and common enough as a hunting weapon.

Just add a sling and a light to it and you've got as much defensive combat shotgun as you're ever going to need.

However, there's something that many shotgun owners and operators don't stop to consider, especially when fitting out a shotgun that other members of the family (a spouse, children, etc.) might use.

That is stock length.

Stocks And Length Of Pull

A shotgun, especially a pump-action shotgun, must be the right size for the person who uses it.

Consider what you do when you fire a shotgun like that. You put the shotgun to your shoulder, work the pump (if it's not a semi-auto) with your off hand, and pull the trigger with your right hand.

Then you repeat the process.

If you have to reach farther than is comfortable to work the pump (or simply to hold the weapon), you have a stock that is too long.

This is why the youth model of many shotguns appears so much smaller than the "full sized" model.

It isn't that the shotgun barrel or receiver is any smaller (it couldn't be, if it fires the same ammunition).

Instead, the stock, the part that fits against the shoulder, is shorter to give the operator better reach toward the front of the shotgun.

When selecting your shotgun, make sure you choose a weapon that is the right size for you.

To do this, refer to the "length of pull."

The **length of pull** is the distance from the trigger to the back of the recoil pad.

It's a way of giving a size for shotguns so that you can determine what does and does not fit you.

If the length of pull is too long, you simply won't be able to operate the shotgun comfortably.

A shotgun that is right for you might be impossible for your wife, your son, or your daughter to use, if they are smaller than you are.

One way to solve this problem is to install an M4-style adjustable stock on your shotgun.

This turns your shotgun into something that looks like the offspring of a shotgun and an M4/AR15 style rifle.

Different users can adjust the stock to fit them, giving them the length of pull they desire.

For ninety-nine percent of shooters, a length of pull from 12.5 to 13 inches is adequate.

MOST shotguns on the market come out to about 14 inches, which is simply too long.

What this does is cause the shooter to reposition the shotgun while working the action, and when he does that, the butt moves out of position for the follow-up shot, making everything take longer.

If your arm rather than your shoulder takes a beating from a shotgun with the incorrect length of pull, you could be injured.

One student got an embolism from such punishment during a three-day shooting class, and actually DIED.

Length of pull is a very serious consideration, and one that is often overlooked by beginner and expert shooters alike.

It is, in fact, the FIRST consideration where operating a combat shotgun is concerned.

The second is LIGHT.

A Light On Your Gun

Most self-defense situations and most real shooting scenarios occur in low light (in other words, at night rather than in broad daylight).

There are, conservatively speaking, roughly a billion "tactical flashlights" on the market.

Many of them are very good.



To use a combat flashlight with a handgun isn't very difficult.

There are specific methods for carrying and using a flashlight in your support hand while you're wielding a handgun in your dominant hand.

When using a shotgun with a flashlight, however, things quickly become more complicated.

A shotgun is a two-handed weapon. It is very difficult to carry a flashlight in the hand you need to support and often to pump a combat shotgun.

The solution is obvious: You'll need to mount a light if you want to use it with the shotgun.

Just as there are many ways to mount flashlights to handguns (on accessory rails and below the magazine, for example), there are different methods for mounting flashlights to shotguns.

I solved this problem by installing an accessory rail on all my shotguns.

I use it with SureFire lights, but of course you could use different lights from among the many available.

The light just clips to the rail, and that's that.

If you can't see, you can't shoot.

You have to be able to identify your target.

Seventy percent of your input, as a human being, is visual.

This makes including a light on your combat shotgun a no-brainer, as far as I'm concerned.

I recommend mounting your light forward, right on the pump, where you can easily mount an accessory rail.

Try to keep the position of the light uniform across all your weapons that are similarly equipped.

So I stick with uniformity.

As long as you are consistent, there are a number of different ways to mount the light, from the very expensive to the very cheap.

You can buy replacement forearms for the pump on a shotgun that include integrated switches and flashlights protruding from them.

You can clamp the flashlight to the barrel or under the magazine tube.

You can even buy flashlight mounts that are designed to fit in one of the shell holes of an ammunition carrier (a "**side saddle**") mounted to the receiver of your shotgun (we'll get to those).

Now, while doing all this accessorizing, remember not to skimp on the light itself.

Yes, you can buy very bright lights very cheaply, from Internet "tactical" sites to your local hardware store.

Unless you buy a model that is proven to work with a firearm (such as a SureFire or a Streamlight), however, you'll never know if your light can withstand the shock and vibration of being mounted to a shotgun.

Always buy quality when adding accessories to a gun!

A SureFire can absorb the recoil of a 12-gauge slug discharge, but many lesser flashlights will not.

Their bulbs will blow, and you will be without a light for your follow-up shots.

Remember that you get what you pay for... unless you get LESS than you paid for.

Heat Shields

We mentioned the many aftermarket accessories on the market for combat shotguns. Let's talk about a couple of them now.

One accessory you find commonly installed on self-defense shotguns, especially the ones sold at gun shows as pistol-grip models, is a heat shield.



Heat shields are just pieces of flat metal bent to curve around the barrel. They have cooling holes drilled through them.

The purpose of a heat shield is simply to protect the operator from a barrel that has gotten hot.

Of course, they also make the shotgun look "meaner," and for some people, that's a selling point.

Heat shields are primarily installed on shotguns for military purposes.

Think about it: To heat up the barrel to the point you'd need a heat shield, you would have to fire a LOT of rounds.

Unless you're in the habit of getting into firefights with gangs, you probably don't NEED a heat shield.

There is, however, no harm in having one on the gun.

In other words, if your shotgun comes with a heat shield already installed, there's no reason to take it off.

If it doesn't, there's no need to put one on.

Side Saddles

One accessory that I absolutely WOULD recommend you install is a side saddle.

These, like heat shields, make your gun look "meaner," I suppose, but they also serve a very real purpose.



A side saddle gives you means of carrying a reload right on the gun, rather than loose in your pockets.

The side saddle is the BEST way to carry a reload for a pump-action shotgun, for that matter, because most people don't wander around their home or neighborhood wearing a bandolier full of shotgun shells.

There are other setups that are similar, such as some shoulder stocks you can install on your gun that have slots for shells.

I think the side saddle puts the rounds closer to the receiver where you'll need to load them, however, and thus the side saddle is the better idea.

Most side saddles install on the shotgun using extra-long pins.

You just pop out some of the pins holding your shotgun's receiver together, replace those pins with the longer pins, and include the side saddle while you put everything back together.

Typically, the shell carrier portion of the side saddle is screwed to the plate that you've just mounted to your shotgun's receiver, so make sure you use Loctite or something like that when assembling it.

Make sure you tighten those screws as hard as you can, too.

Otherwise, the recoil of firing the shotgun might cause the side saddle to shake loose.

Every 200 rounds or so, check your accessories, including your side saddle, to make sure it's still firmly mounted to the weapon and not going anywhere.

If it's coming loose, tighten it down again, and use more Loctite to keep it there.

If you don't want to mount a side saddle directly to your shotgun, there are other options.

One of those options is a fabric shell carrier for the buttstock.



Buttstock carriers aren't as fast to get into action as a side saddle, and in most cases you have to move a flap to remove the rounds, but this is a low-cost way to add rounds to the gun that does not involve directly altering the weapon itself.

There are even some aftermarket plastic stocks with shell-carriers built into them.

A Sling

Most people who own shotguns do NOT have slings on them.

This is a mistake.

Think about it: You can't holster a shotgun of any length.

It simply isn't physically possible.



In a self-defense altercation, there may come a time when you need to "holster" your shotgun.

Just in day to day use, there may come a point at which you need both hands but you have to carry your weapon with you.

What will you do in such a situation?

What if you've just engaged in a shooting and have called the police?

You don't want to meet the police with a weapon in your hands... but you don't want to leave the weapon just lying around, either.

In all of these cases, the only option to "holster" a shotgun is to sling it.

Your combat shotguns, therefore, should have slings on them.

How Long Is Too Long?

As we mentioned earlier, when choosing a shotgun, don't go longer than 20 inches of barrel.

There are many shotguns that are longer because these longer barrels are used for hunting and for trap- and skeet-shooting.

If you have a very long shotgun and you want to use it for home defense, you'll have to cut the barrel down.

If it's a particularly nice hunting gun or it has sentimental value, you wouldn't want to do that to the weapon, so you'd have to get something else with a more suitable barrel length.



Fortunately, shotguns are relatively inexpensive.

A barrel longer than 20 inches will give you serious problems with maneuverability, be it in foliage or in your living room.

By way of illustration, it's a fact that all adult males have roughly the same upper torso length.

Somebody's who four feet tall and somebody who's over six feet tall ranges from the bottom of the neck to the waistline between 18 and a half to 19 inches.

(Females are 14 inches.)

The difference in height is largely in the femur, the femoral bone.

A tall man has a long femoral bone, which means he has more clearance for a longer barrel, but he still would want to stay within the 20 inch range.

For reference, the federal minimum barrel length on a shotgun is 18 inches.

Most of the shotguns you'll buy that have "18 inch barrels" really have barrels that are more like 18 and a half inches, just to be safe.

Combat and home-defense models with 20 inch barrels are common.

Beyond that length, you'll have serious problems operating the shotgun in doors for home defense.

Let's talk for a minute about the difference between shooting a person and a clay pigeon in trap- and skeet-shooting.

Now, clay pigeons move at 600 feet a second in a smooth trajectory.

People, however, move erratically.

Target shotguns have longer barrels because that long sighting plane and heavy barrel promotes the swing.

You swing through the clay pigeon, looking at your target, but not at your site.

You're posting the bead site underneath the target, looking at the target and then swinging the gun all the way through the pattern.

This way you can launch a pattern four foot wide, hit the pigeon with one or two pellets, and it will be marked down as a kill, which is a term for making a cross on a piece of paper that retains your score as long as you knock dust off that clay pigeon.

If you shot trap or skeet with a self-defense shotgun, you probably wouldn't do very well.

But for the sake of maneuverability, a shotgun of the length used in target shooting simply isn't suitable for home defense.

More On Choosing Calibers

We talked about this already in the section on understanding gauges, and a little bit when we talked about shotgun types, so it should be obvious to you that there are many shotgun calibers from which to choose.

Remember, as the gauge number goes up, the size of the projectile goes down.

The 12 gauge is the most common and the most popular for home-defense and for military and law enforcement applications, but that doesn't mean you have to choose it.

It's a great compromise that puts a lot of lead downrange without being extremely punishing.

The 20-gauge, by comparison, is a smaller round but also reasonably effective, so you could choose to go with a 20-gauge if you wanted to, and it might make it easier for smaller members of your household to use the shotgun.

Ten gauge is too punishing for most people.

8 gauge and 4 gauge run closer to something you would use to hunt big game with, so we won't even consider those, and we didn't bother to list them among the common shotgun gauges.

Then there is the .410 shotgun shell, which, as we've said, is the same diameter as .45 Long Colt.

This small shotgun round can be had for use in light-duty home defense shotguns, but it's also very popular in the lines of oversized revolvers on the market these days, like the Judge and the Circuit Judge.

For smaller people, the .410 is a great fit, and the ability to fire both shotshells and bullets means the gun will be very versatile for defense and survival.

Consider the cost of ammunition when you select your caliber, too.

Some calibers, such as 16 gauge, can be hard to find and more expensive to buy.

Ultimately, though the choice comes down to personal preference.

No matter what the size of the cartridge, you don't want to be standing in front of it.

Carrying And Storing Your Shotgun

Your shotgun, if used for home defense, can conceivably be left somewhere for fast access, such as mounted to clips or racks on your bed or by a door.

If you live in a home with children, however, this is terribly irresponsible.

In all homes with children, firearms should be secured when not in use.

Ideally, they should also be hidden from view, so a casual casing of your home won't reveal them.

Simply separating the weapon from its ammo, or hiding it in what you think is a clever way, is not enough, because no matter how clever you think you are, children will figure you out.

In some localities there are also storage laws that preclude leaving a loaded weapon out for anyone to access.



Locks such as those you see in police and military vehicles, which lock down the shotgun and keep it secure, are a good choice.

So are locking cabinets and safes that keep the shotgun stored away for maximum security.

You can buy locks and safes that have fast biometric locks, which you can open using your fingerprints or some other method.

There's also carry in a vehicle to be considered.

Gone are the days when anyone with a pickup truck could drive around with a shotgun in a rack in the back window.



Doing so today is a good way to get your vehicle burglarized and your shotgun stolen.

If you keep a vehicle in your car, make sure it's locked up in a case that can be secured to some metal part of the vehicle with a steel cable.

Even these precautions won't stop a determined thief with a pair of bolt cutters, so be aware that storing a shotgun in your vehicle should be a short-term affair ONLY.

Again, check your local laws and follow them.

A good rule of thumb, however, is to make sure a shotgun cannot be used without your authorization (such as with locks and keys).

Also, the shotgun should not be visible to just anyone.

It should be out sight to prevent crimes of opportunity... as well as curious children or adult visitors.

The bottom line, though, is that the shotgun must ALSO be accessible for use in a deadly force altercation.

That's why you have it, after all.

So when securing your weapon, make your choices with an eye toward compromise between security and accessibility.

A lock or safe that can be quickly opened when you need it is a good choice.

A Shotgun In Your Vehicle

Law enforcement officers often carry shotguns (or other long arms) in their vehicles.

Should you, as a private citizen?

A shotgun is one weapon that (when transported separate from its ammunition) can generally be carried in a vehicle, legally, across state borders, so it's a great choice for traveling.

A shotgun is also great backup to have when you are facing opponents who have rifles.



You really don't want to go up against shooters with long arms if all you have is a handgun or two, do you?

A lot depends, as it always does, on whether there are other people who have access to your vehicle.

Make sure your firearms, whether locked in your vehicle or in your house, are LOCKED, secured from unauthorized access.

Avoid keeping a shotgun in a window rack in a truck, which is like hanging a giant neon sign on your vehicle that says, "STEAL ME."

Remember, too, that there is a difference between HIDING a firearm (putting it where you think it is cleverly disguised) and LOCKING a firearm.

Wherever you can think to hide a gun, a criminal or a clever child can think to search for it.

If your gun is found (and it WILL be found if the person searching is persistent enough), the only thing stopping it from being misused will be whatever physical locking system you used to secure it.

Securing your firearms also prevents an intruder from using them against you in the case of a burglary or home invasion.

Yes, it takes longer to access a firearm such as a shotgun locked in your vehicle if that shotgun is properly locked and secured... but the tradeoff is that you have prevented unauthorized access and thus prevented a potentially lethal accident or crime.

Obey The Law

A final consideration for your combat shotgun is that you must know your local laws.

If you've ever taken a hunter safety course, chances are that in your state, like where I lived when I took mine, it is not legal for you to have a shotgun in a vehicle with live rounds in it.

There have been incidents in which deer hunters, who were about to be roused by game wardens, frantically tried to shuck the rounds out of their shotguns... only to discharge them accidentally.



In one instance, a hunter blew the head off the driver behind whose seat he was sitting in a truck.

Whatever the laws are in your area, know them and obey them, especially as they relate to safe storage and legal transportation of your shotgun and its ammunition.

Now, it's true that you can't really legislate responsibility.

There are drunk people on the roads every day.

The danger from these drunk drivers pales in comparison to the danger from people who don't know how to safely and responsibly handle their shotguns.

Ask ten different gun owners and you'll get ten different answers regarding safely keeping your own weapons.

Still, use your head.

Buy quality equipment, and make sure that whatever you use to secure your shotguns, according to the law where you live, that this equipment is reliable.

A Bump In The Night

There is a special consideration for a home defense shotgun:

If you're going to use it in the middle of the night, when you've just been woken from a sound sleep, you DON'T want the gun to be chambered and ready to go.

Most of us aren't in full command of our faculties when we wake up like that.

Do you really want to pick up a gun that is loaded and chambered?

What if you shoot someone while you're only half awake and semi-dreaming... and that someone turns out to be a family member?

It's a good idea to keep a pump gun loaded but NOT chambered in this example scenario.

Pumping the gun forces you to take a positive action that wakes you more fully.

It also helps prevent accidents when handling the weapon while not fully awake.

A Home Defense Shotgun Drill

To put it bluntly, a guide like this can't teach you the body mechanics of wielding a shotgun.

You have to take classes in person from a qualified instructor, or at the very least put in the time on the range, to get the feel for what it takes to properly "run" the shotgun.

But consider this:

Do you have any idea what it feels like to walk through your own home with a shotgun at the ready?

Could you go from room to room and bring the shotgun to bear on any targets that presented themselves?

Would you know which angles to take and which angles not to take?

By angles, I mean, which shots can you safely take at an intruder because on the other side of that shot is a major appliance like your refrigerator, or a bookcase full of books -- things that can absorb your shotgun's fire so those rounds don't keep on traveling into someone in the next room?

After all, if you're defending your home with your shotgun (which is one of the major reasons you bought one), you're going to have to consider these things if that proverbial bump in the night does come.

That means that you'll have to work these things out NOW, before an emergency occurs.

This raises the interesting question of how exactly you're going to do that.

Few of us have access to a three-dimensional shooting range.

In fact, the places where you can fire your shotgun are generally limited to outdoor ranges.

In most of those, you can only shoot down range.

Any attempt to practice force on force is pretty much going to be a no-go.

In fact, you'll get thrown out of a lot of these places if you do something as simple as fire from a holster or, in the case of your shotgun, bring it up on its sling or practice movement drills before shooting.

But that's what we're talking about practicing and working with.

You essentially need to start conducting your own force on force drills in your home, at the very least so you can move through your house with a shotgun and not trip over your own feet, or get the barrel planted in a wall when you need it on target.

After all, shotguns are long guns.

It's not as easy to move through a space with a shotgun as it is with a handgun, which is why we talked about the ideal barrel length for a shotgun in the home defense setting.

So what do you do?

You've got to find a way to practice the body mechanics of moving through the space available (be it your home, outside your business, whatever) with something that simulates your shotgun, but which is safe for the drill.

Now, you could just unload the weapon and use it with the action open.

That's one way, but it's generally frowned upon as not very safe to use a live weapon, or one that could conceivably become live, for a drill.

In the history of shooting accidents, the stories are full of people who thought for sure the gun wasn't loaded, or couldn't fire, and that everything was perfectly safe... until somebody got shot.

Just recently, there was a minor scandal involving a major shooting instructor's trainers.

It seems that during an exercise, the trainer managed to put a round through a student's nearby parked vehicle.

There's no excuse for making mistakes like that during force on force training.

That means you need a safe training tool.

Fortunately, you have some options.

One of the easiest to use is a resin training gun.

There are Ring's Blue Guns and Asp Red Guns, not to mention some resin guns manufactured by other companies, that closely simulate a number of different shotguns and shotgun types.

You could buy one of these and use it to practice the body mechanics of moving through your home, bringing the weapon to your shoulder and down again, and "covering" a potential intruder.

But what if you want to take it a step farther for greater interactivity?

Well, that's where the fun world of airsoft comes in.

A number of airsoft shotguns are available on the market.

The ones that closely resemble pump shotguns are actually fairly affordable, because they operate on spring power.

Because you have to pump the spring each time you want to fire, and because this exactly matches the need to pump a real shotgun for each shot, airsoft shotguns make great combat simulators.

You can buy an airsoft shotgun -- preferably one that is as close as possible to your real shotgun in terms of size and appearance -- and work your way through your house, or whatever other scenario you choose.

This is a safe way to practice the mechanics of using a home-defense or self-defense shotgun that also gives you the option of firing a few pellets at a target.

Airsoft Shotgun Home Defense Drill

Try the following drill at home.

You'll need an airsoft pump-action shotgun and appropriate eye protection.

Remember, too, that airsoft pellets hit hard enough to leave dents in drywall, so keep that in mind before you start or conduct the drill.

If you just had the living room refurbished, it might be better to set up a mock living room in your garage or backyard.

You can even use cardboard boxes to simulate objects and furniture.

The drill works like this:

- Construct a target that simulates a human being. Even a cardboard stand-up, or one of those movie standees you can buy used from hobby stores, will do.
- Have a friend or family member position the target somewhere in your home without telling you where it is.
- Using your airsoft shotgun, move through your home and “clear” each room. Ask yourself which angles offer safe shots that cannot over-penetrate and strike a family member or neighbor... and which angles are definitely not safe.
- When you discover the target, make sure you can safely take the shot, then fire and take cover.
- Repeat the drill as needed to get a sense for the best way to clear your home, and for the mechanical challenges of moving through your home with the shotgun.

The drill is limited only by your imagination. You can find ways to make it more complicated, more challenging, and more interesting.

Remember that practice and training ahead of time are what will make all the difference.

The Home Defense Shotgun: Final Thoughts

When it's all said and done, the combat shotgun obeys the same basic rules of handling, operation, strategy, and tactics, as does any other firearm, irrespective of mechanical differences in its manual of arms.

I can't be your parents, nor would I presume to be.



When you arm yourself with a combat shotgun, the same basic presumptions apply.

I assume you're not doing something stupid.

I assume you're not looking for a fight.

All sane men and women, if they can avoid a violent confrontation, do so.

When it comes to protecting your loved ones, your family, and your own life from violent assault in a dangerous world, it is nonetheless sometimes necessary for you to prepare to use deadly force.

Allow me to leave you these basic rules of the combat shotgun as I see them:

1. It doesn't matter what shotgun you use as long as the weapon is cleaned, maintained, and sized properly for you. That gun must be usable by every members of the family who is authorized to use a firearm in defense of the home, in a caliber that every one of those people can handle.
2. Load your shotguns with slugs, not shot, so that you can reasonably predict where your shots will go and what your backstop is likely to be.
3. Mount a white light to your shotguns so that you can see in low-light situations. Make sure this light can withstand the vibration and recoil of the weapon's action.
4. Mount a side saddle to your shotgun if it is feasible for you to do so. This is the best way to carry a reload for your weapon, right on the gun where it is most accessible.
5. Mount a sling to your shotgun so you have some way to "holster it" without putting it down.
6. Avoid junk! You get what you pay for... unless you get less.

The rest is up to you.

For most people, a shooting is a situation akin to a dog chasing a bus.

Most dogs wouldn't know what to do with themselves if they ever caught that bus.

Unless you want to know what this feels like, you must train for the possibility of a shooting scenario, and you must know intimately the weapon you have chosen to do this.

Under stress, you're going to fall back on your training.

Under stress, you'll perform at your worst.

In other words, the best you do when the real thing happens is the worst you did when you trained.

Keep that in mind and always strive to practice diligently, pushing your level of excellence so that your "worst" is at least acceptable in reality.

Using a deadly weapon is no small thing.

It requires a very specific set of circumstances to justify its use in self-defense.

That weapon, if it is the combat shotgun, will serve you in good stead if you follow the directions in this report... and if you follow up with qualified training and diligent practice.

Remember: the shotgun must be simple and reliable, easy to operate, and operable by all the members of your family.

It shouldn't be too long and it shouldn't be too complicated.

In that way it truly is a home DEFENSE shotgun.

As always, train hard, stay safe... and prepare now.