



THE 28 GAUGE FOR RUFFED GROUSE

By NICK SISLEY


In decades past I wrote something like, “If you’re serious about securing a comforting bump or two bouncing along in the back of the old hunting coat, pack a 12 gauge.” This suggestion still holds plenty of merit, but these days many serious grouse hunters are more interested in the “sport” of grouse shooting rather than the “success”. Accordingly, the 20 gauge has somewhat replaced the 12 bore in grouse woods nationwide. Interestingly, statistics prove that the 28 gauge is only a smidgen behind the 20 in effectiveness.



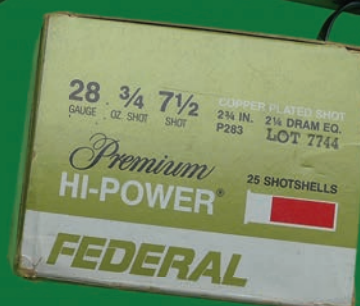
Beretta 682 Silver Pigeon S in 28 gauge – despite its 28-inch barrels, this one only weighs 6 pounds, 2.5 ounces.



Older 28 gauge side-by-side from Huglu in Turkey – at the time imported by Armsco. Bright chromed receiver is no longer offered, nor is the intricate hand-engraving shown here.



Krieghoff model 32 Phantom – fitted with a set of 28-inch, 28-gauge barrels with fixed chokes (skeet and skeet).



Most of you know that competition skeet shooting is a four-gauge game – with separate events for the 12, 20, 28 and 2 ½-inch .410. Every year the National Skeet Shooting Association (NSSA) produces their “Skeet Shooting Records Annual” (for a copy go to www.nssa-nasca.com). The guy with the highest 20-gauge average for 2013 was Mike Schmidt, Jr. with 1800 registered 20-gauge targets. His average was an amazing .9983, certainly remarkable shooting.

Comparing the 2013 28-gauge averages in the same regard, Michigan’s Kurt Grates led the nation with an average of .9980 for 2013. That means with these serious skeet shooters there was hardly a split hair of difference between the 20 and the 28 gauge – good reasons to not look too harshly at using the 28 gauge for grouse.

As you might guess, there is a wide array of 28-gauge grouse guns for you to consider. If your spouse balks at you buying yet another shotgun, consider what Gene Hill did – smuggle the new 28 bore wrapped in a new Persian rug for your partner. While Ruger has brought the Red Label over-and-under back in 12 gauge – a new 20 gauge could be available by the time this appears in print. But my favorite Ruger Red Label was the 28 gauge, which is no longer made, and that 28 was made on a gauge-specific, 28-gauge frame. In my handling of the gun, as well as my opinion, that was the best Red Label ever when it comes to consideration for grouse work. Check the used market if you’re further interested in this one.

In 1991 I visited the Franchi factory in Brescia, Italy. In a conversation with Franco Franchi, who then ran the firm, he told me the company had only made about 80 28-gauge semi-autos on their 48AL 20-gauge frame, and 60 of those were sold in Europe, leaving only about 20 to reach the USA. My close grouse-hunting friend John Schoen bought one of those and still has it. After Benelli started marketing the Franchi brand, they offered the 48AL in 20 and 28, so there are now plenty of the latter around both new and used. My first “real” grouse gun was a Franchi 20 gauge 48AL. Then I bought a 12-gauge Franchi around 1975, shot it for more than a decade, and there were plenty of grouse around then. The 12 gauge 48AL is no longer offered.

Most grouse hunters agree that a reasonably light smoothbore is a big plus for grouse work. The two models covered so far are definitely in the “light enough” category for this. One current 28 I certainly favor is the Beretta 682 Silver Pigeon S. Light despite its 28-inch barrels, this one is maybe a 20-year-old gun. The engraving pattern is certainly more intricate than the current Silver Pigeon S models. Of course, the 682 is well known for both its handling qualities and its long-term durability.

I also own a Huglu 28-gauge side-by-side with bright chrome receiver that’s intricately hand-engraved including the sideplates. This gun was imported by Armsco – while current Huglu shot-

guns are imported by CZ-USA. This same model, with the sideplates, is still offered by CZ including hand-engraving. Still for side-by-side fans, a CZ 28 gauge is a good and inexpensive option. The older Huglu 28 has side clips – current CZ 28s and .410s do not, while the 12, 16 and 20-gauge side-by-sides do. To me the side clips speak volumes due to the increased amount of labor required to fit them.

When it comes to gun-carrying lightness, several shotgun companies offer models with aluminum-alloy receivers. If on a 20-gauge receiver, a 28 gauge will be reduced in weight by 10 to 12 ounces – aluminum-alloy compared to steel in 12 gauge. Most all of these are built with some type of steel insert fitted into the receiver’s breech face, giving such alloy-receiver shotguns added strength where needed. My Krieghoff model 32 Phantom is built with an aluminum-alloy receiver. Of course, like all model 32 Krieghoffs, this is a 12-gauge gun. While four-barrel Krieghoff sets were once the most preferred (at least by those who could

afford them) skeet competitors now shoot 12-gauge over-and-unders fitted with Briley or Kolar sub-gauge tubes in the 20, 28 and .410. But those 20, 28 and .410 barrels are still out there – many of them sitting in closets and thus unused with fixed chokes (www.halkguns.com). I bought a set of 28-inch model 32 28-gauge barrels and had them inexpensively fit to my 12-gauge Krieghoff Phantom, another 28-gauge avenue to consider.

Browning is another company that makes lightweight 28-gauge Citori over-and-unders made on aluminum-alloy frames. Caesar Guerini does too, and there are others. Are you a pump gun fan? While Remington does not currently make an 870 in 28 gauge, they did, and so they, too, are available on the used market. The one to seek here would be a 28-gauge skeet model 870. Unless altered, that gun’s barrel will already be fitted with a fixed open skeet choke.

One last bit about skeet: Decades back, I made it a point to pace off the distance for an entire season from where I shot to where the grouse hit the ground. Interestingly, the average distance was 23 long

steps (roughly yards). So those birds were hit at probably 21 yards or closer on average. The distance from each skeet shooting station – to the center stake is – guess what – 21 yards! So William Harnden Foster and his cronies who originated the game of skeet to help improve their grouse shooting – they certainly had the average distance correct. Bottom line: keep those grouse gun chokes open even if you shoot or plan to shoot a 28 gauge. ♦



Slipping two 28-gauge shells into the Beretta silver pigeon S.



Side clips on this close-up of the 28-gauge side-by-side from Huglu. These clips are a great touch to these somewhat older guns.

If interested in Sisley’s ebooks on shotgun topics, go to www.amazon.com - only \$2.99. Nick welcomes your emails at nicksisley@hotmail.com.