

Fit for purpose

Having a properly fitted gun can make a massive difference to your shooting, as **Mat Manning** discovered after having some expert tweaks made to his new Rizzini

While I do not profess to be an expert on gun fit, I can vouch for the significant difference it can make to your shooting.

I took the plunge and had a gun fitted to my exact measurements last year. The improvement it has brought to my results on clays and in the field has been astonishing.

Until last year, I had been using an over-and-under Bettinsoli for most of my shooting. I'm 6ft 2in and have long arms and a long neck, so the gun needed a few tweaks. A friend made a discreet wooden spacer to lengthen the stock by about an inch and the gun was fitted with a cheap foam comb riser to help raise my line of sight. Those modest adjustments improved my strike rate.

My performance with a shotgun still

suffered one big problem. As somebody who has done a lot of rifle shooting over the past 30 years, I found it very difficult not to overthink my shots. Apart from focusing too much on the bead and where it was pointing,



I also noticed that I was taking time to nestle down into the gun and properly align my eye with the rib after mounting. All this faffing around was affecting the fluency of my shooting and it was down to poor gun fit.

Elegant

Things took a turn after I had a go with a friend's Rizzini BR110 Sporter, shot very well and immediately fell in love with it. It handled like a dream and had a very crisp trigger. I also liked the fact that, although it's quite an elegant gun, it seemed robust enough to tolerate the abuse of my crow, pigeon and squirrel shooting rounds. Most significantly, my friend is of a similar height and build to me and he had had his gun properly fitted.

As luck would have it, I found myself what looked to be a very good deal on a BR110. The only problem was that it had a 14in; my old gun had been stretched to around 15½in. I got in touch with a local gun shop, AW Rule & Son, which specialises in ensuring that shotguns are properly fitted to their owners.

“How a gun feels and how you actually shoot with it can be two very different things”



Mat mounts the try gun as Gareth checks the position of his eye over the rib



The business, based in Somerton, was launched more than 60 years ago by Anthony William Rule, who served his apprenticeship at James Purdey & Son. Rule's is now owned Anthony's son, Gareth, who is continuing the family's proud tradition.

Gareth confirmed that he would indeed be able to make the Rizzini fit me. Two weeks later I found myself chatting and laughing with Gareth over coffee in the Rule's gunroom. Gareth produced an over-and-under try-gun to take my measurements accurately. A try-gun is a gun with a stock that allows adjustments to be made in more or less every direction. By standing at the opposite end of the room and getting me to mount the gun and point it as his nose — something that goes against everything we have been taught — Gareth was able to make subtle tweaks until he was satisfied that it fitted me correctly. He noted my measurements and explained their implications. I would need a stock with a $15\frac{3}{4}$ in length of pull — much shorter than that and my mount would be inconsistent, recoil would be exaggerated and shooting would feel uncomfortable.

Misalignment

Adjustment would also need to be made to the bend of the gun to stop me from dropping my head, as not being able to see enough of the rib would cause problems. The cast of the stock would be increased to $\frac{3}{8}$ in. The adjustment required to get the cast right was small but Gareth explained that it would make a considerable difference, as tiny increments of misalignment at the gun amount to being several feet off aim when the target is 30 or 40 yards away.

Hearing that these three key elements of gun fit required adjustment came as quite a surprise to me but Gareth believes some 90% of off-the-peg guns don't fit their owners properly. Variations between shooters are influenced by height, build, age, sex and injury. Rule's uses a traditional method to adjust cast and bend, pouring hot oil over the stock to soften the wood fibres before pressure is gradually applied to bend it to the required dimensions. A slow cooling process is important to ensure that the wood



Craftsmen ensure the new recoil pad and spacers fit seamlessly to the stock of Mat's Rizzini



Having a properly fitted gun has made a significant improvement to Mat's results in the field

fibres bond correctly and don't creep back.

To sort the length of pull, Gareth offers several choices incorporating fine wood or synthetic spacers, and I went for the practical and affordable option. A 30mm black Wegu pad was set behind two additional spacers, which were

carefully ground to make a subtle refinement to pitch while creating a neat join with the stock. The process then entailed hand-sanding and oiling, and the result was a seamless connection between the wooden stock and synthetic spacers. Finally, the metal components of the gun were stripped and cleaned to remove any oil. I was delighted with the result. Dry-mounting the gun confirmed a marked improvement in fit.

How a gun feels and how you shoot with it can be two very different things, so I was eager to put some cartridges through the tweaked Rizzini. On the clay ground, the improvement was very apparent from the off —

I was hitting a lot more than usual. It was also the same in the field and my cartridge-to-kill ratio when decoying pigeons and crows is now far better than it ever was.

Instinctive shooting

In my opinion, the biggest difference for me has been being able to trust my mount and know that I'm looking straight down the rib as soon as the gun is in my shoulder. The result is that I am suddenly able to shoot far more instinctively than I could when I was forever checking my aim and constantly making tiny alterations to my head position to compensate for poor gun fit.

Six months later and the honeymoon period has passed but I am still an absolute convert. True to my usual form, I've missed plenty of 'unmissable' shots with the Rizzini but, more importantly, I am connecting with a far greater percentage of the targets I take on than I was with my old gun.

Of course, a very good Shot can shoot pretty well with most guns. But, for those of us who need all the help we can get, I am convinced that having a properly fitted gun is a huge step in the right direction. ■



Gareth presents Mat with the fitted Rizzini