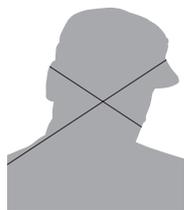


Adam Calvert is a freelance shooting instructor with a global reputation, offering highly bespoke and tailored shooting instruction in addition to being a Fabbri ambassador.



Expert instruction

PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD FAULKS

Q As we move towards the pheasant season can you recommend the best cartridge load for standard driven pheasants, and I don't mean 60-yard skyscrapers?

A I think cartridges are very much a personal preference and I would say that whatever gives you confidence when you are shooting is the correct cartridge for you. Shooting is a mental game and it is important to believe you have the correct tools for the job.

However, cartridge choice is obviously affected by what type of gun you are shooting. For my side-by-side users I would tend to recommend 28g 6s, moving to 30g 5s later in the season. For my over-under users I recommend a 30g 6 for the early part of the season, moving to a 32g 5 later on. I think most people are now aware that an increase in shot size gives you better knock-down power, which can be useful when the birds are slightly older and stronger later on in the season.

There is currently a fashion to shoot bigger and bigger loads, which is fine if you are targeting extreme birds. I personally never shoot anything bigger than a 34g 4 (and they would need to be extreme for this), preferring speed over weight of shot.

I am also a big fan of copper-coated cartridges (lead shot electro-plated with copper) as my experience and testing appears to suggest that copper assists enormously with patterns. The copper almost acts like a lubricant going down the barrel, preventing shot balling but also improving penetration. That said its effects seem to be negated on bigger shot sizes.

There are four final points to make when it comes to cartridges, which although simple are often overlooked...

Storage. People spend lots of money on the best new cartridges and then store them in the worst conditions, effectively wiping out any possible gains. Store them in dry conditions at room temperature. Not in the garage or the airing cupboard.



The most important thing about cartridge choice is to use what gives you confidence.

Patterns. I send all my clients' guns to Teague and ask them to regulate and pattern-test the gun to the client's desired cartridge. This may or may not involve fitting chokes.

Back-boring. Most estates now insist on fibre wads and, as a result, it is important to understand how a fibre wad performs in your gun. Many modern guns are back-bored to reduce recoil – this can result in a loss of pressure and thus striking energy.

Recoil. Probably the biggest problem I witness is clients shooting with cartridge loads that simply result in too much recoil, especially side-by-side users! The effect of recoil is massively underestimated and it can lead to poor second-barrel recovery and at worst flinching, head lifting, bruising and even trigger freeze in severe cases.

In summary try to avoid the hype and shoot a cartridge that you believe in. ■