



BY ANDREA BOGARD

You've worn the muffs, driven the cart, marked the Xs and pushed the button. You've sat through awards dinners, stood through long squads and ridden through road trips to the next shoot. But, have you pulled the trigger? Have you experienced the reason behind the obsession? Do you want to?

Come with me, let's chat about the why behind the what. The sporting clays course is filled with people who took that first shot, watched the clay break and were hooked. There was no looking

back. No question they wanted to experience that intoxicating feeling again and again.

It's 2020. Women are the fastest-growing segment in the shooting/hunting world and the reasons for this are numerous. The main one, however, is just plain fun. Shooting is fun! Even now, the vast majority of registered shooters are male. In 2019, 18,142 men shot registered targets in stark comparison to 1,692 women who shot registered targets. That means a lot of wives, girlfriends, fiancés, daughters, and sisters are pushing the button

when they hear "pull."

Do you want to shoot, but not enamored with the serious tenor of the registered scene? Are you looking for pointers and instruction, but not sure where to turn? Do you want guns and gear aimed at getting you closer to hitting your goals? Yes? Then, let's take a look at how you can go from pushing the button to calling the shots.

But, where do you start? Over the next several months, we will explore instruction, safety, gun fit, gun selection, gear options and all

the goodies you could possibly want or need to enjoy the game of sporting clays. Before all of that can happen, you have to feel comfortable with the concept.

When I started shooting as a 12-year-old, it was considered somewhat uncouth for a "young lady" to be at the range, let alone as a tactical pistol shooter! My long-standing interests of ballet, figure skating, horseback riding and music recitals were no longer as appealing as they once were. I wanted something with a bit more bang.



A few years after that, I picked up my first shotgun and was in love. The energy, fluid movements and complete satisfaction of a beautifully-choreographed true pair were tough to find in any other activity. The gun range dynamic was interesting to navigate as a teenage girl frequently shooting alone.

I remembered feeling nervous, out of place and like an outsider for many years. It wasn't until I could consistently put more Xs on the board than many of my male shooting counterparts that I felt a sense of belonging. Interestingly enough, as I felt more comfortable, many men in my immediate vicinity felt less comfortable. This made me feel uncomfortable all over again, but for different reasons. I briefly contemplated shooting poorly on occasion to assuage the angst of my male companions. The notion disappeared as quickly as it had appeared.

I've now called the "range" in some discipline or another my home for 22 years. I'd love to share a few things I've learned along the way on how to navigate this world so you are able to truly embrace the fun, enjoyment, camaraderie and challenge that is sporting clays.

First, recognize that you will most likely be inundated with advice, input, pointers and suggestions. Nearly all of this will come from a place of genuine enthusiasm to impart knowledge and help you experience success. It will be hard to sift through the occasionally contradictory communication, but sometimes you will pick up a kernel you can use, and it can be a game-changer!

Second, understand you will most likely receive more of the above because you are a woman. I'm old fashioned. I like to be taken care of, have the door held and my chair pulled out. Generally speaking, many of the suggestions and tips will come from men over 50 years old. They want to help.

My husband and I can go to a new range where we know no one. He gets a "hi." I get a lengthy discourse on safety, muzzle awareness, the difference between skeet and sporting clays, which button to push and how to hold the gun. I smile and say thank you. I don't want to burn a bridge for a future lady who needs and wants the help but is too afraid to ask for it.

Third, recognize you're built different but have every bit as much physical advantage as a male in the sporting clays world. This is not like basketball, softball or



tennis — sports where the inherent average height, musculature, skeletal structure and upper body strength of the male gender present an inarguable advantage.

You can shoot the same gun (properly fit), with the same shells at the same target with the same chance at success. Your only limitation is you. That's refreshing, isn't it? We'll get into gun fit in the future. The big takeaway right now needs to be the emphasis on "properly fit." This is a whole

different beast when dealing with women, and we'll discuss it extensively.

The bottom line is this: shooting sporting clays is a blast (literally), and it's time to try it. The next time you go to the range and say "Pull for Me," it will put a smile on your face almost as big as the one you'll wear when you break that first clay. ■

Stay tuned for the next "Pull for Me" installment!

