

RST Specialty Shotshells



RST may be a specialty shotshell company with a wide range of offerings oriented toward use in "classic" guns, but tests show that high quality is built into these niche products.

Now this is fun! It's fun to test and review products when the test results show the products perform as well as claimed. And it's even better when the performance values measured indicate very high quality ammunition.

RST, Ltd., located in Friendsville, Pennsylvania, has been manufacturing and selling a broad line of specialty shotshell ammunition for years. Because my contract shotshell development and testing work for American manufacturers has involved exclusively mainstream, high-volume ammunition in standard gauge and shell lengths, I haven't paid much attention to specialty shotshells over the past several years. That changed when I contacted Morris Baker at RST for information on his company's line of shells. Baker followed up several months ago by sending a variety of his company's offerings from 10 through 28 gauge, including short- and standard-length cartridges as well as lead and Nice Shot—RST's loads with imported nontoxic shot.

I won't list all of the sample loads I was shipped or all of the loads and shot sizes RST offers. I designed a testing regime for the sample loads I received that

consisted of two parts, depending upon load type: clay-target breaking and pattern testing, or bird hunting and pattern testing. Those shells loaded with size No. 7½ or smaller shot were tested on clay targets, whereas those loaded with No. 6 shot were tested for bird-taking effectiveness.

My first impression upon seeing the RST samples was: Wow! Here was a bunch of shells of different gauges and lengths, all with excellent crimps and professional-looking, clear-to-read tube stamping served up in high-quality Reifenhauer hulls containing plastic basewads. There were also two loads assembled in nice paper hulls with plastic basewads. All of the loads were made with all-brass heads—some low, some high—and all came in high-quality, professionally printed card-stock boxes that did not pop open when I picked

them up. Considering that the ammunition consisted of 10-, 12-, 16-, 20- and 28-gauge in lengths from 2" to 2⅞", one should realize that it's no small feat to set up loading machines to handle such a variety and to do such a nice job assembling, crimping and tube stamping, as well as working out the dimensions for a variety of custom boxes to hold the cartridges and finding a printer to do such good work.

The next step was to see if the shells were all show and no go or if they actually performed as well as they looked. Starting with the loads to be tested on clay targets, I conducted a physical inventory on several RST Premium Grade Lite 20-gauge (2¾", ⅞ oz of No. 8 shot) and 28-gauge (2¾", ¾ oz of No. 8 shot) shells. I found the pellets in both loads to be very high quality, round and uniform. I mixed these RST offerings (separated by gauge, of course) with Winchester Sporting Clays AA 20- and 28-gauge loads, each of the same length and shot-charge weight. Then with the



Alex Papp and Morris Baker—the men behind RST.

help of an assistant, the shells were blindloaded into a Beretta 687 with 30" barrels choked Modified and Full. Firing 50-round samples of each load, I was delighted to find no significant difference in target-breaking performance between the RST loads and the AA Sporting Clays loads, despite the fact that the RSTs were traveling almost 200 fps slower (1,100 fps versus 1,300 fps) than the Winchesters. Now that's performance, especially considering that all three big US manufacturers' 1,300-fps 20- and 28-gauge sporting clays loads contain the best lead shot and have patterned superbly and broken clays with authority in all of my tests over the past several years.

I then moved to RST's Best Grade 2½" shells in 16 and 20 gauge, each containing 7/8 oz. of No. 8 shot. I found the same results here on clay targets (which, as with the tests above, were shot as 30- to 40-yard crossers). In other words, there was no real change in scores with these low-pressure, light-recoiling Best Grade loads when compared to RST's Premium Grade Lite and Winchester's AA Sporting Clays loads.

The same was found for RST's Specialty Grade Paper-Lite 2½" 12-gauge loads with 1 oz. of No. 8s and the Best Grade MaxiLite 2½" 12s with 1 oz of No. 8s and Best Grade Lite 2½" 12s with 1 oz of No. 7½s. All proved to be top drawer clay-target smashers.

After firing 150 RST rounds at clays, I turned to pattern testing. The first load I used was RST's Paper-Lite 2½" 12-gauge with 1 oz of No. 8 lead. The test gun was a Remington Model 332 over/under with 30" barrels and standard Remington Rem-Choke screw-in chokes. I fired 10 rounds per choke at 40 yards, with the results being an average of 320 pellets in a 30" circle through the Improved Cylinder, 373 through the Modified, and 379 through the Full. Because the physical inventory revealed this to be a 450-pellet load, that worked out to 71 percent for the

IC, 83 percent for the Modified, and 84 percent for the Full. Very impressive, especially if you could see the uniformity of the patterns. They were so good that I saved the pattern sheets for my archives.

I next turned to the Best Grade 2" 12-gauge shell containing 7/8 oz of No. 7½ shot. This roll-crimped load contained an average of 309 pellets in its green plastic hull. At 40 yards the 10-round sample delivered an average of 251 pellets, or 81 percent, inside the 30" circle through the IC choke; 274 pellets, or 89 percent, through the Modified; and 265, or 86 percent, through the Full. It seemed odd that the Full RemChoke did not pattern as densely as the Modified, but I've seen stranger results. This underscores the maxim, by the way, that you cannot make any reliable predictions as to patterning performance for any given load, choke and gun combination. You simply have to get out there and do your homework to find out for sure. Regardless, in the final analysis this cute little 2" 12-gauge load patterned like gangbusters, no doubt thanks to its combination of high-quality lead shot and modest velocity level.

A physical inventory of MaxiLite 2½" 12-gauge 1 oz loads of No. 8s revealed an average of 446 pellets in each shell. Ten round pattern tests revealed an average of 305 pellets, or 68 percent, in the 30" circle through the IC choke; 362 pellets, or 81 percent, through the Modified; and 382, or 86 percent, through the Full. Once again, very uniform patterns were reflected on the patterning paper, and the average-percentage results were well above nominal for these choke constrictions.

I completed my pattern testing with the Premium Grade Lite 2¾" 12-gauge 1 oz load of No. 7½s. At 40 yards this 364-pellet load averaged 271 pellets, or 75 percent, through the IC choke; 293 pellets, or 81 percent, through the Modified; and 311 pellets, or 85

percent, through the Full. Once again, these were super patterns. And by the way, I mic'd a 10-pellet sample of each pellet size in each load and found them a little smaller in diameter – by .003" to .005" – than the American standards. This works out to about one-quarter-to at most a half-size smaller than the standards.

My last series of tests involved firing 2½" 20-gauge 7/8 oz loads of No. 6 Nice Shot (nontoxic tungsten-composite pellets) at pheasants and chukar. I took a total of nine pheasants with the 10 rounds from one box and eight chukar with the 10 rounds from a second box. Behavior One, or B-1 (dead or immobile within 30 seconds), kills occurred for every bird at distances from 24 to 42 yards. Very impressive.

The entire line of Nice Shot loads – 10-, 12-, 16-, 20- and 28-gauge-features velocities close to 1,100 fps and pressures close to 7,000 psi. They are designed to be totally compatible with classic, older shotguns. Not only do the low-pressure levels and modest velocities of this ammunition contribute to this compatibility, but also Nice Shot pellets are easily deformed in any squeeze test, which means they approach lead shot in softness. Nice Shot pellets average 10.2 g/cc in density (versus about 10.9 g/cc for chilled lead shot), are only slightly harder than lead shot and mic out very close in diameter to the American standards by shot size. They are shiny silver in color. They exhibit a wide variety of shapes approaching spherical but never actually achieving it-which is similar to the form factor of medium-graded and sorted lead shot. It doesn't matter, though, because you'll find RST's Nice Shot loads abundantly lethal.

I finished my bird shooting tests by firing Nice Shot 2¾", 28-gauge, ¾-oz loads of No. 6s and several rounds of handloaded 2¾", 28-gauge, 7/8-oz loads of No. 6s (1,205 fps at 12,500 psi). (I had obtained my Nice Shot

reloading pellets from importer Ming Hwang at Ecotungsten [408-838-5158; www.ecotungsten.com], in San Jose.) I took a total of 15 pheasants and eight chukar with 10 rounds of the RST factory loads and 20 rounds of myNice Shotreloads. Distances were 24 to 37 yards. Again, B-1 bagging performance prevailed, with only two birds falling into the B-2 category (mobile but retrieved). The test gun was a Beretta 687 with two sets of 30" barrels

and standard Beretta Mobilchokes-IC and Modified with the 20-gauge barrels and IC and Full with the 28-gauge tubes. Most birds fell to the IC choke in each barrel.

So there you have it. You can think of RST as a specialty shotshell company if you want. But my testing tells me that for a long time coming I'm going to think of RST as a high-grade shotshell company. Empirically gathered, objectively measured test data with statistically reliable sample sizes do not lie. And my tests proved to the 95-percent confidence level that RST markets an excellent line of lead and nontoxic shotshell ammunition.

“ Author's Note: For more information on quality lead and Nice Shot loads, contact RST, 570-553-1651; www.rstshells.com.

To correspond with Tom Roster or to order his reloading manual on buffered lead and bismuth shotshells, his HEV-ISHot reloading manual, his 75-page manual on shotgun-barrel modifications or his instructional shooting DVDs, contact Tom Roster, 1190 Lynnewood Blvd., Klamath Falls, OR 97601; 541-884-2974; tomroster@charter.net