

# *Playing on the Skeet field*

(Plus new loading data)



**A Remarkable image of the shot charge in flight a split second before hitting the high house single from station seven.**

When most shooters think of skeet shooting with the small gauges, it is inevitably to the NSSA rules that they are first drawn. This is hardly surprising, as this is what the vast majority of .410 and 28 gauge skeet loads were intended for.

Of course in the beginning, the humble .410 and 28gauge were seen as a serious challenge, with true to gauge guns being used, as well as the 'gun down' start point ruling.

After all, the original point of Skeet shooting was to promote better gun proficiency for bird hunting, with a better standard of swing resulting from the original round the clock layouts, and their single trap house.

These days, for the .410 part of the competition, the use of the 'tubed cannon' has become the norm, with NSSA Skeet .410 shooting seen as perhaps not the really serious part of the competition, by most shooters. With an 8½lb, or even 9lb 12 gauge Shotgun, with tubes fitted, pre-mounted and almost mechanically shot, personally, I feel that the original point of the .410 gauge classes has been lost somewhere in the transition from true gauge guns, to multi-barrel sets. This evolution finally culminated in the mass adoption of inserted tubes for the 12gauge, which is what exists today.

Indeed, pretty much the same thing can be said for the 28gauge class, with the excellent matched pairs of .410 and 28gauge Skeet guns, being relegated to the annals of history (although resurrecting them for small gauge sporting clays would be a good idea).

The intrinsic problem with this contemporary attitude towards small gauge NSSA skeet shooting purports to be one of obtaining the maximum possible score. Well presumably, if a shooter is serious about entering a skeet competition, they will want to hit as many targets as they can, so as to be well placed in their class as regards the prizes on offer.

The problem though, is that in the transition from a sport originally set up to encourage better field shooting, it has come just about as far away from this ideal as it could possibly be.

With sporting clays we are very much closer to this concept when using a small gauge gun. Because we have a variety of targets and angles, it is the speed that the shooter can get onto the flight path of the target that is of paramount importance; to ensure within range target breaks.

I well remember the remarks that were made after one very windy day a few years back. I had been shooting NSSA Skeet in the 28gauge class in a major competition, using a true to scale 28gauge over and under gun weighing barely 7 lbs, and had the audacity, or perhaps blatant disregard for my maximum scoring potential, of shooting from the gun down position, with the stock being well out of the shoulder before mounting on the target.

The comment afterwards from a well-meaning member of my squad, (who shot with a 12 gauge with tubes) was illuminating: “You’ll have to learn to shoot with the gun up if you want to progress”.



**Shooting a 12gauge gun with tubes doesn't enter into the spirit of .410 gauge shooting and misses the point completely.**

Well I thought about this for a while, and when I had returned to the clubhouse, I realized that mine was the highest score.

Before going any further, it must be appreciated that this was not an ego trip on my part, but merely a statement of fact, as the weather conditions probably had given me an edge. The wind had been gusting furiously and unpredictably for most of the day, only slowing up a little in the late afternoon.

The fact that I was shooting from a gun down position had been a real advantage, when it came to the elusive target variations that the wind had to offer.

The pre-mounted, target tracking swing of the 12gauge .410 tubed company, left them totally unprepared for the inevitable target variations; which were bordering on the downright horrendous on occasion. Some of my best variable shots had been snapped as the gun met the shoulder, the fact that I was able to pick up the target, and instinctively swing through it as the gun was mounted, had been a considerable advantage!

The windy conditions certainly added to this scenario, and was indeed excellent practice for wood pigeon, flushed grouse or partridge shooting.



**Calling for a pair from station four. A nominated double from station 4 replaces the two NSSA singles on station 8 in the English Skeet rules.**

Wasn't this the original point of Skeet, and the other Sporting clay target games; namely the replication of at least some of the target angles that might be encountered while out hunting?

This may sound ridiculous, but I know of not a single shooter that walks the woods with a pre-mounted gun in their shoulder. Why? Well it would be too tiring for one thing, but most importantly, it would distract the eye from the flight of the bird, and would almost certainly lead to a miss: this is not how wing shooting is performed efficiently.

There is another angle to all of this though: the *FUN* factor. The thing is, I don't very much care if I never make the AA class for NSSA, or any other forms of Skeet with the smaller gauges.

I shoot them because it is more fun, and ultimately derive a much greater feeling of fulfillment by using genuine scaled small gauge guns of sensible weight.

This is even further enhanced by the use of my own practice reloads, which is just about as good as it gets in my view, especially after making a good score!

This level of oneness with the gun, shooter and load, for the job at hand, is, after all, where wing shooting first originated. To this end an intimate knowledge of every aspect of the gun's potential was imperative, certainly if reasonable success was to be achieved in the field.

As there is no 1/2ounce limit on the shot load for a .410 in English and International Rules Skeet, most people use 11/16oz magnum shells, with a choice of shot size between US#7.5 and #9.

I have tried shooting it with 3/4oz reloads of US#8 shot, which work very well indeed, but have now dropped down to a load of just over 9/16oz (actually 255grains) of US#9 fired at a fairly high three foot velocity for a plus 1/2oz .410 shell of 1250 feet per second.

This seems to work extremely well, even for doubles on station four, and has the added advantage of using less shot, which with today's sky-high lead prices is not to be disregarded!

The pellet count for this slightly over 9/16oz load with standard chilled shot is about 340; virtually identical to a 12gauge 1oz load of US#7.5 shot.

The chokes in my .410 O/U are a pattern test regulated US rated Improved Cylinder in the bottom barrel, and Modified in the top. This combination is better when it comes to reliably hitting the second bird of the station four doubles (and sporting clay targets).

Looking at the English skeet targets, and also the International Rules Skeet target sequences, there are similarities between the two, the origins of which were of course all based on the original US Skeet layouts.

Both are inherently 12 gauge games, although there are a few shooters that use 20gauge guns for English rules Skeet, to no inherent disadvantage as the 1oz shot payload limit is available loaded in shells for both gauges. Any advantage of lower recoil here has been lost, but again there are a few that use 7/8oz shells in their 20gauges. English Skeet rules have no targets at station 8, but to keep to the 25 targets for the

round, a pair of targets are shot at station 4 instead. This is quite a challenge with a .410, and the reason why just about everyone who shoots it with the .410 uses magnum shells.

This is to ensure sufficient pattern density for consistent target breaks, and still use more open choking, to the shooter's advantage.



**The Remington 1100 cycles the 9/16oz economy Lil'Gun Skeet/Sporting reload perfectly (double on station 4 shown). It is designed to function reliably (remaining in one piece after firing for smooth ejection) in the looser chamber dimensions of the 1100 looser than some O/U shotguns, but not all.**

The half-ounce NSSA legal shells can sometimes be a little thin for this use. However, some of the top range half-ounce shells that are loaded with magnum shot (5-6% antimony hardening agent content) do work well here: Remington, Winchester, Federal etc. Because of this rather more demanding pattern requirement, more choke is normally used to tighten up the pattern, than would generally be the case for

NSSA Skeet. This is especially true when the US#8.5 shot half-ounce sporting clays .410 loads are used for shooting full rounds of English Skeet rules doubles, to maintain greater target breaking power on the second shot.

Indeed, from the maximum *FUN* viewpoint, in this regard it has to be English Skeet rules doubles, working from station one round the skeet field and then back again. This entails shooting a total of fifty birds though, over two rounds, 24 and 26 to add up to fifty with no option bird: this is excellent for sharpening up the reaction times of the small gauge sporting clays shooter.



**A pair of targets in the air at station four during the modified English Skeet 50 bird competition at the .410 World Championships. The flight line height of both targets was specially adjusted to give more variability to their heights than with a strict skeet rules setup. The shooter is pictured just about to shoot the high house target successfully, and went on break the low house target!**

### **How is International Skeet shot?**

The main differences here over English and NSSA are the target speeds, the target sequences, the mandatory gun down starting position, and the out of bounds markers.

The targets are 10 miles per hour faster than the standard Skeet variety; which are usually timed leaving the high house at 43 (International 53) miles per hour, and the low house at 44 (International 54) miles per hour.

The target sequence is a variation of both NSSA and English Skeet, but with some extra tricky bits thrown in.

**International (Olympic) Skeet Target Sequence:**

**Station one: a high single and a pair.**

**Station two: a high single and a pair.**

**Station three: a high single and a pair.**

**Station four: a high single, low single, a pair shot high**

**Bird first, a pair shot low bird first.**

**Station five: a low single, and a pair.**

**Station six: a low single, and a pair.**

**Station seven: a pair.**

**Station 8: high single, low single.**

**Total 25 targets with no option bird.**

The number of single targets are reduced, with doubles being shot at all stations. The station eight singles are included as in NSSA Skeet; with the addition of two pairs of doubles shot in alternate sequence after the singles on station four.

There is also the out of bounds stipulation, for the hitting of targets that have traveled beyond the limit markers in line with both the high and low houses.

Needless to say, even with the 12 gauge, not many straights are shot during the course of a day's shooting!



But here there are perhaps some similarities to the .410 shooter's set up for sporting clay targets. The 12gauge is limited to a 24gm(7/8oz) International load, and will generally use more choke and or tighter patterning shells than the standard skeet shooter.

With 11/16 (19.5gm) or 3/4oz (21gm) loads of US#8.5 or US#8 shot, and light modified and modified choke pattern performance, it is surprising how well the true to scale .410 & 28gauge will perform under these circumstances.

It is far more exhilarating than either of the other two skeet types, however, from the point of view of value for money, and realistic gun mounting and swing practice, International rules Skeet has it all!

This is not to say that every Skeet layout will have the capability to wind up the traps for that extra 10mph, but even so, why not try a round of international sequenced targets on a standard NSSA type Skeet field?

As far as a warm up before the main sporting clay event is concerned, this just has to be the best practice there is!



For those that are interested, my high-speed magnum International Skeet load is as follows:



.410 Fiocchi or Cheddite red 73mm (2,7/8inch) plastic tubed case with a paper or fiber base wad, or a trimmed to 73mm once fired 76mm case with a rolled crimp. **NB plastic base wads have 'memory' and in most European shells cannot cope with the enlarged chamber and forceful extraction of the Remington 1100 when reloaded.** Ballistic Products Magnum Wad (Gualandi H-40), Fiocchi F616 primer, Average drop of 255grains of standard chilled shot with 2% to 3% antimony content (just over 9/16oz). Maximum charge of 13.3grains of Hodgdon Lil'Gun powder (for guns with larger sized chambers only) \*, a six star finished crimp.



**WARNING: do not exceed this powder charge.**

\*Some .410 shotguns with tighter chambers than my O/U & Remington 1100 will need to reduce the powder charge by third to half a grain, (13 to 12.8grains) and test, or alternatively use the data as is, but substitute the milder Fiocchi F615 primer for the listed hotter Fiocchi F616.

Where allowed, this load also works brilliantly for sporting clays with US#8.5 shot, at 480 to the oz (UK 8 at 2.2mm also works very well, and is very close in pellet count at about 450 to the oz).

It ought to be a good choice for Quail and other similar bird hunting applications as well. The use of the H-40 wad eliminates barrel leading for all intents and purposes, but can tighten up the patterns, however the relatively high velocity and the use of standard chilled shot with 2-3% antimony, will help to reverse this tendency.

**NO RESPONSIBILITY WHATSOEVER CAN BE ACCEPTED FOR THE USE OR MISUSE OF  
THIS DATA**



As both of these Fiocchi primers look identical externally when in a loaded shell, there is a way to readily identify them beforehand.

The white colored flash-hole powder seal distinguishes the hotter Fiocchi 616 from the milder Fiocchi 615, which has an orange/flame red colored flash-hole powder seal.

These seals are primarily put in place to prevent the incursion of ball powders or other finely granulated powders entering the primer body. If these powder types are used with primers having uncovered flash holes, uncertain ignition and or abnormal pressures can result.

Special thanks to our sponsors: Remington Arms USA (via Edgar Bros in the UK), Hodgdon (Lil'Gun Powder), Fiocchi (615 & 616 primers and .410 hulls) & Gualandi (Wads)