

Once in a while, something comes along that really gets my full attention – besides a muscle car from the 60s, or a Shania Twain look alike moving in next door! This time it was a most unlikely named product called the 'Lucky Weasel'. I discovered it while cruising vendor's row at the American Shooting Centers in Houston, during the U.S. Open.

What the heck is a 'Lucky Weasel', I thought, and had to stop and check it out. What I discovered was the next generation of pattern performance testing. For those

who have taken the time and really want to know how their chokes and shells perform, or just exactly where their barrel or barrels print to point of aim, pattern testing has been about the only solution. However, it requires some tedious work at a patterning board, counting pellet holes and analyzing shot placement to determine if your barrel placed the pattern where you wanted and just what percentage of the shot was hitting within the magical standard of a 30 inch circle. For the really diligent, this procedure should be repeated

for each and every choke in your choke box. Incidentally, I highly recommend that each and every shooter actually devote some time to pattern testing, as the information gathered is very enlightening and necessary – especially to a heavy competition shooter.

Doug Ashby, the designer and owner of this remarkable set up with the equally remarkable name, was busy at the computer terminal working with another shooter when I arrived – so I just stood back and watched for a while as his gun was tested. The procedure was pretty straightforward, although I am sure it took quite some time and some real talent to design the operating programs and software and to put the system together. Simply stated, Doug has built a portable computer-assisted pattern testing device. It consists of a sophisticated computer program

# PATTERN TESTING

*... IS THIS THE NEXT GENERATION?* ASKS CHRIS KING



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that will analyze the shot, and a mobile receptacle that will contain the entire shot string without it ricocheting all over the place.

## HERE'S HOW IT WORKS

First of all, the exact load data is entered into the computer program consisting of an accurate pellet count, the size of the shot, brand name of the shell and the velocity as advertised. A shell is cut open

and the pellets dumped into a neat screened tray connected to the computer that actually counts the pellets. Your name, gun make and other pertinent information is then entered into the computer and you get to take a rested and carefully aimed shot at a laser dot aiming point, projected to the center of the portable back stop. The distance used is usually 40 yards, but can be altered easily enough to any distance required. The inside of the

collector holds a large roll of paper which is penetrated by the shot. A 'secret' process then counts the pellets that penetrate the paper and this information is sent to the computer. Once the shot has been taken, an automatic door closes over the collector and the paper roller puts up another clean sheet to be ready for the next shot. In the meantime, the information gathered from the shot is printed out onto an 8½ by 11 inch sheet of

paper in the form of a circle, showing the exact center of the shot pattern in relation to the laser aiming point. Page two is a printout, picturing exactly where the shot penetrated the paper, showing each and every pellet that hit the paper. It shows just how many pellets were within the 20 inch center area, as well as in the overall 30 inch circle, miniaturized down to fit on the 8½ by 11 inch sheet of paper. Additionally, it tells you the accuracy of your gun/choke/load combination, true choke in terms of percent efficiency and whether your pellet distribution is good (even) or bad. As an extra added attraction, Doug also had a chronograph set up in front of the muzzle to give you the velocity of your shell. All of this happens without walking back and forth 40 yards each time to see the results of your shot – and without all the time involved in counting and analyzing each shot by hand.

## QUITE A SURPRISE

My turn next – and after dumping the shot charge on the counting screen and counting the pellets from my favorite 1 oz. Lyalvale shells, all the pertinent data went into the computer and I was ready to go. A \$20 bill bought me 5 shots

and a print out of all the data gathered, plus a critique by Doug as to the results. A very fair price for all the information gathered! I shot with my SX-1 with a fixed choke that measured .020, the nominal measurement of the choke's inside diameter, considered to be modified according to the industry standards. In actuality, the choke printed an average of 70.3 percent, or almost a full choke pattern. This certainly explained the solid hits I get with that particular barrel. It also showed that judging what pattern a choke will produce solely by the constriction dimensions (or just because it says modified, for example) is no guarantee that the pattern produced will actually be what is printed on the choke.

Both barrels did print to center, though Doug told me that there were many shotguns tested that



*PATTERN TESTING MADE EASY WITH COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY.*

had impact points other than where they should be. This is another good reason to pattern test your favorite blaster to make sure it is doing what you expect, and placing the shot where you expect it to be.

Doug has taken his 'Lucky

Weasel' set up to several sporting tournaments, as well as some trap and skeet tournaments, and the response has been exceptional. It seems that many shooters would love to verify their equipment on his device, and skip the time

***A \$20 BILL BOUGHT ME 5 SHOTS AND A PRINT OUT OF ALL THE DATA GATHERED, PLUS A CRITIQUE BY DOUG AS TO THE RESULTS. A VERY FAIR PRICE FOR ALL THE INFORMATION GATHERED!***

consuming work of doing it themselves. For those facilities that would like to have Doug and his equipment on site at a larger tournament, he can be reached at 918-247-2011, or look him up on his web site, [www.luckyweasel.com](http://www.luckyweasel.com). ■