

The Great Shotgun Stock Shootout: What works best

Modernizing the police shotgun for the 21st Century

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A test of some of the best shotgun stocks on the market today



The police shotgun may sometimes be described by modern agencies as “outdated” and an “anachronism.” But there is one indisputable fact about the police shotgun. It may seem to some that a police shotgun in the era of patrol carbines is a bit like a hammer looking for a nail, but when a shotgun hammers a nail, that nail stays hammered.

Within its design range there is nothing that stops a fight more quickly and effectively than a shotgun in the hands of an officer who knows how to use it.

Life is not a Hollywood movie. There is nothing exciting or pretty about a real-life gunfight. To paraphrase 17th-century Thomas Hobbes, a gunfight is nasty, brutish and short. The longer it lasts, the more people get hurt.

A firearm is not the solution to every problem, but much like a parachute, when you need one, little else will do.

While some agencies are replacing the shotgun with a patrol carbine, others are keeping them up front in a dual-rack setup or repurposing the shotgun for duty as an intermediate-force (less-than-lethal) projectile weapon.

The modern patrol carbine loaded with police duty hollow-point ammunition is ideal for intermediate range threats. The bullet is unlikely to over-penetrate a target or get through more than a few layers of drywall, but it is decidedly useless when it needs to penetrate the skull of a charging polar bear or put down a wounded moose on the side of a highway.

In certain areas of the country, the primary threat is more of the four-legged variety the size of a small truck and can run almost as fast. Shotguns can do a job that no handgun and few rifles can perform. A shotgun loaded with buckshot is ideal when the threat is large wolves or wild dogs. Loaded with slugs, a shotgun can stop almost any animal on the face of the earth and can be fired quickly and accurately at typical short range encounter distances.

A firearm may not be the solution to every problem but in many places, it is a necessity. There are still vast areas of this country where people live or work in remote areas and carry shotguns loaded with slugs 24 hours a day.

But is the traditional wood stock on a patrol shotgun the best stock for the job? With an exploding aftermarket in firearms accessories, just how effective are some of the choices of alternate stocks for police officers and other professionals who carry shotguns for a living?

We looked at some of the best stocks available and tested them head-to-head on a Remington 870 Police 12-gauge pump-action shotgun to find out which aftermarket stocks are serious alternatives for professionals and which ones are pretenders more suited to the "tactical" crowd.

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Stock Length

The standard short-barrel 12-gauge pump-action shotgun typically carried by law enforcement and other professionals has a lot of advantages for people who might need that power to save lives. It is simple to operate, fast into action and can carry a versatile selection of ammunition. With proper training based on the physiology of the human body under stress, it also utilizes few if any fine motor skills.

At typical encounter distances, the shotgun's simple bead sight is perfectly adequate for the job. Aiming is instinctive. The downside is that proper shouldering and aiming of the shotgun is very dependent on how well the shotgun stock fits the arm length of the shooter.

Most shotgun stocks come out of the factory too long for the average person. Adding heavy jackets or soft body armor exacerbates the problem.

One of the advantages of aftermarket stocks is that many come in shorter lengths that helps address the problem of fit, especially when shotguns may be shared by a variety of people.

Interestingly enough, in over 35 years of training shooters on the pump-action shotgun, I have found that persons with longer arms can adapt to a shorter stock, but persons with shorter arms struggle with stocks too long for their stature.

Taller shooters may find that shorter stocks have a tendency to bop them on the nose with every shot, especially with lighter clothing, but if there is a charging polar bear ten yards away and closing fast, that is the least of one's worries at that moment.

The purpose of a stock that fits better is to get the aiming eye behind the receiver of the shotgun so that the bead, or bead and pedestal base, is sitting right on top of the receiver and no barrel is showing. This requires consistency in shouldering, and especially a stock that can be tucked quickly and firmly into the shoulder.

One simple way to roughly measure if the stock length will be suitable for the speed and the accuracy that one may need is a quick length-of-pull test. To measure the length-of-pull, bend the shooting arm at the elbow, lay the unloaded shotgun across the arm with the butt tucked into the elbow, and see where the trigger falls in relation to your trigger finger. It should fall on or very near the first joint of your trigger finger.

Heavier clothing will change this, and this simple test will show that the factory stocks are often too long for even the average person. This is where professional-grade aftermarket stocks may help. But does that actually translate into better performance? Are we trading off speed or accuracy for a better fit or will a better fit enhance the speed and accuracy of the patrol shotgun at those close- and intermediate-ranges where it shines best?

Here are the results of our extensive head-to-head tests of everything currently on the market that we consider a viable alternative to the factory stock.

Standard wood or polymer stock



The wood stock has been around for centuries and continues to provide great service and long life. While wood is more subject to slight warping with variations in moisture and humidity, that is not generally an issue with shotgun stocks.

We tested the standard stock and forend that comes on the Remington 870 Police model in both wood and polymer variations to give us a baseline for speed and accuracy. Both proved to be simple and fast, and if the length fits, there may be little reason to even change.



Hogue OverMolded stock



The Hogue OverMolded shotgun stock is polymer, with permanently molded rubber inserts in the pistol-grip area. A matching forend is available with a rubber overmold finish the length of the pump.

This stock was always my number one choice for a sturdy and weather-proof shotgun, and the Hogue set is used on every single one of my training shotguns. It provides a good grip, even in wet or cold conditions.

The Hogue stock is available in two pull-lengths to accommodate both youths and adults. Many adult shooters are turning to the youth version and its shorter trigger-pull length to better fit when wearing body armor or when shooting from a more squared stance.

(While a squared stance may be trendy in shotgun training with the tactical crowd these days, years of working with shooters on the shotgun has taught me that one doesn't turn a shotgun into a carbine simply by changing the stance. A more traditional angled stance, with a slight tilt forward and a bend in the forward leg pushes the center of gravity slightly forward into the shotgun and allows it to do what a shotgun does best – shoot quickly and accurately at short to intermediate ranges. There are few firearms that can match the speed, accuracy and power of the pump-action shotgun in the hands of a well-trained professional. That slight forward lean keeps the center of gravity forward for every shot and gets the bead back on target quicker in case follow-up shots are needed.)

All my training Remington 870 Police and Marine Magnum shotguns are equipped with Hogue stocks for extreme all-weather versatility. I use both lengths for more versatility and better fit in training, and my training shotguns have upwards of 25,000 rounds each through them. The Hogue stocks have never failed me.

SpeedFeed stock



SpeedFeed stocks (now discontinued) were available from Remington on certain Police and Marine Magnum XCS models. It used a unique spare shell carrier built in to the stock where one could carry two extra shells on each side, held in by coil springs.

While the shell carrier worked well in testing and the polymer construction was robust, it suffered from a situation where the coil springs would weaken over time and spare shells could fall out under recoil.

Mesa Tactical Urbino stock



The Mesa Tactical Urbino stock is a fixed-length pistol grip shotgun stock made from injection-molded glass-filled nylon. Modeled after the Benelli M4 tactical stock, they are now available for a number of Remington, Mossberg and Benelli shotguns.

This stock took a bit of practice but turned out to be one of my favorite stocks, especially when mounted on short 14-inch barrel models.

The Urbino is designed to be one to two inches shorter than OEM stocks to better accommodate body armor and the squared stance favored by some instructors. I found the length perfect, even when using the traditional angled stance favored by experienced shotgun trainers.

When the Urbino fixed-length stock is combined with a 14-inch barrel, you have a compact 33-inch shotgun that will fit in patrol racks and can be much easier to manipulate in and around vehicles.

If you look at the overall lengths on the specifications chart, you will note the fixed-length Urbino-equipped shotgun is not much longer than the telescoping AR stock adapter fully collapsed.



Mesa Tactical LEO telescoping stock adapter



This is the stock that challenged my thinking by firearms instructors at a police college. They were testing this adapter to modernize their 14-inch barreled Remington 870 shotguns. I have never been a fan of adjustable stocks on shotguns, mostly because I still have nightmares about shooting those awful folding stocks from years ago that caused more officers to fear the shotgun than almost any other single factor.

But this is not my dad's folding stock. It is a robust adapter that allows one to use any AR-style stock and a mil-spec dimensioned buffer tube. You can buy it as just the adapter and install your own favorite AR stock, or you can buy it as a package, complete with buffer tube and M4 SOPMOD 4-position adjustable stock, pictured here.

Adjustable stocks solve the problem of shotgun stock fit on a wider variety of officers but the cost is the loss of point-at-the-threat-and-pull-the-trigger simplicity. Tested as a solution to agencies who have one vehicle rack to accommodate both rifles for officers trained on the patrol carbine, and shotguns for those not yet qualified on the carbine.

It was the slowest stock tested, even when pre-adjusted to the correct pull length. Unlike a patrol carbine, the close-range intent of a patrol shotgun meant officers just didn't want to grab a firearm designed for quick deployment only to exit the vehicle and have to play with stock adjustment. Disadvantages aside, it is better to have a shotgun that fits in a modern rack than no shotgun at all.



Stock	Pull Length (inches)	Overall Length (inches)	Overall length (inches)	Pistol Grip
		14-inch barrel	18.5-inch barrel	
870 Police wood/polymer stock	13 ¾	34 ¼	38 ¾	No
Hogue OverMolded stock	13 ¾	34 ¼	38 ¾	No
SpeedFeed stock	13 ½	34	38 ½	No
Mesa Tactical Urbino pistol grip stock	12 ¼	32 ¾	37 ¼	Yes
Mesa Tactical LEO telescoping stock adapter with 6-position M4 SOPMOD stock	11 ½, 13 ¼, 14, 15	32 (Collapsed)	36 ½ (Collapsed)	Yes

Exercises

This was a head-to-head test of both speed and accuracy. I decided to keep the tests simple, scientific, repeatable and – most important – duplicating realistic conditions in which a patrol shotgun may be expected to perform.

One downside to the shotgun is a limited ammunition supply, but with GOOD training on shotgun speedloads (most agencies do it wrong) an officer can get spare shells downrange quickly and simply and with no requirement for fine motor skills.

The first exercise was a simple five-round drill, using bowling pins at seven yards. Starting with four shells in the shotgun and one in the pocket, the shooter shoots four pins off a table, speedloads the fifth shell from a pocket and knocks the last pin over. The exercise begins with a round chambered, safety ON, and muzzle in the high ready position. Timing is done electronically, and the times noted in the chart are the average of five runs, from start beep to the sound of the fifth shot.

Lest you think this is easy, bowling pins are fun but they are TOUGH to shoot. One must hit them dead center to send them flying, and the pattern at seven yards is tight enough that the bead or sight must be centered exactly. There is no such thing as knocking off two pins with one shot.

This test was done with #4 birdshot to minimize pellet bounce-back from the bowling pins we were using as targets.

The second exercise was a simple four-round drill into a 10-yard silhouette target using police-issue buckshot loads to test for both speed and accuracy of the pattern. It shows stocks that allow consistent shouldering and stocks where the eye could not be placed precisely behind the receiver for center accuracy.

It starts with the shotgun loaded and resting on a table, safety ON and chamber empty. The adjustable stock was adjusted to the proper length-of-pull prior to the start of the test. Times are an average of five passes and timed electronically from start beep to the sound of the last shot.

The shotgun was first bore-sighted for accuracy and tested with slugs to determine how close the buckshot patterns should center on where the slugs were landing.

Stock	Five- round Bowling Pin Exercise (Average time in seconds)	Four-round Silhouette Exercise (Average time in seconds)
870 Police wood stock	5.26	3.75
Hogue OverMolded stock	5.98	3.60
SpeedFeed stock	5.24	3.42
Mesa Tactical Urbino pistol grip stock	4.93	3.38
Mesa Tactical LEO telescoping stock adapter with 6-position M4 SOPMOD stock	6.82	5.19

Results

The results were a bit surprising. A more modern look just did not translate into faster times. The standard wood or plastic shotgun stock was still fast to shoot and the easiest to speedload. The slowest stock was the AR-adapter LEO due to the need to tuck your head down for a more careful sight picture. (The LEO stock adapter is too high for use on bead sights, but works well for ghost ring or rifle sights.)

While the SpeedFeed stock was the most comfortable and consistent stock in the test, the overall fastest was the Urbino. It tended to slam into the cheek a bit more than a longer-length stock but after a few shots, I never noticed. It just seemed to point handier and aim faster. It is also the perfect height for bead sights. I think Mesa Tactical did an excellent job with the Urbino, and the Benelli M4 that it was designed from is probably the world's best combat or tactical shotgun.

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Conclusions

There is no one perfect stock for every use and every officer. Traditional straight stocks made from wood or polymer work well, but they may not fit into modern racks. Collapsible stocks are slower, but can accommodate a wider variety of officers and styles of soft or hard body armor.

If I had my way, agencies who decide to keep the shotgun should at the least have their armory cut every factory stock down by at least an inch and install a better butt pad that fits the new contour such as the R2 or Limbsaver.

Agencies who use Mossberg shotguns such as the 590A1 should stay away from any aftermarket or factory stock with a separate pistol grip. The receiver-mounted safety is too hard to reach in a hurry with the thumb of the shooting hand.

The Hogue stocks are the ones that live on my training shotguns, and I kept the Urbino on my 870 Police with the 14-inch barrel when I am in bear country.

Some of the reasons why agencies have gone away from the shotgun was that training was rudimentary, stocks were way too long and many officers were intimidated by the shotgun for no good reason.

Shotgun training rarely accounted for cross-dominant officers in spite of the fact that about 20% of the population may be cross-dominant, and instructors rarely even tested eye dominance before training, let alone knew how to adapt to it. In many cases, training just HURT.

As for the limited ammunition supply, it's the first round out of that shotgun that is most important. If the problem can't be solved with that first round or two, it likely can't be solved at all.

One of the questions I am sometimes asked when up in northern climes working with people carrying shotguns for polar bear defence is why our training shotguns have six-round tubular magazines and the one I carry myself only holds four.

My response? “So I can bring three rounds back to camp. It's the first one that counts.”

Thankfully, I have never needed even that first round because training in bear country is not so much helping people with bear problems as it is helping bears with people problems.

This shows there is still a place in this world for the traditional patrol shotgun, and with better stock fit and good training, that first round may be the one that saves lives.