

Speed-Reloading A Shotgun

BY PAT KELLEY, A-14401

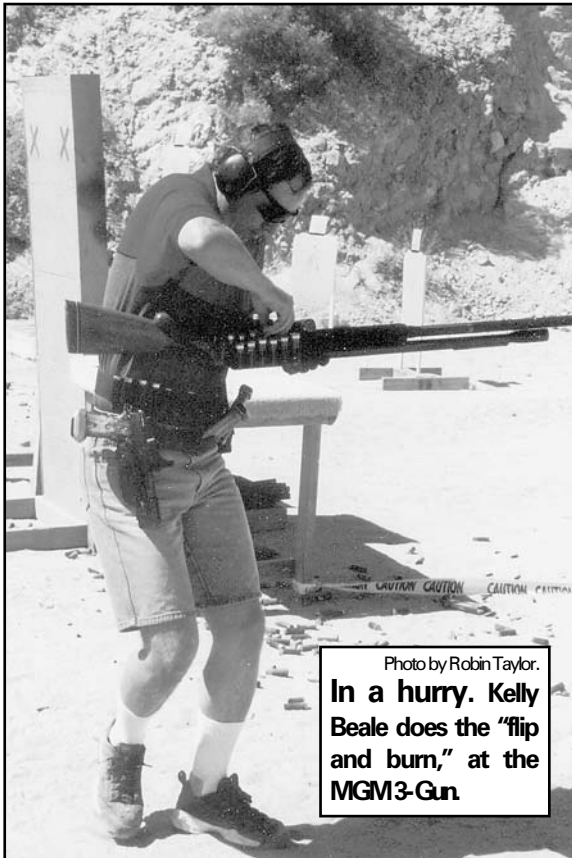


Photo by Robin Taylor.
In a hurry. Kelly Beale does the "flip and burn," at the MGM3-Gun.

Number one: The Beale Flip and Burn.

Kelly Beale does a great job with this method, which is probably the most common and easiest to learn. Lower the gun to about waist level and flip it over using the strong hand, so the loading port is straight up. The "burn" depends on where you place your weak hand for support. As it is usually on the barrel, a glove is recommended. This leaves your strong hand free to

lower the gun to your belt level, releasing your weak hand while maintaining your firing grip with the strong hand. Twist the top of the gun outward, bringing the loading port up. A key to this method is to pinch the stock between the inside of your arm and your waist — kind of a reverse Flip and Burn only without the burn. This is a sure approach to loading, whether drawing shells off your Side Saddle or off the belt. The distance is short between the loading port and the shell location either way. Jim draws and loads one at a time, which greatly reduces the fumble factor.

"In 20 words or less, what do I need to know about action 3-gunning?" My reply: "Learn to run your rifle for accuracy, your pistol for speed, and learn to reload your shotgun!" I wish I had coined that description, because it sure applies!

Have you gotten your pistol reloads down to one second so you can smoke some classifier? That may be a worthy goal, but knowing how to make short work of reloading your shotgun is a far more valuable skill in a 3-gun match. Here's how some of the best keep their shotguns topped off.

The recently adopted USPSA rules for Open and Limited division shotguns hold the capacities at 10 plus 1 and 8 plus 1 respectively. With this in mind when facing a 15 to 25 round course of fire, your ability to keep your shotgun loaded is at a premium.

I have taken the liberty of assigning competitor's names to the styles or methods of reload. I hope none of them will be offended, as they were chosen as the "best observed" example of the techniques described.

stuff shells into the loading gate. While low on the "fumble factor" scale, this technique is a little more difficult to perform while moving around course obstacles as the barrel is parallel to the ground and most of it is sticking out in front of you.

Number two: The Wall Low Roll.

Jim Wall's method was born out of necessity. The Browning Auto-5 (the shotgun Jim was using that lead to the technique) has a very strongly sprung loading gate. To overcome this spring tension Jim developed a very fast and reliable approach. From the shoulder position,

Number three: The Cooley Forearm Twist.

USPSA 3-Gun Limited champion Bennie Cooley is the only guy I have seen use this method, but it certainly

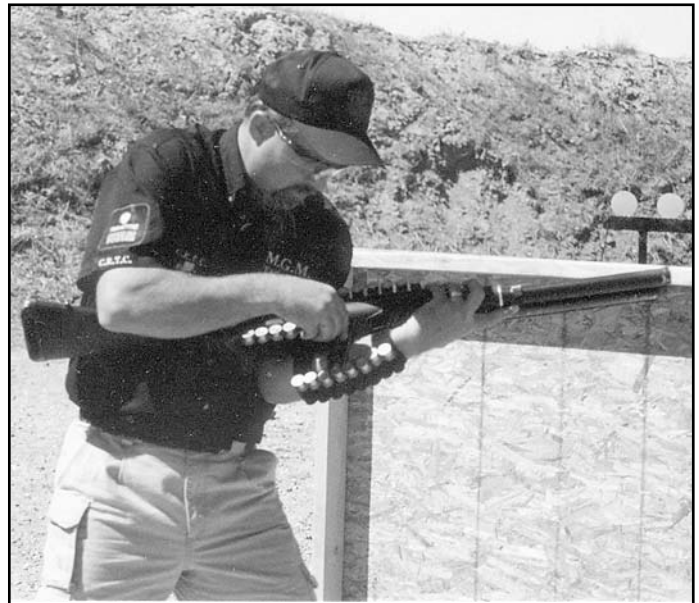


Photo by Bennie Cooley, Jr.

Winning form. Bennie Cooley demonstrates the "Cooley Twist." Note the 12 rounds on the gun, plus 8 on his forearm.

works for him! When it's time to recharge your shotgun maintain your firing grip with your weak hand (it should be on the forearm) and twist the gun in toward your chest. Think of it as a biceps curl and wrist curl at the same time. At this point the loading gate is facing you and you are ready draw and load shells one at a time. This method works best if the bulk of your ammo supply is attached to your gun and weak hand forearm, since you must load with your strong hand. This keeps the distance to load short and rates it low on the fumble factor scale. In use, this technique positions the barrel more vertically allowing for good maneuverability while reloading.

Number four: The Rhodes High and Tight.

Eddie Rhodes is supremely fast with this technique. From the shooting position lower the butt of the gun and stick it under your arm, pinched in your armpit. Keep the muzzle up and the loading port within a hand span of your face. This method allows you to move well in and around course obstacles. If you only have to move a step or two, Rhodes advises you to leave the shotgun on your shoulder if you can.

Using a straight-stock Benelli, Eddie has the dexterity to draw and load three to four shells at a time from belt-mounted shell carriers. This makes this method very fast, but it carries a higher fumble factor. Done right, you only have to go to your belt one or two times. Done wrong, you drop ammo in the dirt.

"I used to use a pistol grip stock, and that helped with the loading, but the straight stock allows you to mount it better and shoot it better. I think you get a better cheek weld with the straight stock."

Taran Butler uses the same technique, but sticks with the pistol-grip Benelli.

What About Speed Loaders?

Any of the methods described can be used with speed loaders if that is

your preferred flavor. The Flip and Burn and a somewhat lower High and Tight are the preferred styles for Open Division shotgunners.

What else might we need to know about shotgun reloading? Nothing beats practice but more practice — we all know that. Even the worst topping-off technique repeated often enough will work, but what else might help our quest for a speedy shotgun reload?

Reloading from "Bolt Lock"


Let's say you have run your self-loading shotgun dry. I know that never happens, but there you are ready to load and the locked-back bolt is staring you in the face. Now what? If you are running a Browning, just load the shells into the mag tube as you would normally and the speed load feature will load the chamber for you. Neat, eh? However, most of us do not use a Browning and many a major match has been won without the help of the Browning speed load feature. So what do we do instead?

Remington 1100 shooters draw two shells, loading the open ejection port and the mag tube in one movement. Perhaps I should re-phrase that. Remington 1100 shooters load the ejection port and the mag tube in one movement IF their 1100 is equipped with an Easy Loader flipper and IF they



Photo by Robin Taylor.


Quick access. See those two shells strapped on just ahead of the ejection port? Mark Anglin strips one back into the ejection port whenever the gun runs dry—it's a lightning-quick fix for "bolt-lock."




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Photo by Bennie Cooley, Jr.

Get and Go. When choosing a reloading technique, see how long it takes to get your gun back on target. Since Cooley's left hand stays in firing position, his technique lets him recover very quickly.

use one of the reloading techniques that allows you to see the open ejection port. The Easy Loader guides the rounds into the mag tube and releases the locked open bolt without a sepa-

rate manipulation.

Being able to see the open ejection port is a good indicator that you are suffering from post ammo depression

and allows you to "look the round" into the open port. Those of us who own Benellis or Winchester SX2's have to release the bolt via the carrier release button, but with practice, that added motion becomes part of a smooth load.

Some shooters (Mark Anglin of MGM Targets in particular) keep a pair of shells mounted just ahead of the receiver, rigged in line with the ejection port just for loading a locked-open bolt. In one swoop, Mark can snag a shell with his strong hand, drag it into the ejection port, and slip his bolt release as his hand slides back on the receiver.

With new shotguns on the market, and a rising pool of 3-Gunners nationwide, these techniques are likely to evolve. Little of Bennie's technique, and almost none of his fancy Browning shotgun had been seen at a national match prior to 2001. Who knows what we'll see this year? These are the most common techniques in use today. Which one is best? It all depends on you.



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