

*Move over guys!  
Have we got a shooting  
partner for you.*

GR

story by Clarke C. Jones  
photos by Dwight Dyke

**T**his dove season things were going to be different. My bird-to-shot ratio was going to improve. Friends would stop picking up easy money betting me which of us would get their limit first. Doves would learn that flying directly over me was not the safest place to be, and I would no longer get notes from the corporate heads of shotgun shell manufacturers thanking me for the spike in their third quarter sales. There is an old adage, "You keep doing what you have always done, and you will keep getting what you always got." Thus, this year I decided I would spend some time at the shooting range working on rights to lefts and incoming shots which always seem to confound me and amuse my shooting partners.

Well, things turned out to be different but not in the way I expected.



*Elizabeth Lanier points out shotgun basics to her daughter. Below: Lanier sitting a high bird.*

Like many quests in our lives, we set off to discover one thing and we uncover something completely different. While I had hoped to solve the mystery of missing targets, I made a

much more important discovery—WOMEN! To be more succinct, the increased participation of women in shooting sports.

Of course a number of women have been shooting for years, and it may appear this discovery on my part was like Columbus claiming to have found a new world when the Native Americans already knew about it. However, women who shoot for sport have been such a small segment of the population that even the fashion industry—which claims to know what women wants—only recently began producing clothing that didn't look like big brother hand-me-downs.

You can usually count on seeing the same thing at any sporting clay range when you show up during the week: a small group of men with poor hearing who said goodbye to their 40s a long time ago. You do not expect to find two carloads of women



# GRITS



*Elizabeth Lanier assists a new shooter at the range.*

consisting of a law partner, a minister, an artist, and several garden club members chatting about choke tubes, Browning vs. Beretta, and which preserve offers the best pheasant shooting.



*Above L to R: Derenda Reynolds, Sandi Nunnally, and Eva Tashjian-Brown prepare for a morning of sporting clays. Below: Pheasant shooting in Caroline County.*

Because my father's sons were not born attractive, we couldn't afford to be shy; therefore, I cautiously approached the ladies as any man would approach a group of women holding shotguns, and asked the lady

in charge what brought them to a sporting clay range. And you thought an opening line at a singles bar was critical!

Elizabeth Lanier, who has put this group who calls itself GRITS (Girls Re-





*Brenda Bickerstaff-Stanley accepts a retrieved pheasant.*

ally Into Shooting) together, explained to me that her dentist who shot clays had piqued her interest and she and her husband decided to take shooting lessons.

"I was doing this for my husband," she said, "but I'm the one who got hooked. Shooting was fun but I was the only woman involved until I met Lydia Strickland at a shoot. We exchanged phone numbers written on the top of a shotgun shell box."

Most of the GRITS girls have only been shooting clays for three years or less and, admittedly, some were hesitant to pick up a shotgun.

As Eva Tashjian-Brown, who just started shooting this year, relates the story, "Lydia had been telling me about the group and how much fun shooting was but I kept putting them off. Finally I went and had a ball. I told Lydia, 'You told me it would be fun but you didn't tell me it would be THIS fun!'"

Sandy Nunnally got involved because of her son. "He asked me to go shooting with him and I had no interest in doing so. Then I thought, how many things can a mother do with her 21-year-old son?" Sandy now shoots a 28 gauge Franchi and has been for about a year.

I was invited along to watch the ladies tackle the Charity Hill Sporting Clay range and shoot with them. The enjoyable aspect of this group is that they take their shooting seriously but they do not take themselves seriously. There is constant encouragement to those who have just started shooting, as well as helpful instruction by the more experienced shooters to those who want to learn.

"The really fun part is watching everyone improve their shooting,"

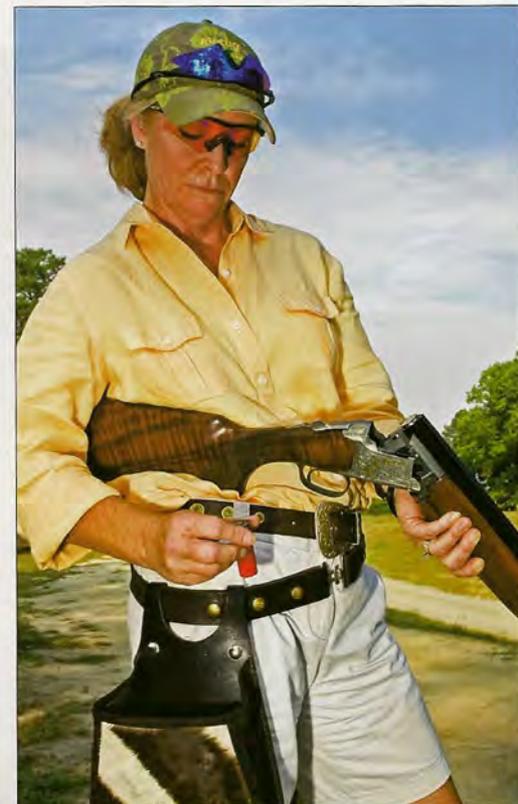
*Clothing manufacturers have expanded their lines into shooting attire and accessories for women.*

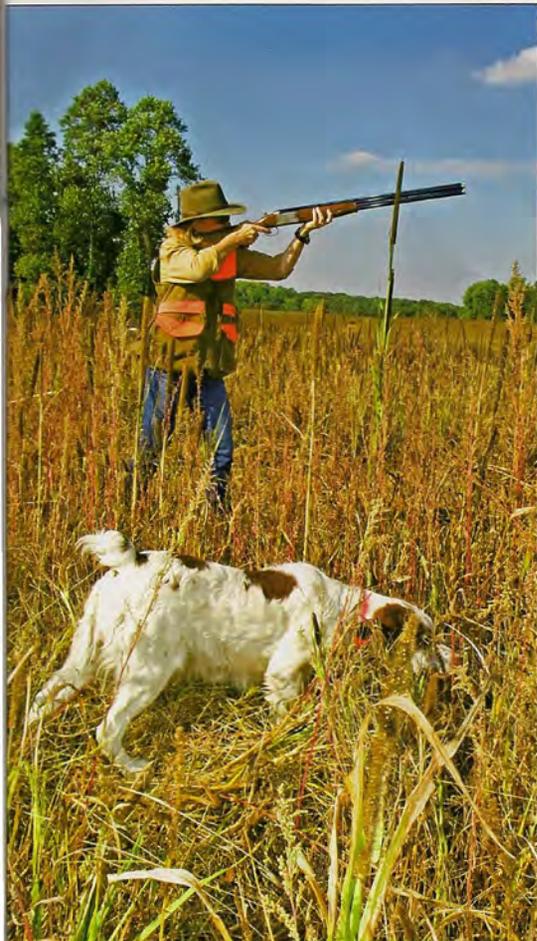
stated Marilyn Wetton who has been shooting for a little over a year. Marilyn, like a number of the GRITS, got interested in shooting because of her husband. "He went on vacations where he was shooting and it looked like too much fun to miss out," she recalls.

While some of the GRITS use the sporting clay range as a way to improve on their new-found desire to bird hunt, others like Susan Butterworth, a recent graduate of Union Theological Seminary, enjoys shooting clays for different reasons.

"I love being outdoors and the uniqueness of a sport that allows women of any age to participate. If you take a few lessons and stay consistent with your shooting, you see improvement pretty quickly. I like a sport that provides a way to improve a skill without having to be athletic. It doesn't matter whether you hunt or not, the camaraderie is fantastic. When I am standing at the shooting station, I am focusing on breaking that clay and not how bad my day or week may have been."

So why an increased participation in shotgun sports by women? Henry Baskerville, Program Director





Above: Taking 'em on the rise.  
Below: Re-living the day's hunt.

for Cavalier Sporting Clays, believes there are a number of reasons for this. "Shooting is not a gender-separated sport. It is a sport that requires more grace and the ability to focus than physical strength. Also, shotguns are now made that fit women better than in the past, and finally, there has been a resurgence in the interest of using lighter gauge shotguns."

Baskerville notes that women are easier to teach than men. "A woman new to shooting does not bring bad shooting habits to her lessons that have to be corrected, and after a few lessons, are often shooting better than their significant others."

Gentlemen should begin to prepare themselves for a little "come-uppance" when it involves their dress in the field and the lodge. When shooting, women in the past have had few options when it came to hunting attire. Their choices were hand-me-downs or something bulky and often nonfunctional. European clothing manufacturers have recognized this and are significantly ahead of the U.S. when adding style to a woman's gunning wardrobe.

Ramona Brumby, CEO of the London Trading Company based in

Atlanta, states that European clothing manufacturers started adjusting their clothing lines to market to women a number of years ago. "Field or shooting attire is now made to fit women, where not long ago women had to purchase men's clothing in smaller sizes. For formal shoots there is now classic clothing that is timeless and looks good in the field or at the cocktail reception afterward."

Brumby also believes women's interest in hunting and sporting clays have increased because they have discovered, "Shooting is something that women can do with their husbands and boyfriends and is an 'even sport'—one where both men and women can evenly participate."

It is human nature to congregate with those who share similar interests. Best friends usually become that way because they share a common interest in the things they do. If your spouse or significant other is already your best friend, what a great person to make your shooting partner as well! □

*Clarke Jones is a freelance writer who spends his spare time hunting up stories with his black lab, Luke. He can be contacted at [www.clarkecjones.com](http://www.clarkecjones.com).*

