



I had just returned from my wine cellar with a bottle of PlumpJack Cabernet when Ol' Jones trudged through the front door, slumped into my favorite chair, spotted the bottle, and muttered, "Great... pour me about four fingers' worth." Ordinarily, the big galoot is a little more gentlemanly, so I asked what was bothering him. It appears his retirement plan of winning the lottery has not borne fruit. There have been no nominations for the Pulitzer Prize and no calls from Hollywood proposing to turn one of his stories into a movie. His search for rich relatives from the family tree, who might designate him the sole heir to their fortunes, so far has turned up branchless.

With a little probing, I learned that Ol' Jones had gone clay shooting with several members of the Lonesome Dove Hunt Club and Literary Society who had chosen career paths that proved far more profitable than writing. Most had acquired new high-grade shotguns and shot exceptionally well. Jones, using his ol' blue collar shotgun, had done poorly in comparison. I could see that he was falling into a common mental trap of, "I used to shoot clays better when I was younger—it must be the gun." (Golfers, go ahead and substitute golf clubs.) The reasons are never: I've gotten older, my reflexes have slowed; I haven't exercised and now I'm out of shape; it's been years since I went shooting; my eyesight has changed or perhaps that cataract surgery has changed the way I see things; maybe my shooting

partners took some tune-up lessons and didn't tell me. Then again, your friends may be shooting once or twice a week while you only shoot once *every other* year. No...the easy answer is, "It must be the gun!"

To extricate Jones from his funky "... my friends all drive Porches, I must make amends" state of mind, I proceeded to lay out for him the reality of his woes in economic terms. (I know, it's hard to believe, but Ol' Jones was a *finance* major in college.) "A new, custom-fitted shotgun, the likes of which you crave," I suggested, "would probably run about \$4,500 to \$7,500—or more!"

Gun fit is important; yet having a gun custom fitted may cost almost as much as some new guns. True, an off-the-rack gun that fits a shooter who is 5'9" may not work so well for a shooter who is 6'4". "However, keep in mind that a custom fitted gun may limit potential buyers if you want to sell it later on. Remember, too, how your grandparents kept getting shorter as they aged? Over time, that custom fitted gun may no longer accommodate your evolving physique."

I continued, "Another thing to consider: Because you cannot help showing off your new, expensive shotgun to your peers, they—and you—will expect you to shoot much, much better. In fact, some will say that since you have spent so much money on your new, custom fitted gun, you should never miss! So, on the QT, you'll have to ante up for shooting lessons at \$100 an

hour to help improve your skills. This doesn't mean you instantly start breaking more clays or bringing home more game. You'll have to practice more—covertly, of course."

"Then," I added, "seeing as you're on a streak, you'll probably want to join a shooting club. More peer pressure and club membership fees; I guesstimate \$500 initiation plus \$200 annual dues, at a minimum. Add in all the money spent on shotgun shells—which you will now be buying by the case and not the box—plus the wardrobe enhancements and gunning accessories, as well as buying a round or two of beverages for your shooting partners. The sky's the limit!"

I concluded by appealing to the sensible, frugal side of the man, "As with most activities, the more you practice, the more you improve, and the more you improve, the more confidence you have, and the more confidence you have—the more you improve! So, if you took all that money for the new gun and custom fitting and instead spent it on lessons and shooting more targets ... would you not improve your scores and confidence using the *old* gun?"

Just saying.

Keep a leg up,
Luke

Luke is a black Labrador retriever who spends his spare time hunting up good stories with his best friend, Clarke C. Jones. You can contact Luke and Clarke at www.clarkecjones.com.

