Shotgun Slugs
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Shotgun slugs have been around for quite awhile starting with the round ball also called the pumpkin ball. They weren’t very accurate and if you hit something much beyond 50 yards it was it day to die. Due to low sectional density they also lost velocity rather quickly. Another problem is that the ball had to be a little smaller then the barrel otherwise it could damage the choke. You could patch it but it still has serious limits in regards to accuracy. As a note if you have a tight choke be careful with any slug as they can ruin a choke. I have a barrel that had an extra tight choke and my brother shot a Breneke through it. Now the choke has wings. If you did manage to hit a deer at closer ranges with a ball it was effective in so far as it was about a 70 caliber slug and it made a large entrance hole.

Years ago Breneke came out with a slug that was better then anything on the market at that time and in fact is still one of the better ones around. They first came out in 1898 and have changed little since. They took a wad cutter shape bullet and attached a wad on the back to enhance accuracy. It works like a rock in a sock or a bad mitten projectile. They had ones with a felt type of material which used to be available to reloaders as projectiles. They were put on with a screw which held it even after impact. Sadly that is no longer the case as they no longer offer just the projectiles. Factory ammo however is still available. Anyway I shot quite a few of them and at 100 yards they produced about 4” groups consistently with the shotgun I use. It is a model 12 that someone cut off the barrel and is scoped. With good handloads I was able to obtain about 1500 FPS which makes it a potent load indeed. The Breneskes also proved to be good harvesters of deer, bear and wild boar.

The next development was the Foster slug which is basically a hollow base bullet which came out in 1936. They resemble the mini ball from the Civil War era to an extent. Some have grooves on them which in theory helps it to spin but I doubt that is so. They are more effective and accurate then the pumpkin balls extending the usable range to 75 yards or more. Some guns shoot them better then others and a 100 yard shot might not be out of the question in some instances. Generally as far as you
can keep the slugs in a plate size target would determine how far you should be shooting at a deer. The vital area of a deer is about the size of a plate and that is the most common game harvested with slugs. The Foster slugs usually weigh from 1 to 1 & 1/4ozs. Lyman offers molds in 12 and 20 gauge for those who want to cast their own. The Lyman mold doesn’t have the rifling fins as the Fosters do. I have shot the 12 gauge verity and they work fairly well, again better in some guns then others. We harvested a couple of deer with them, the shots were in the 35 to 50 yard range.

Some states require slugs as opposed to rifles due to the danger that a rifle bullet presents at ranges that a slug can’t travel. I hunted for years in such a state and never felt handicapped. That isn’t a handicap unless you are sitting over a bean field and are presented with a 300 yard shot. In those areas you generally hunt in the woods where a 50 yard shot is the rule with 75 being a long shot. Many shots are closer. A rifle bullet can travel 2 to 3 miles while a slug goes from ½ to ¾ of a mile. If you go hunting in unfamiliar territory be sure to check the laws regarding ammo before you go out. If the game warden catches you with illegal ammo that could prove to be expensive.

There have been other designs including one that looked like a spool. I haven’t seen that one around for some years so there must have been some problem with it. I worked with one some years ago that was a 50 caliber that had two plastic sleeves that held it in place. It narrowed down in the center. I tested them and they would produce great groups at 100 yards but there were some flyers that
usually hit about a foot from the rest of the group. My guess is that one part of the sabot hung on tool long thus disturbing the balance. Due to that I never took them hunting. I heard that they would break off at the center which would reduce penetration though I doubt that would be much of a problem with deer.

A few years ago a company called Active made some slugs. The case didn’t have an outside brass bottom but was re-enforced from within. The slug was 1 & 1/2oz and killed on both ends. Shooting it off the bench is like shooting a 458, what fun! It performed well at 100 yards and worked very well on deer. It would take down most bears also. Unfortunately they went out of business as their cases were great for reloading also. I still keep an eye out for their slugs and empty hulls.

Rifled barrels cam along and so did some new slug designs. Companies such as Remington came out with a copper slug that has a sabot. Velocity exceeds 1700 FPS and it shoots very well at 100 yards and even further. With increased velocity and accuracy it is now possible to hunt out to 200 yards with some of the better offerings. A company called Lightfield makes a unique slug for rifled barrels. They have three levels of power but they hit to the same point of impact at 50 yards. I know that to be a fact as I have done it on several occasions. The only difference you can tell is the amount of recoil felt. At 100 yards palm size groups are more then realistic. For more info on their innovative slugs you can go to http://www.lightfieldslugs.com/Lightfield/ One of the features is most companies have come out with managed recoil slugs. They are still effective at woods ranges but don’t rattle your teeth like the full powered verities do. Federal uses a Barnes copper slug in their ammo with good results. Most companies that offer ammo also sell slugs. They come in 12, 16, 20 and 410. However anything smaller then a 20 should not be used for large game. A 410 slug weighs about 87 grains which translates into insufficient penetration and accuracy for big game. If you like to load your own there are a couple of companies that offer projectiles. Loading data is available and like the factory verity you will need to experiment to see which combo works for you.

So which one is best? That depends on what you are going to use it for. If you have a smoothbore then be sure you buy the appropriate ammo for best results. If you have a rifled barrel then it doesn’t make much sense to use a Foster type of slug as the rifling may not enhance it’s accuracy by much if any. Like any firearm a shotgun will probably prefer one brand over another. You will have to test your weapon and once determined what it likes then buy a supply in case they change the design or stop producing them. Most slugs will completely go through a deer with a broadside shot which produces a large wound and a good blood trail if needed. Don’t sell slugs short they will do the job if you do yours.

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