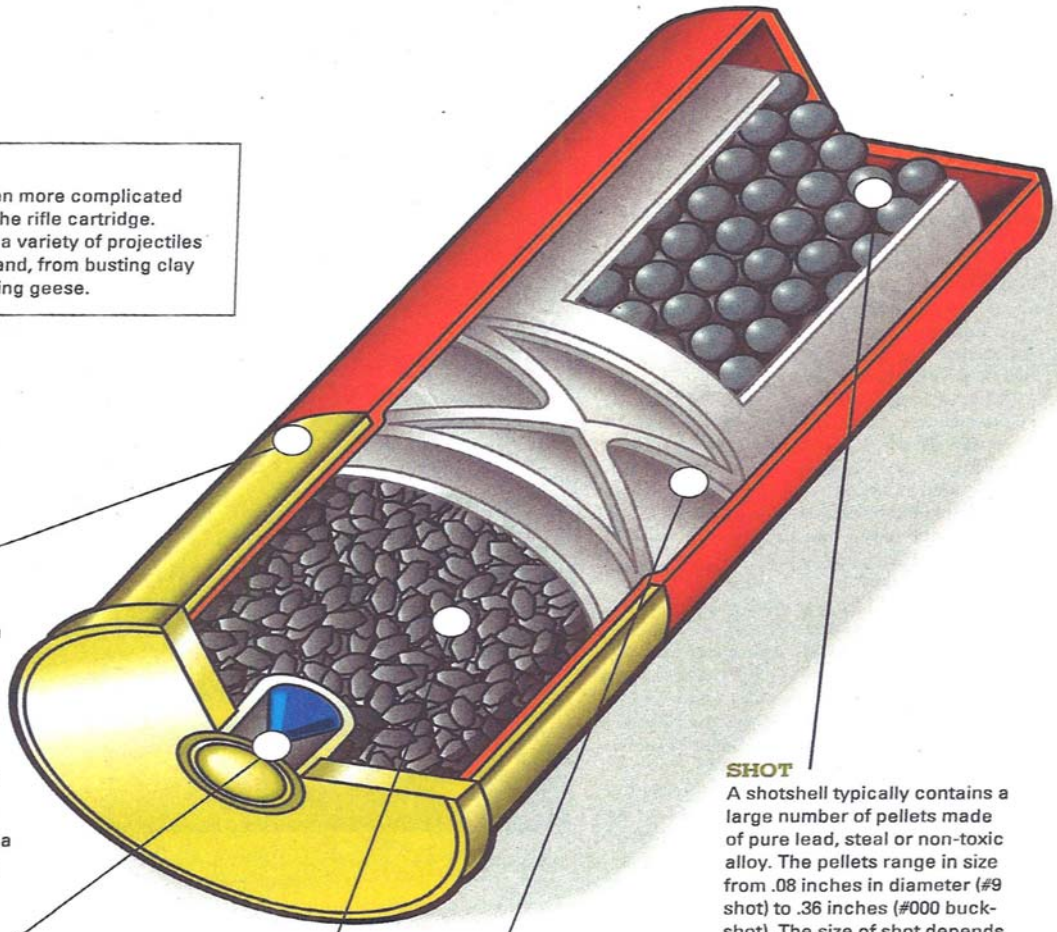
SHOTGUN SHELL

The shotgun shell is an even more complicated round of ammunition than the rifle cartridge. Shotshells are loaded with a variety of projectiles depending on the task at hand, from busting clay targets to shooting high-flying geese.



SHOTSHELL CASE

The brass case head and the plastic case body combine to form the shotshell case (which contains the primer, powder charge, wad and shot). The head supports the primer recess, ensuring the primer stays in place during ignition, and provides a gas seal. It has a rim that allows the shell to be easily ejected from the gun after firing. (Note: the gauge of a shotshell refers to its diameter, and thus the size of the gun chambered to receive it; shell lengths also vary. This information should be stamped on the barrel of your shotgun.)

PRIMER

The primer contains a sensitive chemical that explodes when struck by the shotgun's firing pin. The flame from this explosion ignites the powder charge. As with the centrefire rifle cartridge, the primer is found in the middle of the base of the shell.

POWDER CHARGE

Shotgun powder is similar in makeup to rifle powder, but it burns even faster and delivers somewhat lower pressures. As with a rifle, when the powder charge burns it produces a huge volume of gas that pushes the shot down the barrel of the gun.

WAD

The wad, or shotcup, separates the powder from the shot. The modern shotcup is a polycarbonate container that helps move the shot down the bore, resulting in a tight, uniform pattern.

SHOT

A shotshell typically contains a large number of pellets made of pure lead, steal or non-toxic alloy. The pellets range in size from .08 inches in diameter (#9 shot) to .36 inches (#000 buckshot). The size of shot depends on the size and range of your intended target; the smaller the game, for example, the smaller the shot size. A shotshell can also contain a single projectile, known as a slug. These have evolved into saboted projectiles that perform much like modern muzzleloader bullets. They can be jacketed or homogenous in design, and offer higher velocities and better accuracy than their lead predecessors.