The Shooting Instructor

By Alan Liere

There was a man once who needed a suit for his daughter’s wedding, and having never before worn one, he put his trust in a local clothier. Unfortunately, he picked a man of questionable integrity and little skill who cared more for the jingle in his pocket than doing right by his customers.

“I think the sleeves are too long,” the man told the clothier upon trying on the suit. “See how they hang beyond my fingertips?”

“Oh, that is no problem,” the clothier said. “Bend your elbows out and the length will be perfect.”

The man tried this and sure enough, it worked, but he had another question: “Don’t you think the jacket hangs down too far in back?”

“Not if you’ll just lean forward a bit when you walk,” said the clothier. “Try it now—bend your elbows out, lean forward and walk toward the mirror. Isn’t that perfect?”

“Well, I guess it’s better,” said the man, “but the pants seem to bag in the crotch and I notice there’s a sizable hole on the inside of the right leg by the knee. What do I do about those issues?”

The clothier studied the problem only a moment. “Reach down with your left hand, get a fistful of the extra crotch material and pull upward . . . Yes, just like that. Now hold it. And as for the hole in the leg,” he continued, “squeeze your knees together when you walk and it won’t show a bit.”

The man did as he was told.

“Perfect!” said the clothier. “That will be $300.”

The man paid and walked out of the shop wearing the suit. He was leaning forward with his elbows out, grasping the extra material at the crotch while he pressed his knees together.

“Hey,” said a passerby, nudging his friend as the man waddled by. “Get a load of that guy!”

“No kidding,” the friend said. “Nice suit, isn’t it?”

I recalled this story recently when I signed up for some shooting lessons. Although I wasn’t the worst shot on my team, I never seemed to improve. Some expertise was in order. I didn’t do much research—in fact I did none, but I had seen the fellow shoot and I knew he was a lot better than I.

After a morning with the instructor, I learned there was no earthly way I could have ever hit a target with my shotgun. “That weapon,” he said, shaking a finger at the offending 12 gauge, “does not shoot where you point it.”

“So is my recourse to not shoot at the target and hope I get lucky?” I asked. “I very much want to improve my scores.”

“’Lucky’” is not a factor,” the instructor said emphatically. “The stock is too short to mount well. It is also too wide and high at the comb and narrow at the heel. You are not getting good support under the cheekbone, so we’ll have to find the resting point center of your face on the comb.” He leaned back and critically surveyed my countenance, then grasped my chin between thumb and fingers and moved it from side to side. “Your face,” he said finally, “is definitely too wide, so naturally we will want to dish out one side of the comb to get the master eye to the line of sight.”

“Naturally,” I said, wondering how my mother had ever tolerated such a wide-faced child.

“Also,” he continued, “due to your large chest, we will want to cant your butt a quarter inch.”

“Say what?” I asked.

“Cant your butt,” he repeated. “Not an easy alteration.”

“I should think not,” I said. “Probably painful, too.”

“Yes,” the shooting instructor went on obliviously, “and with such a long neck, the Monte Carlo style should be perfect.”

“Now let me see if I’ve got all this right,” I said. “My face is too wide, my eyes are out of line, my cheekbones don’t support, my chest is too large, my neck too long, my butt needs canting. Is that everything?” I wasn’t sure if we were talking gun alteration or plastic surgery.

“I’m pretty sure that will do it,” he said. “With those adjustments, your shotgun will fit you like a glove. I’ll bet your friends at the club will be amazed.”

“And probably my wife, too,” I said, “especially if I’m looking at surgery. “But will it really help?”

“Definitely,” the shooting instructor said. “I can now make my next car payment. That will be $300 please.”