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# DECISIONS, DECISIONS

SERIOUS SHOOTERS NEED SERIOUS  
EQUIPMENT, BUT WHEN IS THE  
BEST TIME TO BUY? PLAN YOUR  
PURCHASES WITH THIS GUIDE!

NRA STAFF



**W**hether you just started shooting or have been shooting for several years, one thing is undeniable: The people who are winning shoot with equipment that is capable of achieving the top score. What does that mean?

It means that no one is winning Olympic events with a beginner's rifle. If you want to shoot at the elite level, you must use equipment that will help you achieve that goal. If you are shooting in your 4-H club, school team or just for fun, you have a wider choice of equipment.

There are six major factors to consider before you purchase equipment. They are (in order of importance): 1. Your commitment to the sport; 2. Skill level—how well you shoot now; 3. Your age; 4. Cost of the equipment; 5. Your goals; and 6. Expectations. You must choose based on cost, equipment available, your skill level, your commitment to the sport, your goals and expectations. It does not make sense for a novice who shoots once every two weeks to buy a top-of-the-line rifle. By the same token, if that novice shooter is shooting 500 on a half course, he or she should be encouraged to practice once a week to gauge interest in making a bigger commitment to the sport.

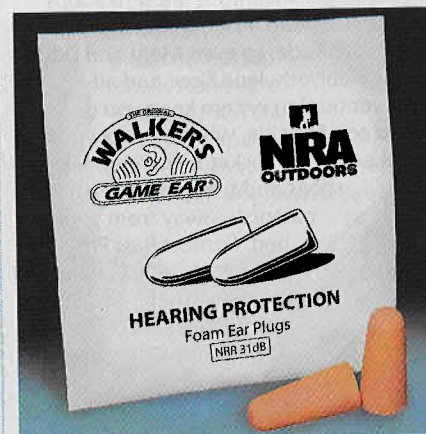
Shooting international-style smallbore rifle requires a considerable monetary investment. A new rifle can cost between two and five thousand dollars, and the rifle is just the beginning. You also need several thousand dollars' worth of additional equipment. Ammunition is a significant and regular expense. In order to progress, shooters need the best equipment they can afford. Equipment that does not perform well will hold a shooter back. For a new shooter, increasing the quality of equipment and introducing new equipment can only raise scores. For shooters who are more established, the introduction of a new or replacement piece of equipment can sometimes result in a temporary dip in

scores. Although an adjustment like this can be discouraging, shooters need to remember the end goal, and that with better equipment they will be able to progress further in the long run.

How do you manage it all? If you are just starting—or are thinking about starting—international-style smallbore shooting, do not feel compelled to buy a top-of-the-line rifle. You should buy the best rifle you can afford. Used rifles and equipment are available on several websites and through reputable dealers, especially those dealers who cater specifically to international shooters. These include Champion's Choice, Champion Shooters Supply, Pilkington Competition Equipment and many others. Don't overlook your local Junior shooting club, either; many people will know a shooter who has a used rifle for sale.

## BASIC EQUIPMENT

Ear and eye protection, rifle, sling, kneeling roll and palm rest (if you use one), are the minimum pieces of equipment you need to start shooting. Some would argue that a canvas/leather shooting jacket is also an essential, but you can easily get a feel for the sport without it. A



NRA-licensed foam earplugs from Walker's Game Ear ([www.walkersgameear.com](http://www.walkersgameear.com)) come in a convenient range-bag pack.



jacket should be purchased as soon as you decide to make a commitment to shooting as a sport. If you do not have a jacket, wear two sweatshirts that are thick enough to provide some padding. If you find a used jacket that fits, go ahead and buy it sooner rather than later.

**JACKET**

Your next wave of purchases should occur soon after you have enough stamina to shoot a half course (60 shots total, 20 record shots in each position), with scores of 350 or better. By this stage, it is essential to have a jacket that fits you. For most people, that means a new competition-style jacket (costing about \$160). At this point, there is no need to invest in a custom jacket. Custom jackets average \$400-\$600. If you are between 8 and 12 years old, you still have a lot of growing to do. Purchasing a new jacket every year is not just expensive—it can be discouraging. A jacket that's too big will not offer you the support it should, and it may even violate the rules. Together with your parents, you must make educated choices. Take into account your family history for growth. Did Mom or Dad go through a growth spurt at around 14? Are you as tall as Mom or Dad now? If

Eye protection doesn't have to be pricey. These Smith & Wesson shooting glasses from Cabela's ([www.cabelas.com](http://www.cabelas.com)) are only about \$30.

**"...no one is winning Olympic events with a beginner's rifle."**

you are a 12- to 13-year-old who wants to shoot on a team in college, the

quicker you can put together a quality array of equipment, the better. That will give you a few years to become accustomed to the equipment and work out your best positions.

**BOOTS**

Shooting boots have a flat bottom and square toe. Shooting boots will help steady you significantly, both standing and kneeling. While you must again consider how much you will most likely grow—and how fast—boots are a wise investment. Once you make the investment in boots, take good care of them. Don't walk around in your boots. Put them on once you are at the shooting line and the only walking you should do in them is to change targets.

A shooting jacket like this I.S.S.F. coat from Champion's Choice ([www.champchoice.com](http://www.champchoice.com)) is an important purchase for committed shooters.



Although your feet may still be growing, shooting boots like these Anschutz boots from Champion's Choice are a wise investment.



