

I'm constantly asked to instruct on long crossing targets. Much of this stems from the fact that true (and difficult) crossers are becoming more evident at Big Blasts as the target setter increases target difficulty to match the ever improving ability of most competitors. There are now few major competitions that you will not encounter several long crossers or have a stand alone Long Bird side game. Then there is FITASC – which has always had its fair share of long crossers.

I consider that any target that is pushing the ballistic reach of a shotgun is likewise pushing the competitor's shooting skills. Small mistakes that you can get away with at 20 yards, and still break the target, are going to create a definite miss at 50 plus yards.

The first questions I'm asked are more usually on choke and cartridge – followed by lead, patterns and shot fall. However, I believe that the majority of long crossing targets are most often missed off line rather than through ballistics problems or lack of lead. Consider the line of flight of any

target. You can effectively miss it 360 degrees all around – in front, behind, over or under! If you can stay on the line of flight you are 50 percent better off – now you can only miss in front or 'you're behind it', as I am sure you have often been told by fellow squad members.

Establishing the target line of flight, regardless of technique being used, and maintaining it through to the completion of the shot is essential for consistent shooting – even more so on distant crossers where approximately an eighth of an inch at the muzzle is two feet or more at the target.

There are several reasons for coming off the line – poor gunmount, gunfit, incorrect interpretation of the target flight line and target setter's tricks (using terrain and various spring combinations on different traps). But the most common and most destructive is the rolling or dropping of the shoulder in the



direction of the target line of flight, causing a rainbow or windshield wiper sweep of the muzzles over and under the target line.

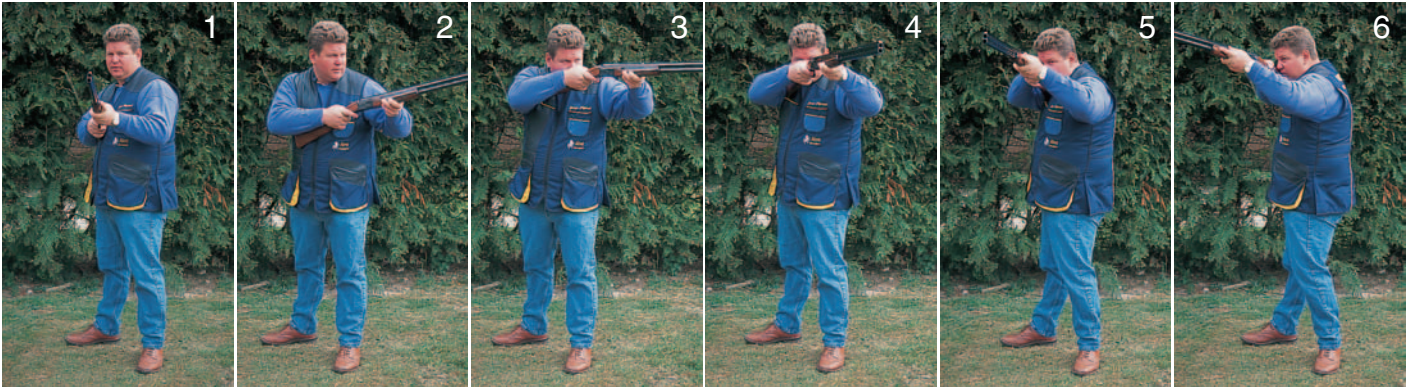
There are also several reasons for not sustaining swing speed. Those include riding the target, wrong insertion point (picking the

target up too soon), or loss of gun speed at the chosen breakpoint. However, the most common fault is that the gun swing is made with the arms alone, instead of the whole body.

Consider a golf swing. The only way the ball can be hit both

BALANCED SHOOTING

BY CHRIS BATHA



THE DIGWEED STYLE – STEP BY STEP. 1. THIS IS THE POINT AT WHICH I WILL TAKE THE SHOT, NATURAL AND COMFORTABLE. 2. I TURN BACK TO THE HOLD POINT. 3. THE SWING STARTS. 4. THE SWING CONTINUES AND THE STANCE STARTS TO OPEN USING HIPS AND KNEES. 5. THE SHOT IS TAKEN. 6. FOLLOW THROUGH.

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straight and to a distance is if the whole of the golfer's body is utilized throughout the swing. Shooting a shotgun is no different.

Balance is essential to compete well in all sports. If you can start and finish a shot in balance, you'll break more clays. Balance is created by a combination of the skeletal and muscular system. The skeletal structure is comparable to the girders of a tall building – they are the core of our strength. The muscles are the cladding, which when you correctly use the skeleton to provide strength, you

need only a small amount of muscle effort. Your movements become smoother and better coordinated and you are able to move efficiently in any direction.

The reason for the 'windshield wiper' or 'rain bowing' of the gun, on and off the target line, is from swinging the gun with the muscles of your shoulders and arms only. Your center of balance shifts from your lower abdomen to your upper body. As the amount of movement available from the arms is used up, you unconsciously recognize that you are running out of movement. Then you begin to make continuous weight transferences to keep the gun moving and incrementally lose your balance. If right handed, shooting a left to right crosser, solely using the arms, you effectively push the gun off your face and involuntarily begin rolling the shoulder into the target direction. The result is that you come off the line and slow or even stop the swing. Target lost.

If you make a shot using the whole body, your movement to the target will be better coordinated. Your feet should be squarely underneath your body. This allows uninhibited rotation, and a relaxed pivot around a central axis. The swing should be created with the ankles, legs and knees, which

cause your hips and shoulders to move together rotating on a level line. This action should be so well grooved that there is no conscious effort or tension in its implementation.



THIS STANCE ALLOWS THE WHOLE BODY, THROUGH THE KNEES AND HIPS, TO SWING THE GUN.

Tension in the body will affect the motion and smoothness of your swing. Most importantly, if the hips and shoulders do not work as a unit, they create a jerky erratic move in the swing. This is caused by conflict between the lower and upper body trying to obtain proper alignment, making the timing and smoothness of the

swing extremely inconsistent and inaccurate. Swinging the gun should be a single, smooth and rounded action and not a series of jerks from one position to the next.

The fault of only using the arms to execute a swing is probably because of the use of the word 'swing'. The interpretation of this word is to 'swing' the gun like a golf club. However, we should remember that the golf club has the weight at the opposite end to your hands, but in the case of a shotgun, the majority of the weight is in the hands and the muzzles are comparatively light. Swinging the gun solely with the arms (like a club) creates a loss of control. While some shooters will revert to barrel weights to move the weight further in front of the breech pin to alleviate this, the correct solution is to use the whole body to swing the gun, not just the arms.

THINK DIFFERENTLY

Try to start thinking about using the hands and arms to mount the gun, and the whole body to swing the gun. You will be surprised and delighted by the improvement in your consistency and scores – particularly with those difficult crossers. ■



THIS VERY UPRIGHT STANCE TENDS TO RESULT IN THE ARMS AND SHOULDERS (ONLY) EXECUTING THE SWING.