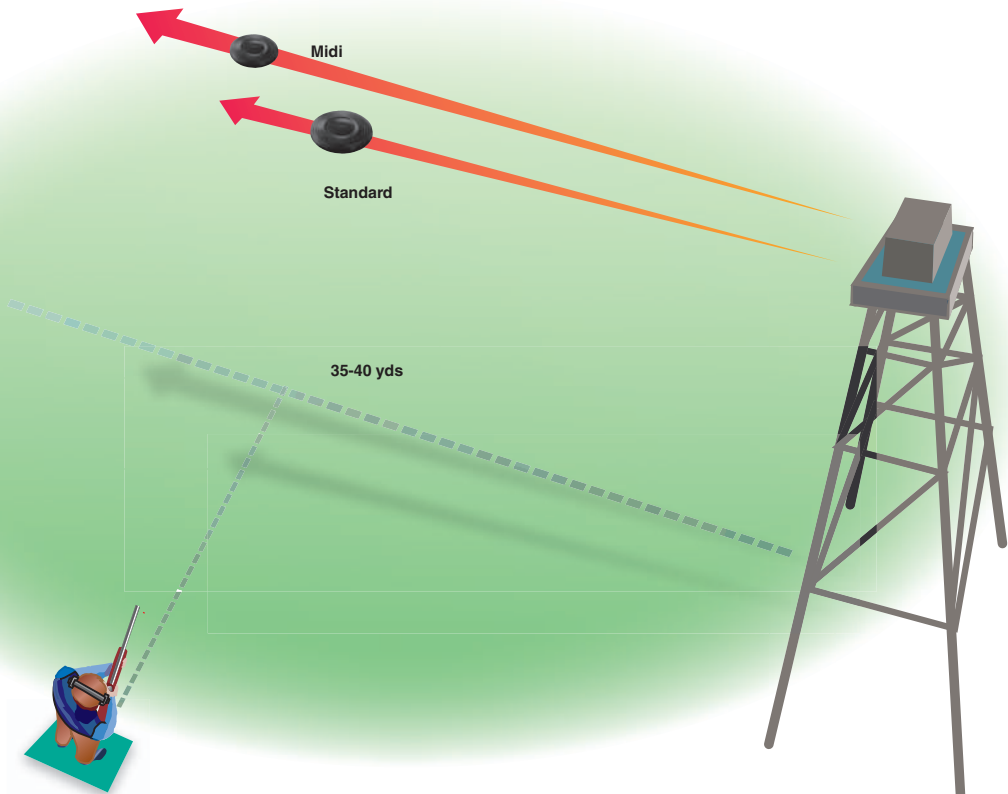


WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PAIR?

ASKS NICK SISLEY

BY COMMITTING TO THE BREAK POINT WHEN THE BIRDS ARE SEPARATED BY THE MOST DISTANCE, YOU MINIMIZE THE POSSIBILITY THAT YOUR EYES WILL BE DISTRACTED BY THE CLAY YOU ARE NOT TRYING TO SHOOT.



Sporting clays is a game of pairs – true pairs, following pairs or report pairs. With all three, the presentations are virtually infinite. Target setters are continually coming up with new and interesting challenges, but, at the same time, there are also pairs we see that have some similarity to targets we’ve shot previously. So, do we all have a ‘favorite pair?’ If so, is that favorite pair the most challenging one you encounter? Or are the two birds you enjoy best the ‘easiest’ – at least for you?

For insight into some of the most memorable pairs you might ever encounter, we asked a number of expert target setters and shooters (mostly the former) the simple question posed in the title of this article – “What’s your favorite pair?”



WILL HAS TWO JOBS –full-time instructor and full-time competitor at sporting, FITASC (his favorite) and 5-Stand. He says it’s a lousy job but somebody has to do it! When asked what his favorite pair was he didn’t have to think too long.

“I think I’d cast my vote for a

true pair off a tower, one bird a midi, the other a standard.” I didn’t have to ask why, for Fennell continued, “Typically the 90, being lighter, gets a jump on the standard. But then the standard, having more mass, passes the midi. The dilemma is which bird do you shoot first? Compounding the difficulty of this is that it’s very easy to have both birds well within your sight picture as you are pulling the trigger the first time. Naturally, this makes it tough to really zero in with your stare on the bird you want to initially break.”

Will goes on to say that such a pair messes with both your depth perception and the targets’ speed – and, no doubt, your mind. He thinks 35-40 yards is about ideal

for such a pair. Both are plenty tough enough, so there’s no need to add distance to make the duo even more difficult. If the elevated trap throwing this pair is close by, take the midi first. If the trap is farther from the shooting station, Will’s tendency will be to take the standard first as that target will tend to take over the lead of the midi by the time he’s ready to pull the trigger the first time. But there’s more.

This shooter/instructor goes on to say that the real challenge here is to commit to a break point. What you must avoid is selecting a break point when the two clays are too close together. Instead, select your break point where the two are farthest apart – then select which of the two to shoot first. By



committing to the break point when the birds are separated by the most distance, you minimize the possibility that your eyes will be distracted by the clay you are not trying to shoot.

Since both the midi and the standard are probably going to have a sky background – both birds should be black. The elevated trap should be at least 40 feet up – probably higher. Whether the pair is right to left or left to right does not matter.

In wrap up, Fennell told me that his favorite individual target is an upside down battue. Why? That bird has a lot of speed. If in the air with a sky background it's easy to see, even at a great distance – and it breaks with authority since it's so fragile.



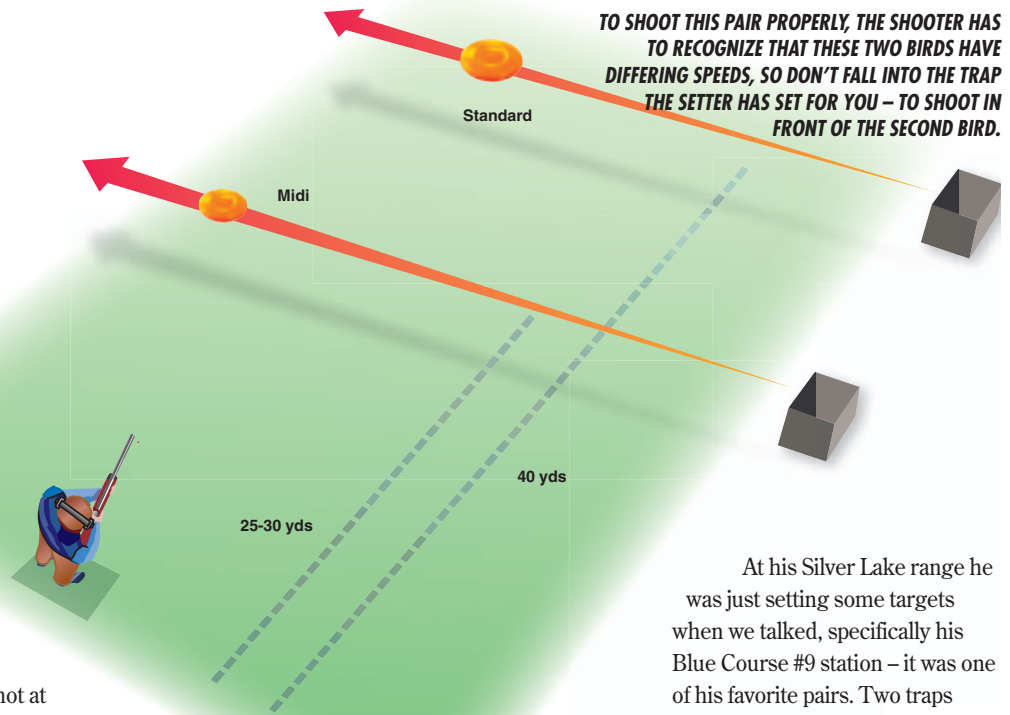
NEIL HAS BEEN SETTING TARGETS FOR MANY YEARS, but he's currently also busy with his latest business venture (LongRange LLC based in Franklin, NH), a card-key system for keeping track of targets thrown at gun clubs.

Like Fennell, Chadwick's favorite target pair is to confuse the shooter by mixing target speed. Here's the way he explains it. He too loves to mix a midi with a standard. Instead of the true pair Fennell suggested, he prefers to throw a report pair. Further, although he does occasionally throw this favorite from a tower, he prefers to send them out fast and flat from the ground. Right to left or left to right – this report pair can be thrown either way.

The midi will be thrown first, to

be shot at from 25-30 yards. He says the bird will appear farther away and faster than it really is, and, as a rule, the shooter will give this first bird plenty of lead – and usually break it. Next comes the standard, but from about 40 yards off – again thrown flat and similar in angle to the midi. He explains that the standard will actually be slower, but because it's farther away the tendency will be to shoot in front of it – probably giving the standard the same lead as the shooter successfully did on the midi – resulting in a miss.

To shoot this pair properly, the shooter has to recognize that these two birds have differing speeds, so don't fall into the trap the setter has set for you – to shoot in front of the second bird. If Chadwick presents this pair from two towers, he will angle those birds up just a bit – say for the first quarter of their flight – but the same shooting technique is suggested if you want to keep a clean scorecard. With a sky background, as from a tower, he throws black birds. If he gets



his preference – a fast, flat pair thrown from ground level – most backgrounds will call for orange targets.



DAVID RIPPETOE OWNS SILVER LAKE SPORTING CLAYS in Oklahoma, and he's a well known target setter. When I asked him about the favorite pair he liked to set he came back with, "I like to make the targets close – make them look easy – but they are not. If competitors come back at the end of the day and say something like, 'The targets were not that tough – I didn't do well because I had a bad day,' then I know I've done a good job."

At his Silver Lake range he was just setting some targets when we talked, specifically his Blue Course #9 station – it was one of his favorite pairs. Two traps throw a true pair. One target is similar to a going away trap target, while the second is angled to the left slightly quartering away. Importantly, the traps are below the shooter's feet, and the slope ahead of the station slants down hill. "When a field slopes downward, away from the shooter, most tend to shoot over the top of the target," David explained.

The first shot taken in this pair should be the going away trap target, which he sets close to straight away. Most shooters can powder this one, but the second target often fools them enough that they shoot over the top or off line. There are two reasons why. First it's the downward slope to the hill that maybe provides an optical illusion. Second is the fact that after shooting the first bird, the nimrod shooter simply swings to the left target. He shoots over the top (often because his muzzle has been too high with the move to the second target) or up the left side of the target (because the swing to the second target was too fast).

Suggesting the proper way to



“WHEN A FIELD SLOPES DOWNWARD, AWAY FROM THE SHOOTER, MOST TEND TO SHOOT OVER THE TOP OF THE TARGET.”

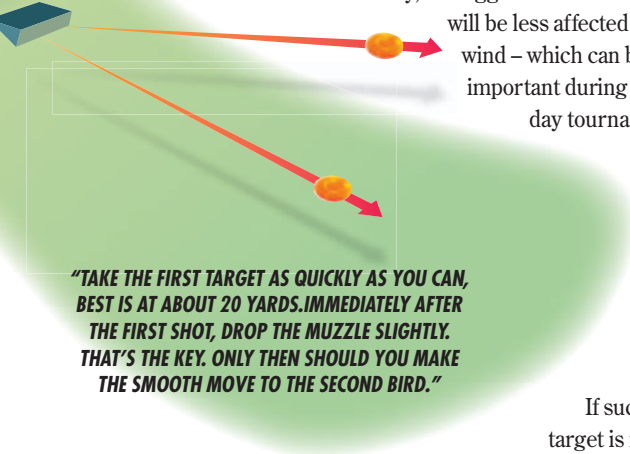
This one will be a bit farther, probably so it can be broken at about 45 yards.

But Mo will tilt the trap on this second bird, so the target shows a bit of black belly. By showing the belly, he suggests that such a bird will be less affected by the wind – which can be very important during a four-day tournament.

shoot these two close-in birds Rippetoe advises, “Take the first target as quickly as you can, best is at about 20 yards. Immediately after the first shot, drop the muzzle slightly. That’s the key. Only then should you make the smooth move to the second bird.”

No doubt dropping the muzzle allows you to get the needed good look at that second in this pair – and that helps you get a better line on its trajectory – to prevent you from shooting over the top or up the side. Shot properly, the second target isn’t all that much farther than the first when you crush it. When David sets a pair like this – most often they are orange standard targets.

David grew up hunting quail in Oklahoma. He likes to think back to some of the bobwhites he missed over the years – and then create shots at sporting stations that simulate those misses. Maybe that’s why he sets entertaining true pairs – simulating the quail covey rise.



“TAKE THE FIRST TARGET AS QUICKLY AS YOU CAN, BEST IS AT ABOUT 20 YARDS. IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FIRST SHOT, DROP THE MUZZLE SLIGHTLY. THAT’S THE KEY. ONLY THEN SHOULD YOU MAKE THE SMOOTH MOVE TO THE SECOND BIRD.”

He also runs the American Shooting Centers in Houston (TX), so he’s naturally responsible for setting sporting and 5-Stand targets. When I asked him about his favorite pair he chuckled a bit and came back, “Is there such a thing?”

But after a bit of thought he suggested a report pair using two different traps throwing a midi and a standard. He likes the midi first – thrown off a tower or an elevated position so there is a sky background (black target) moving from right to left.

Hopefully, he can set things up so this one will be broken at about 40 yards. The second bird is a standard, thrown from a ground trap, flying in the opposite direction – left to right.

If such a target is not tilted a bit, but flying flat, wind coming over the shooter’s back can make it a much longer shot. Conversely, if the wind is strong in the gunner’s face on another day, the bird can be blown much closer – so there’s always a fairness issue to be considered.

What typically goes wrong with this shot? Mo says that many shooters will not finish the first shot – take it too quickly, slow or stop the gun, whatever –

anticipating the second, slightly longer bird. But because this is a report pair, he says don’t do that. Instead, this is the perfect pair to shoot as ‘two singles’. You can stay with the first bird and finish it properly. When the next one comes out, this time a standard – do the same thing. Finish the shot.

Parsons could not help suggesting a second favorite pair. This would be a crossing true pair – thrown from two different traps – left to right or right to left. One trap is at max speed, the other at slower speed, but the latter trap is closer than the other. The key is the first bird you see is not the one you shoot first. This certainly messes with most shooter’s minds and eyes. Such a pair can be thrown from the ground or from a tower. Sounds like a fun pair.



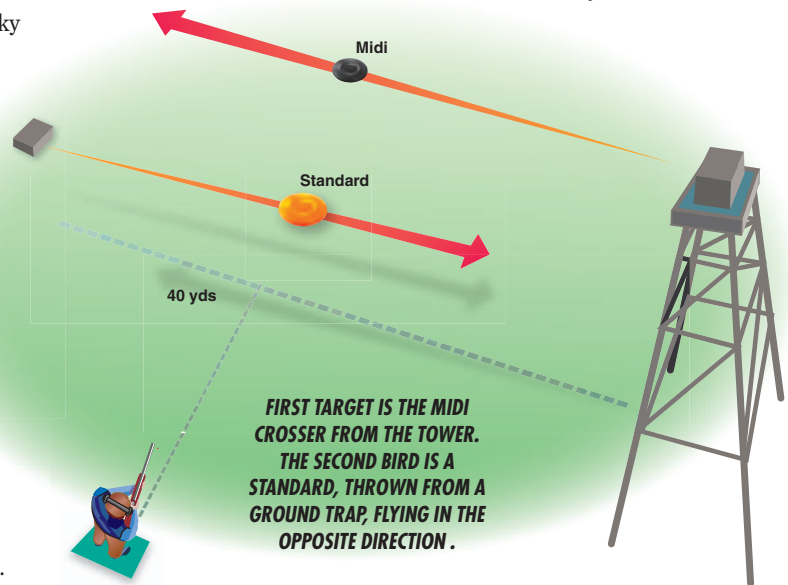
RICK HEMINGWAY

RICK ALSO HAS HIS OWN SHOOTING/GUN CLUB – Back Woods Quail Club in South

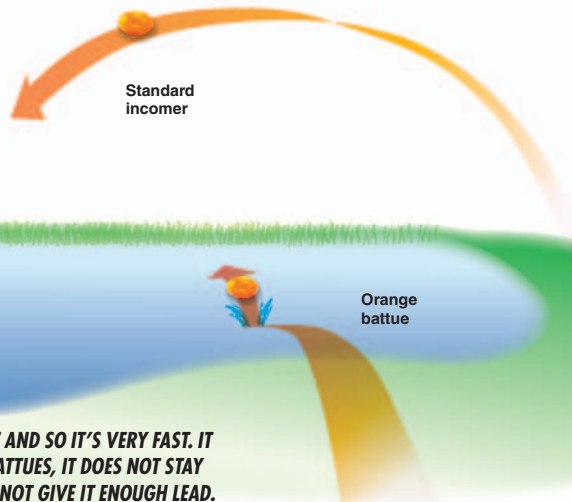


MO PARSONS

MO SETS TARGETS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY AND IS A MUCH SOUGHT AFTER TARGET SETTER.



FIRST TARGET IS THE MIDI CROSSER FROM THE TOWER. THE SECOND BIRD IS A STANDARD, THROWN FROM A GROUND TRAP, FLYING IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION .



THE CROSSING SKIPPER TARGER IS A BATTUE AND SO IT'S VERY FAST. IT REQUIRES A LOT OF LEAD, PLUS, LIKE ALL BATTUES, IT DOES NOT STAY AIRBORNE VERY LONG. THE TENDENCY IS TO NOT GIVE IT ENOUGH LEAD.

Carolina. He's also a much sought after target setter. He has two favorite pairs. The target he gets the most compliments on is what he calls the 'skipper', thrown in conjunction with a delayed incomer. This favorite pair is thrown both as a report pair and a true pair with typically 8 or 10 birds thrown at this station.

First the skipper. At Back Woods they have a 15 acre lake. The trap is 30-40 feet back from the water. The target to be thrown is an orange battue, upside down, with spring tension set at 50-60 percent. The shooters can see the trap, but they cannot see the battue fly off the trap arm. The first thing they see is a splash in the water – this can be disconcerting because the initial reaction is that a bird has broken. But then the battue immediately 'skips' out of the water right to left, turning its orange side to the shooter, rising in the air about 8-12 feet. Because it's a battue, it's very fast. It requires a lot of lead, plus, like all battues, it does not stay airborne very long. The tendency is to not give it enough lead – as well as to shoot over the top as it drops. Shot properly, Rick suggests the muzzles should be under the bird – with 3-4 foot of lead – but fast

muzzle movement is required.

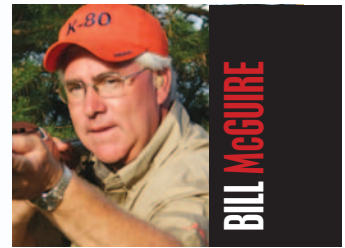
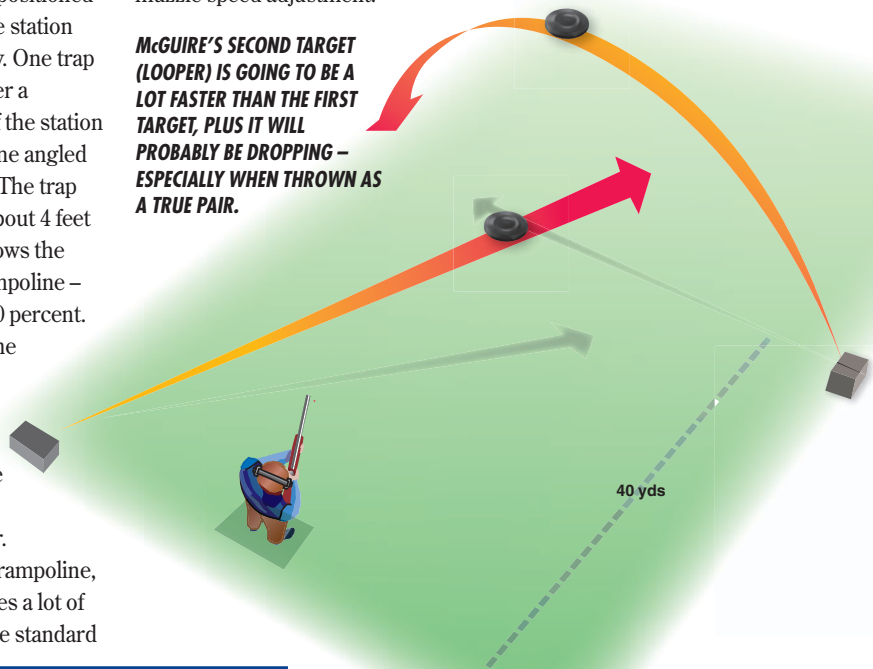
The second bird in this report or true pair is a lazy quartering incomer, a standard showing black belly against the sky. Since the shooter has had to use such a fast gun on the skipper, there's a tendency to stay in that mindset on this lazy incomer. But the trick is to not do that – adjust your swing speed to take this lazy incomer with a much slower gun, matching the target speed.

But Rick has another favorite pair – just as interesting if not more so. Two traps are positioned about 40 yards left of the station and about 25 yards away. One trap throws a rabbit, the other a standard. Out in front of the station at 25 yards is a trampoline angled up at about 45 degrees. The trap throwing the rabbit is about 4 feet off the ground, so it throws the target right into the trampoline – trap tension is at least 50 percent. The other trap throws the standard into the trampoline as well, but the two birds react totally differently. These two can be thrown as a report pair or a true pair.

The battue hits the trampoline, bounces way up and loses a lot of its speed. In contrast, the standard

bounces a lot more forward (as well as up) but, interestingly, it comes off the trampoline looking more like a chandelle – so lots of speed. When thrown as a true pair you have to shoot the rabbit first. Rick advises that to do that right, shoot it when it stalls out at the top of its bounced flight. To shoot the standard, typical chandelle shooting tactics are required – a fast gun. Remember, the speeds of these two targets are totally different, consequently the shooter has to make the required muzzle speed adjustment.

McGUIRE'S SECOND TARGET (LOOPER) IS GOING TO BE A LOT FASTER THAN THE FIRST TARGET, PLUS IT WILL PROBABLY BE DROPPING – ESPECIALLY WHEN THROWN AS A TRUE PAIR.



BILL MCGUIRE

BILL MCGUIRE IS NOT ONLY AN ALL-AMERICAN SHOOTER, if there were such a category he'd be an All-American target setter. "I like to try and deceive the shooter, but I don't do that by setting targets that are nearly un-hittable. Instead, I try to set up a pair so that when the shooter sees them, he says something like, *'I can hit these.'* But after his shooting is over, he comes off the station wondering why he missed."

He tries not to throw any 'second targets' that are on edge. McGuire claims these can be too hard to see, so folks can't always get a good visual look at that type of bird. Instead, he tries to show a lot of target with that second bird – top or bottom, though usually the bottom. Further, that second target is thrown faster than the first.

I asked him for an example. He suggested the first bird be a two-third left to right quartering away. Depending on background, this will probably be an orange standard not thrown too fast. The bird will be set up so that most will shoot it at about 35-40 yards. The second target, report or true, will show all black belly against a sky background. Coming from right to left it won't be a lazy incomer but a big 'looper' that's more of a crosser. It can be another standard, but will act more like a chandelle at trigger-pulling time. Being chandelle-like, that bird is going to be a lot faster than the first target, plus it will probably be dropping – especially when thrown as a true pair. "A fast 'compound' lead will be required (in front and below) to hit this target," says Bill. Distance at crush time will be similar to the first target, at about 35 yards.

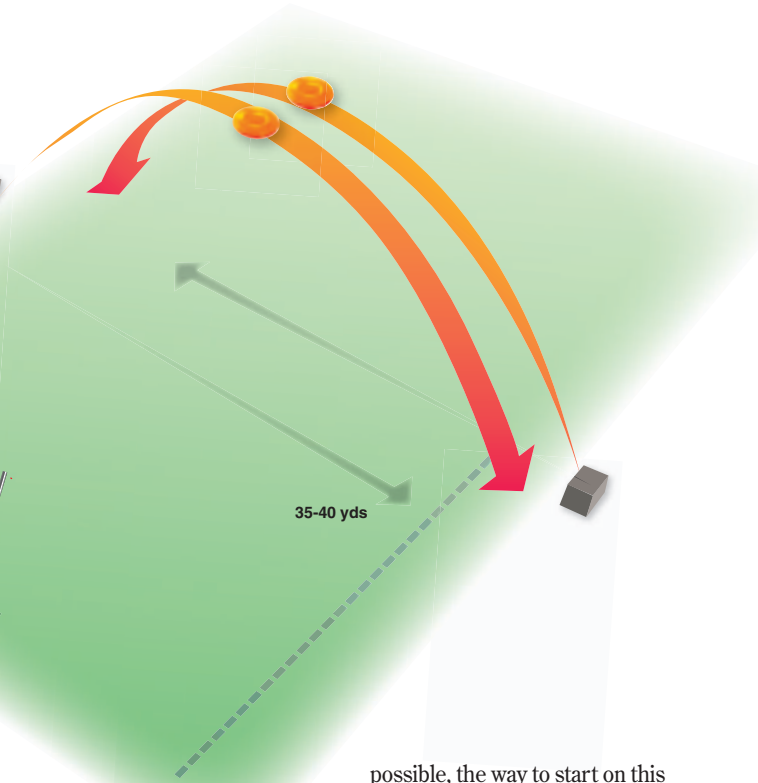


JON KRUGER NEEDS NO INTRODUCTION. He was the first to be inducted to the Hall of Fame,

KRUGER'S FAVORITE PAIR, TWO CROSSING CHANDELLES. THE CHALLENGE WITH THIS PAIR IS KEEPING THE GUN UNDER CONTROL, DESPITE THE FAST AND DIFFERING GUN MOVEMENT.

is a Champion many times over, Krieghoff spokesman, and now is associated with Grand Kankakee Hunt Club in northern, Indiana.

He doesn't get to see his favorite pair very often. How about a pair of chandelles – one right to left, the other left to right – and he prefers them thrown as a true pair. The traps can be on the ground or in the air. The birds can be black or orange, depending upon background, but either way they are easy to see. This pair requires lots of gun movement, and Jon prefers some distance on both targets – say 35-40 yards. This is



anything but an easy pair.

"On most courses with a chandelle station, you only see one of these birds," Jon says. I think he'd like to see the pair described more often. Thrown as a true pair the two birds should cross at just about the time most shooters are going to pull the trigger for the first time. Let that happen, and the visual is certain to play tricks with the shooter's eyes. Jon explains, "If

possible, the way to start on this pair would be to break the first target before the two cross. This is probably going to mean a pretty quick shot, so be careful about too much gun movement after that first shot. By the time you move to the second chandelle, it's almost certain to be dropping in its arc. Lots of gun movement is required coming back to it, plus, since it's dropping, the lead has to be both in front and below. The challenge with this pair is keeping the gun under control, despite the fast and differing gun movement." ■