

Just about everyone has a target or two that gives them fits – you know the ones! Those targets that have your knees knocking and your heart racing, that then start pecking away at your confidence level while you’re still looking at the preview target.

I’ve picked out four targets that top the ‘Tough Target Pucker-Factor’ list that make many shooters’ palms a little sweaty just to talk about them. I think that most of us would agree that these perpetually perturbing shots are (in no particular order) the teal, the crosser, the chandelle (battue, standard or rabbit, take your pick!) and of course, everybody’s favorite, the @&%## rabbit!

Over the years I have developed methods that work well for me on these targets – and they might just help your game. I’ll take a close look at each target and their variations and give you some tips and methods to make these shots come a little easier and help you to put a few less zeros on the score card. We start with teal and rabbits – next issue it will be chandelles and crossers.

But first, there are a couple of things that need to be addressed, from the basics of stance, pick up point, hold point and break point to focus and mental attitude.

I’LL TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT EACH TARGET AND THEIR VARIATIONS AND GIVE YOU SOME TIPS AND METHODS TO MAKE THESE SHOTS COME A LITTLE EASIER ...

SPORTING’S TOUGHEST TARGETS

STEVE FISCHER TELLS YOU HOW TO HIT THEM – STARTING THIS ISSUE WITH TEAL AND RABBITS

VIEWING THE TARGET AND SHOT PREPARATION

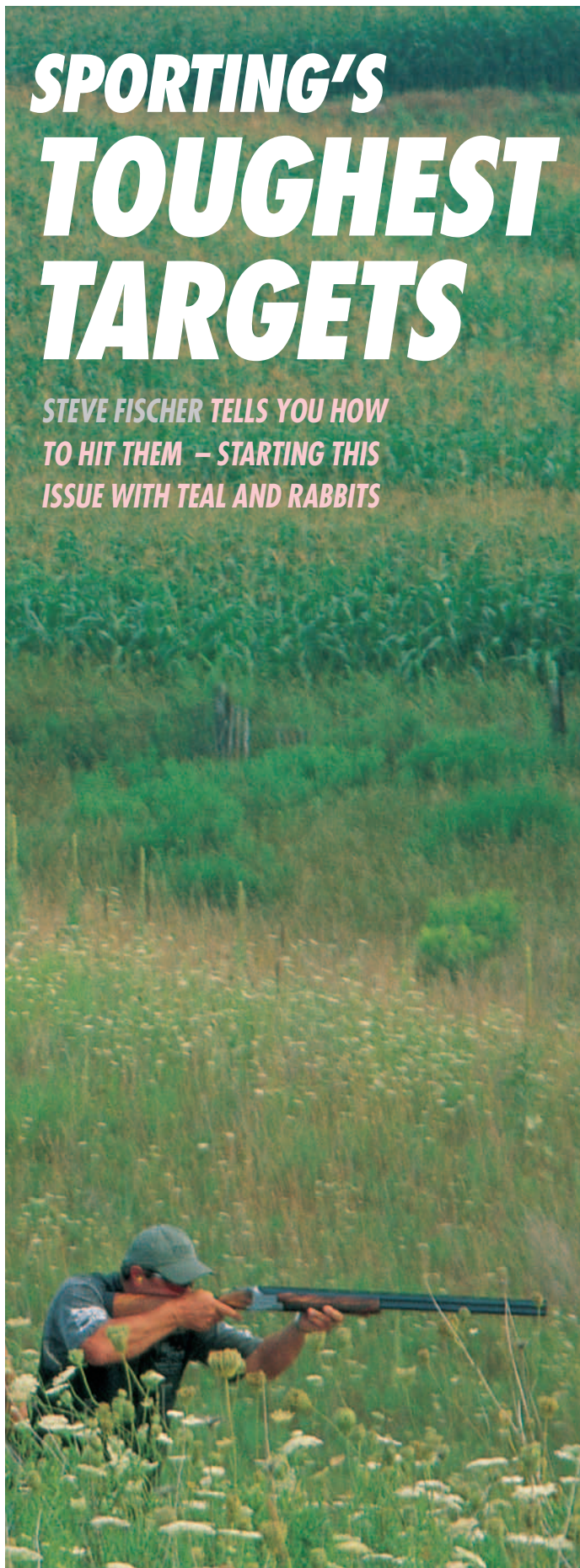
Too often the shooter steps up to the box and does little more than take a cursory view of the presentation, not really looking closely at what the target or targets are actually doing. Factors such as how fast it is (often more important than how far it is) and the angle or trajectory (is it rising, falling, hooking in or out) are critical. Is it clearly visible or does it appear from a hidden launch site?

A good understanding of the target’s flight path, speed and distance is the first indicator of how the rest of the preparation for the shot will be made. The shooter can now more accurately execute the needed mechanics of the shot, such as selecting the target pick up point, the hold point and break point. These decisions, in turn, will determine the best place to position the feet – so that any needed turn of the body while executing the shot can be made without blocking out or limiting the needed rotation of the body while moving through the shot.

The point of all of this preparation is to have a plan for shooting the target, or the sequence of targets. Good shooting isn’t an accident – it is a well planned and executed series of events.

STAY FOCUSED

After the basic physical preparations are made, the shooter needs to get mentally prepared to execute the shot, or shots, often multiple times. A telling sign that



there is a problem in this area is when the first two or maybe three pairs are shot and broken, and then the last shot or even the last pair is missed for no apparent reason. Sometimes it's the middle target or pair. The likely reason is that there has been a breach in the shooter's focus and concentration. Sometimes this can happen because the presentation is perceived as relatively 'easy', with the shot taken for granted.

On harder shots, some shooters, for unexplainable reasons, change something in the approach to their shot – even though the original approach was working just fine. They may change the break point, choosing to hurry the shot, or perhaps get too precise and ride the target too far resulting in the inevitable consequences – a missed target. As the old saying goes, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

A key ingredient to success is confidence. It increases your ability to handle tougher targets. Maintaining that confidence is essential. As soon as you begin to question your own decisions and skill, it will become a factor in turning a hit into a miss! Negative thoughts create indecision and anxiety that drains your confidence. Simply stated, you must believe in yourself!

Sporting clays and FITASC requires you to be able to move in and out of heavy concentration and focus – relaxing between stations or pegs – and re-entering deep focus when ready to shoot. To do this I use a 'trigger word' just before I shoot. It is the switch so to speak, that tells my brain that it is time to quit cluttering my mind with distractions and to focus on the coming shot. My trigger word is simply 'be smooth'. I think that phrase just before I call for the target. It 'triggers' my mind to let go of all thoughts and to

exclusively address the job at hand. Some shooters I know go through a 'ritual' each time they get into the box – such as touching the brim of their hat, flicking the safety on and off, turning their loaded cartridges or rocking back and forth – in order to signal to themselves that its time to focus. It can be anything – but trust me on this one, it really works!

VERTICAL TEAL!

Let's address our first tough target – the teal. In general there are about three types of teal shots – the almost vertical up and down teal, the upward angled fast going away teal, and the all edge on angled teal – probably the toughest of the bunch. Some shooters find them a relatively easy shot, and for others the teal can be a nemesis and a constant enemy on the sporting course or FITASC parcours.

In addressing the first of the teal targets – the one that travels almost straight up and down – there are several ways of shooting this target and each method works pretty well. Their differences are primarily as to where you take the shot – on the way up, at the top or falling. Each has its place and it is wise to learn to hit this target in all three positions.

At the top: Shooting a vertical teal at the top of its rise makes for a fairly easy shot. Here's how.

Position yourself in relation to the flight path of the target and set your hold point about half way up the target's flight line with your barrel just to the right or left of the line so that you can see the target rise up through your hold position. Track it upward, keeping the target in full view just ahead of your barrel. As it reaches the top of its flight, just cover the target with your barrel and shoot directly at it. The trick here is to get the timing

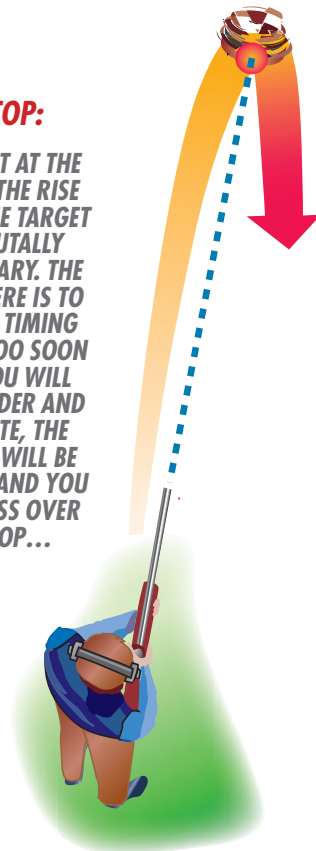
right. Too soon and you will miss under – and too late, the target will be falling and you will miss over the top. (See Fig. 1)

On the rise: Taking a vertical teal shot on the rise is a bit harder than at the top, but it is a necessary shot to have in your collection.

Sometimes there will be a presentation of two simo teals and you will have to take one on the way up and one either at the top, or falling, depending on how quickly you acquire the first target and then move to the second. Position your barrel about half way up the flight line of the target and slightly to one side, keeping the target visible during its rise. Track it upwards, moving your barrel through the target to give the required lead and shoot with the barrel still moving upwards.

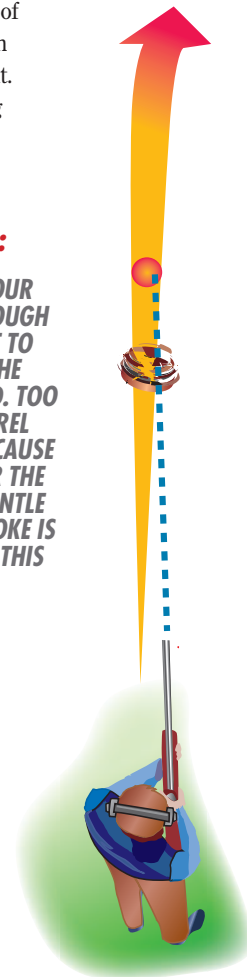
AT THE TOP:

1. SHOOT AT THE TOP OF THE RISE WHEN THE TARGET IS VIRTUALLY STATIONARY. THE TRICK HERE IS TO GET THE TIMING RIGHT. TOO SOON AND YOU WILL MISS UNDER AND TOO LATE, THE TARGET WILL BE FALLING AND YOU WILL MISS OVER THE TOP...



ON THE RISE:

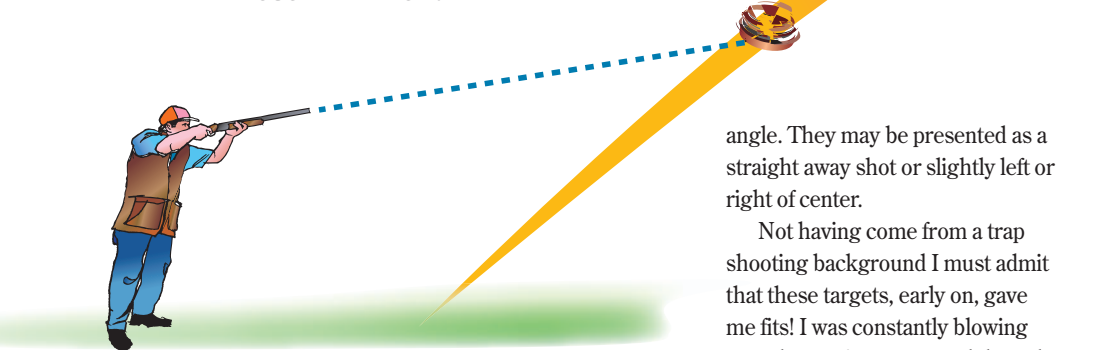
2. MOVE YOUR BARREL THROUGH THE TARGET TO ACHIEVE THE CORRECT LEAD. TOO MUCH BARREL SWING WILL CAUSE A MISS OVER THE TOP, SO A GENTLE SMOOTH STROKE IS NEEDED FOR THIS SHOT...



Remember, in a vertical teal presentation the target loses speed during its flight, so pay close attention to barrel speed. Too much barrel speed will cause a miss over the top, so a gentle smooth stroke is needed for this shot. Beyond 35 or 40 yards a rising vertical teal will need even more lead, so practice this shot at different distances. (See Fig. 2)

Dropping: Here's a target that used to give me a real hard time – the dropping teal. After the target has crested and has begun its fall back to ground, the move to make the shot becomes a rather unnatural one because we don't often shoot at anything going almost straight down. Secondly, the target, with the able assistance of the law of physics and gravity, is gaining speed during its trip to earth. A tough shot by anyone's measure!

5. FOR A GOING AWAY LOW ANGLED TEAL, SHOOT IT SMOOTHLY LIKE A TRAP SHOT COMING UP FROM UNDERNEATH AND SHOOT ITS FEET OFF, LEAVING THE MOMENTUM OF THE MOUNT TO PUSH THROUGH THE TARGET.



Here's a couple of ways to make this shot happen. If at all possible, I prefer to take a dropping teal just as it starts to fall, when its downward momentum is at its minimum. As the target reaches the top of its rise, I move my barrel to an insert point directly under the target and pull the trigger just as the target starts

to fall. (See Fig. 3) The maintained gap between barrel and bird should lengthen as the distance from the highest point of the target increases. Again, practice this shot at varied distances until you are comfortable with the technique.

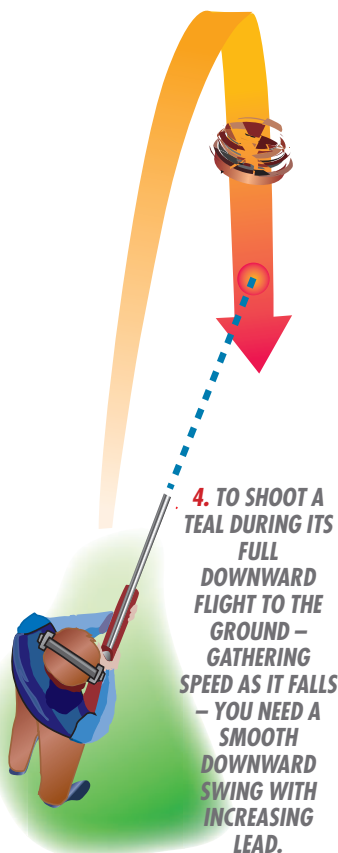
Sometimes you are forced to shoot a teal during its full downward flight to the ground – gathering speed as it falls. (See Fig. 4) Some shooters have a real knack for making this shot – I was never that lucky. What finally got me to better understand the mechanics of the shot was to visualize the falling target not as a dropper but as a fast crossing shot. Based on distance and speed, what lead would I have given that target as a crosser? Having made a decision, I then apply that lead to the dropping target and with a soft pull away move, take the shot. It took some practice, particularly at varied distances, but it does work.

angle. They may be presented as a straight away shot or slightly left or right of center.

Not having come from a trap shooting background I must admit that these targets, early on, gave me fits! I was constantly blowing over the top from too much barrel speed. The trick I finally learned was to slow down and give myself that extra split second to truly acquire the target before pulling the trigger. When the barrel speed is too fast, even though the sight picture at the instant of the shot seems just right, momentum will carry the barrel up and over the target with the resultant miss over the top. The trick here is to stay calm and move the barrel smoothly right up to the bottom edge of the going away target and pull the trigger allowing the controlled momentum of the gun to continue through the target. When the target has some slight right or left angle on it, make the same move except take the barrel to the right or left side bottom of the target depending on which angle is thrown. The more the severity of the left/right angle, the more left/right lead needed. (See Fig. 5)



3. SHOOTING TEAL ON THE DROP. AS THE TARGET REACHES THE TOP OF ITS RISE, I MOVE MY BARREL TO AN INSERT POINT DIRECTLY UNDER THE TARGET AND PULL THE TRIGGER JUST AS THE TARGET STARTS TO FALL.



4. TO SHOOT A TEAL DURING ITS FULL DOWNWARD FLIGHT TO THE GROUND – GATHERING SPEED AS IT FALLS – YOU NEED A SMOOTH DOWNWARD SWING WITH INCREASING LEAD.

SHALLOW TEAL

In the last couple of years I have been seeing more teal shots that resemble a long trap shot – more so than a true teal target. They are usually set from about 30 to 35 yards with the line of flight rising but going away from the shooter at about a 30-40 degree upward

QUARTERING

There's one more teal presentation that can be a real problem. The one thrown from either left or right of the stand and out about 35 yards, quartering and presented completely on edge. This shot can really eat up a score card. It's usually pretty fast and on about a 45 degree angle with nothing but edge showing. It's got to be a real

knee slapper for the target setter – and I’ll bet they chuckle all the way home after setting this shot.

Here’s a tip to help you get more of these truly difficult targets. Cant your barrel so that the rib of the gun is parallel to the line of flight of the target. If the shot is from right to left for example (and you are a right handed shooter), by dropping your right shoulder a bit and slightly raising the left, you can make the rib assume the same angle as the target’s line of flight. Your hold point should be just about where you can first see the target clearly. Call for the target and insert your barrel on or just in front of the bird, pulling away gently until you see the lead picture you want, and then shoot. For a left to right target, drop the right shoulder, and raise the left to get into position. Now, for all you lefties out there, do the exact opposite of these moves to position your rib from the port side.

What we have done by canting the barrel is to make the shot almost like shooting a crosser by putting the rib parallel to the target’s flight, so the target remains completely in view and on the same plane as a crossing shot. (See Fig. 6) Patience, confidence and a smooth move on this shot will break this otherwise tough presentation.

THAT @#%\$* RABBIT!!

I’ll bet the rabbit target collects more foul language, curses, prayers and cold stone fear than any other target on the field. Some go so far as to want it removed from the list of legal targets, complaining that it is inconsistent and often unpredictable making it unfair as it is not always the same presentation for everyone.

A rabbit is missed for a specific reason, and most of the time it’s

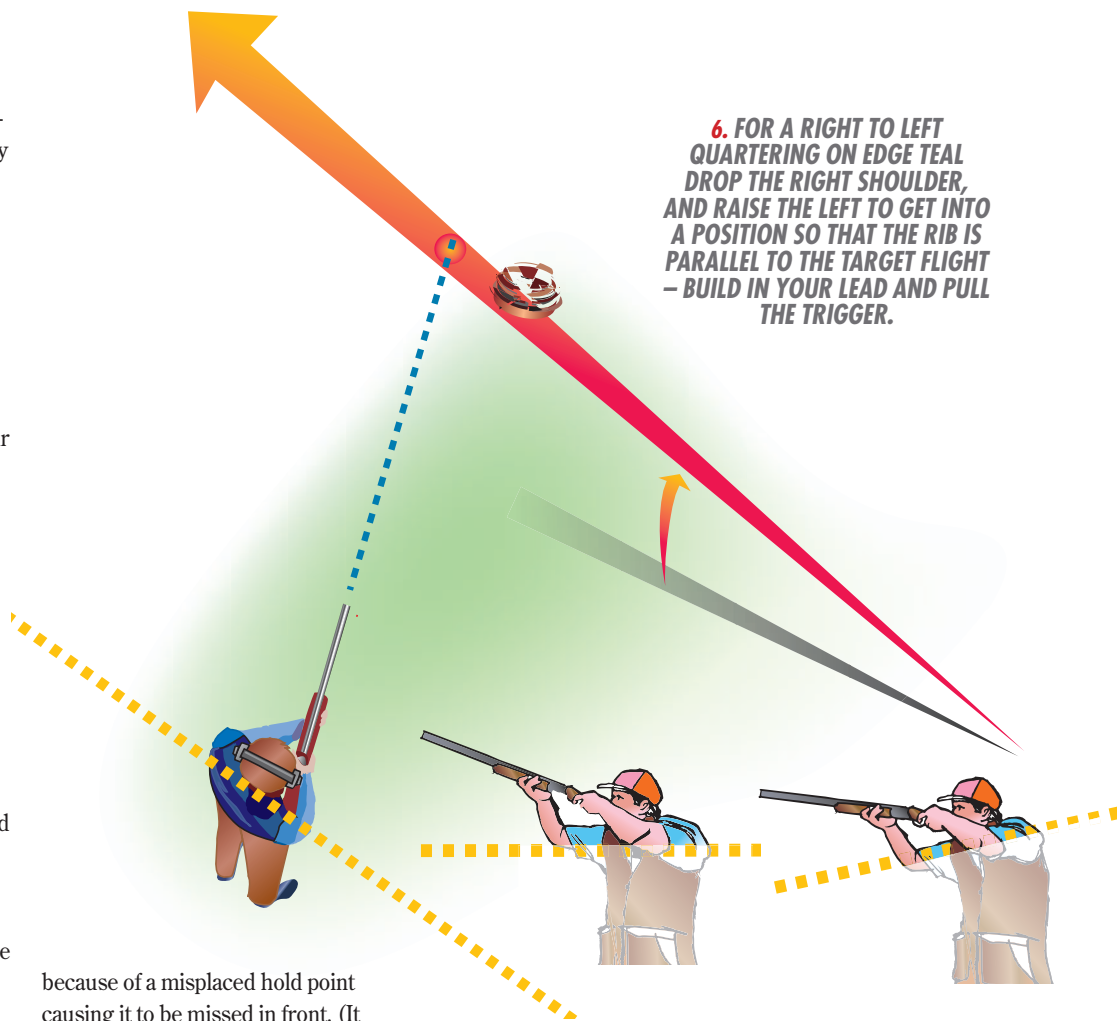
because of a misplaced hold point causing it to be missed in front. (It isn’t usually until the rabbit is presented beyond 40 yards and very fast that the shooter begins to miss behind the target). What usually happens is that the target will get a jump on the shooter, causing him to use too much barrel speed trying to catch it up – and blow the barrel past the target, missing in front. Now here’s where a sort of ‘domino’ effect begins. Having missed in front, the shooter then compounds the problem by being taken in by a sort of optical illusion that makes him think he actually missed behind as he saw the dust and dirt fly. The shooter’s eyes are actually picking up the rabbit’s forward motion AFTER it has passed through the dust cloud produced by the shot hitting the ground giving the brain a mistaken mental picture that the shot was missed behind the target. The problem is then further

compounded when the shooter mistakenly adds more lead and continues to miss in front.

In another scenario, the shooter will apply too much lead to begin with, mis-reading the speed and/or distance of the target. Remember that the rabbit target is slowing down with each and every bounce.

Here are a couple of good tips for the average 30 yard rabbit target with moderate speed. Place your hold point at about a third of the length of travel of the target. Call for the target and insert your barrel to the bottom edge of the rolling rabbit, matching its speed

6. FOR A RIGHT TO LEFT QUARTERING ON EDGE TEAL DROP THE RIGHT SHOULDER, AND RAISE THE LEFT TO GET INTO A POSITION SO THAT THE RIB IS PARALLEL TO THE TARGET FLIGHT – BUILD IN YOUR LEAD AND PULL THE TRIGGER.



with your barrel. Gently, pull away just a little faster than the rabbit is going and pull the trigger. Keep your muzzle on the bottom of the target in order to get the full effect of the center of your pattern. (See Fig. 7) These type of rabbits at that distance, or shorter, don’t really need much, if any, lead at all. It isn’t until the rabbit is presented at longer distances that more pull away from the target is needed.

For the quartering away type rabbit, you can literally shoot right at the target. I like to come up from slightly behind and pick up muzzle speed until I reach the target,

I’LL BET THE RABBIT TARGET COLLECTS MORE FOUL LANGUAGE, CURSES, PRAYERS AND COLD STONE FEAR THAN ANY OTHER TARGET ON THE FIELD. SOME GO SO FAR AS TO WANT IT REMOVED FROM THE LIST OF LEGAL TARGETS...

match its speed, and then pull the trigger, pushing through the target with barrel momentum.

The only thing one can't account for on the rabbit target shot is the inevitable bad bounce. Sometimes we get lucky and still hit it – and sometimes we don't!

I like to use 7½ size shot for all my rabbit shots – especially the edgy ones. I think these are the best choice for that extra confidence in the heavier pellet's ability to generate enough energy to consistently break the target – particularly if it is quartering away. Sure, 8s will break them and I know some shooters even use 9s on this tough target – whatever gives you confidence should be your first and only choice.

Next issue we'll look at chandelles and crossers. Until then keep up your quality practice – particularly teal and rabbits. ■



CALL FOR THE TARGET AND INSERT YOUR BARREL TO THE BOTTOM EDGE OF THE ROLLING RABBIT TO MAXIMIZE YOUR PATTERN, MATCHING ITS SPEED WITH YOUR BARREL. GENTLY, PULL AWAY JUST A LITTLE FASTER THAN THE RABBIT IS GOING AND PULL THE TRIGGER...