

PRACTICE

DANA FARRELL DISCUSSES A STRUCTURED PRACTICE REGIMEN WITH PAT LIESKE

MAKES PERFECT

Sporting clays is sometimes more often defined by what it *isn't* instead of what it *is*. At its best, it *isn't* predictable, repetitive or boring. What sporting clays *is*, is an incredibly diverse and interesting game due to its varied array of challenging target presentations. Ask a group of dedicated sporting clays shooters what draws them to the game and nine times out of ten you'll hear about the fun factor of facing an endless variety of target presentations.

When a target setter is on top of his game, we see birds from many different angles – going away, quartering in and out, true crossers and just about everything in between. Improving our scores and breaking more of those targets takes practice and hard work – both on our shooting mechanics and the mental game. As the time honored adage goes, practice makes perfect, but counter-intuitively, practicing on a sporting clays range may not always be the best use of a shooter's time, energy and hard earned dollars.



Quality practice is built around repetition and predictability, something that, if done right, trap and skeet fields can provide – and at a much more affordable price than a sporting clays range. Because the same target can be shot over and over from many different angles, as you move from skeet station to station (something we can't easily do on a sporting clays range), a shooter can groove a given sight picture until it's engrained in the memory bank and filed away to be called upon in competition. In this article, All American Pat Lieske, of Pat Lieske's School of Shooting, gives his perspective and tips about building a productive sporting clays practice routine using skeet and trap fields.

Got To Have An Angle

The skeet field, Lieske says, provides most of the angles seen on a sporting course and is an excellent training ground that can help develop a good foundation for our game. "A skeet field provides all target angles – going away, quartering and true crossing targets – and all at known speed and distances. This is good for a sporting clays shooter because it enables them to develop a target base line," says Lieske. "Whenever you're on a sporting clays course, and for example, see a crossing target from the right, you can compare its speed and distance to low house #4. With that comparison in mind, you'll have a good idea of how much forward allowance to give it. For example, if you know that it takes a given amount of lead to break low house #4 and in your analysis you've determined that the target you're looking at is 10 yards farther and moving faster, you know it will take

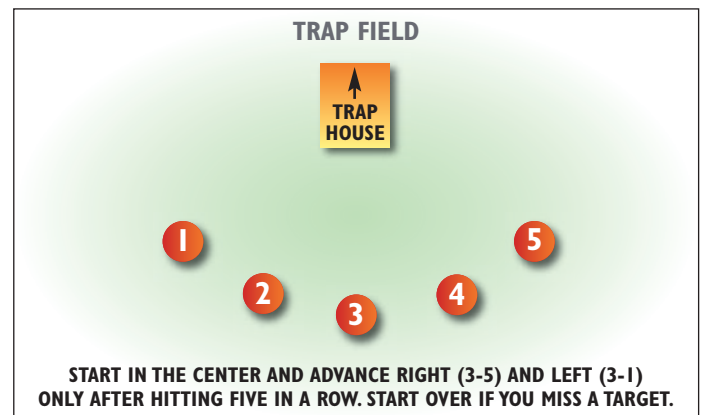
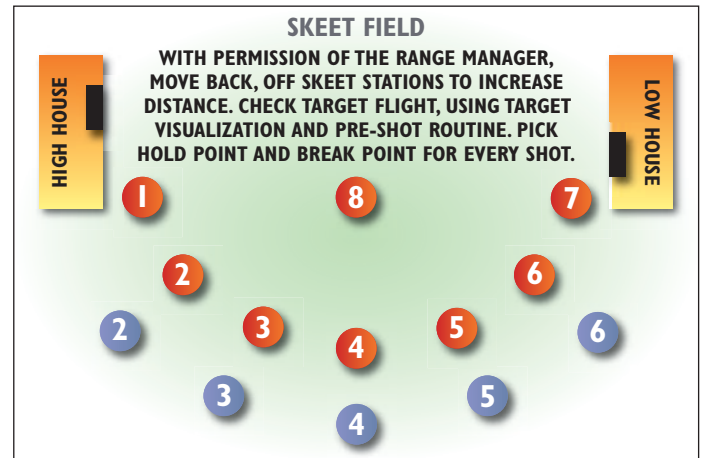
more forward allowance to break. So, as you go around the sporting clays course you can compare the targets you see with those you practiced on the skeet field to get an 'educated' idea of what they will take to hit."

The Basics

The skeet range is also the place, says Lieske, to work on basic shooting fundamentals – those things we should be doing every time before calling for a target. He emphasizes the importance of going through your target analysis for each bird, picking a break point, hold point and focal point – just as in sporting clays – thereby creating good pre-shot habits and engraining good form that can be carried over to the sporting clays game.

Thinking outside the box can also be good if done in a structured manner says Lieske. "If the shooting range manager gives you permission, move back 5 or 10 yards off of the skeet stations. In addition to creating a longer target, a whole set of different angles, hold and break points and forward allowances can be practiced. In doing so, you are expanding your library of what it takes to break a given target." Lieske himself often uses skeet doubles as a way to practice timing and focus before a sporting clays tournament. "It's a great warm up to a round of sporting clays," he says.

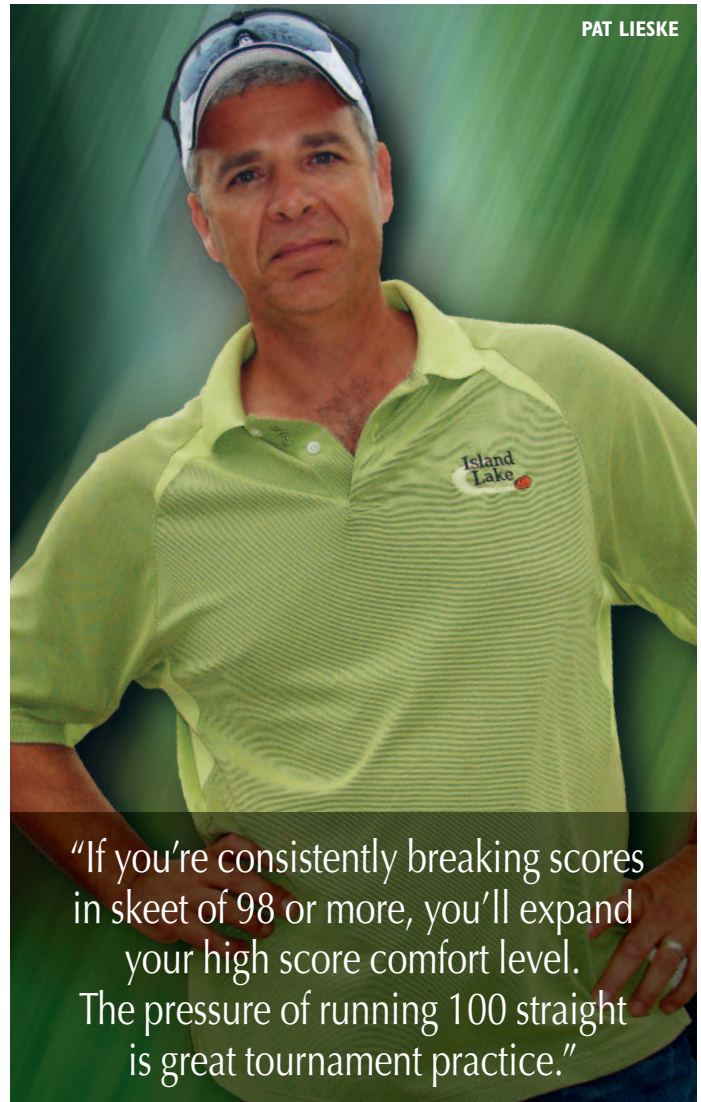
The trap field can also be a productive setting for sporting clays practice, providing probably the most often seen target on the sporting range – the quartering away bird. Lieske recommends locking down the machine in the center position and then walking around the trap field to change the shooting angle. Using this approach, he has come up with a



structured practice regimen that can be challenging, fun and productive.

While standing in front of the trap house (3), shoot five targets. If you break all five, move to the right five more yards (4) and shoot another group of five. If you break all five targets here, move five

more yards to the right (5) and repeat the sequence. If you happen to miss at any position, complete all five targets at that station and then start over from the first position (3). Do not advance unless you successfully break all targets attempted. Once finished on the right side of the field, move back to



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the center (3) and repeat the process to your left (2 and 1). The routine can be expanded further by moving back to a longer yardage marker and repeating. Sticking to the “must break all five” rule before moving adds tournament-like pressure and helps develop focus.

The Pressure’s On

Many shooters have a high score plateau they are comfortable with shooting – their ‘comfort zone score’. When they find themselves on a pace to break through their comfort zone, especially in a tournament setting, they’ll often

subconsciously sabotage themselves, becoming anxious and missing enough targets to bring their scores back down into their comfort zone. “Skeet is a great game to expand your comfortable high score,” says Lieske. “If you’re consistently breaking scores in skeet of 98 or more, you’ll expand your high score comfort level. The pressure of running 100 straight is great tournament practice.” ■

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