



THE COURSE SETTER HAS AN ARRAY OF TARGETS AT HIS DISPOSAL AND WILL OFTEN USE THEM TO DECEIVE THE SHOOTER. RICHARD RAWLINGSON SUGGESTS A FEW TIPS TO REMEMBER WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER SPECIALIST TARGETS.

KNOW YOUR TARGETS

THE STANDARD CLAY

There is in fact no universal standard clay, the parameters for those used in ATA Trap shooting and NSSA Skeet events differing slightly from the 'standard' specified by the International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF) for international Trap and Skeet competition, which is also used as the standard for Sporting Clays in most countries. In practice however, the differences are small – a few millimetres – so as far as the shooter is concerned a standard clay (108mm - 4¹/₄ inches) can be viewed as just that.

The majority of clay targets are black or blaze (orange) but they are available in a range of colors (or flash targets) that can be selected to suit different backgrounds.

SPECIALIST TARGETS

While Trap and Skeet shooting uses just the standard clay, Sporting target setters have access to a number of specialist targets to add interest and variety.

MIDI

Of the same shape and profile as a standard target, the midi is around 20% smaller at 90mm (3½ inches) in diameter. Target setters love midis for their ability to deceive the shooter into thinking the bird is further away than it actually is – it is all too easy to give a midi too much lead and miss in front. Being lighter, the midi will also be faster off the trap arm but will start to slow much earlier too, losing both speed and height. This transition will often occur just in the apparent ‘sweet spot’ where you feel most comfortable taking the shot – and it can lead to a miss either in front or over the top.



TARGET TIP

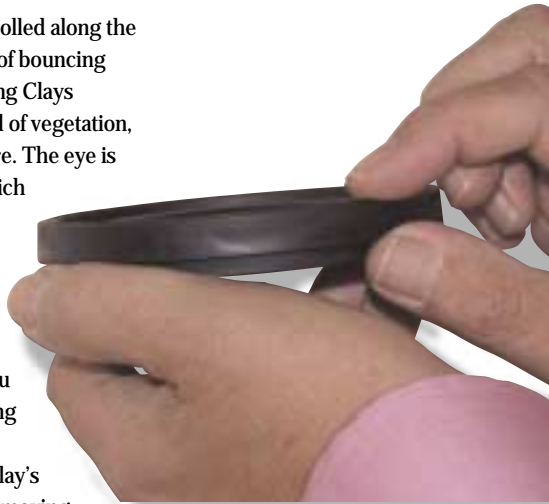
Whenever you see ‘midi’ on the menu at a station, be prepared to pay extra attention to reading the target. Look for visual clues to help you judge distance and concentrate on watching the target through its entire flight to judge the speed changes. It may prove worthwhile to shoot a midi more aggressively, when speed and line are still constant, rather than allowing it to slow and drop.

RABBIT

The rabbit target is specifically designed to be rolled along the ground. Its thick rim can withstand the shocks of bouncing across the terrain. It is one of the classic Sporting Clays presentations. Because they have a background of vegetation, rabbits can often seem much faster than they are. The eye is deceived by the blurring of the background which gives an illusion of speed. More rabbits are missed in front than behind! Unless shown at long range, it is usually enough to focus hard on the front edge and rely on the speed of swing to maintain the required lead.

Shown full face, a rabbit should break easily. You will from time to time however encounter a going away presentation, when only the rim is visible.

This shows a very small area to the gun at the clay’s strongest point and it is well worth considering moving to a tighter choke and larger shot size to maximize the energy of your shot.



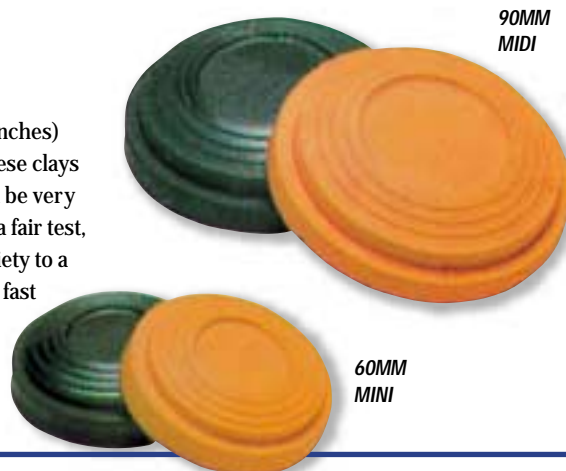
TARGET TIP

Concentrate on keeping the muzzle low as you swing through the rabbit, seeing the whole target sitting on the bead. This not only offsets a natural tendency to shoot over the top of targets below the eyeline, but should the clay bounce it is much easier to see and adjust – it is a much more natural movement to move up to the line of a bouncing target.

**...SHOWN FULL FACE,
A RABBIT SHOULD
BREAK EASILY...**

MINI

The smallest clay target is the 60mm (2⅓ inches) mini, often derided as the ‘bumble bee’! These clays need to be used with care because they can be very hard to pick up in flight and are not always a fair test, but in moderation they can add fun and variety to a course. With so little mass, the mini is very fast off the arm but slows dramatically and cannot be thrown great distances.



90MM
MIDI

60MM
MINI

TARGET TIP

Don’t be fooled by the mini’s initial speed. Chances are that by the time you can pick it up it will already be starting to slow. Match your swing to that initial flight and you will sail on past and way in front.

It may pay to alter your hold point to further along the flight path and watch the target as it comes to your muzzles, using a sustained lead approach rather than swinging through the line. This should keep you tuned into the target’s changing speed

BATTUE

Although the same diameter as a standard clay (108mm), the battue is thinner and does not have the domed shape. It means it is very fast through the air but aerodynamically unstable, giving a unique flight characteristic.

Typically a battue will stay edge on in the first part of its flight, turning to show the full face to the shooter as it loses momentum. Once perpendicular to the ground, it offers very little air resistance and will start to pick up speed again as it drops – the only target that accelerates over the final part of its flight.

The battue will often beat the shooter with sheer speed – novice shooters are often amazed by the extra lead they require. On the plus side, its thin construction makes them very vulnerable, so small shot and open chokes can be used to stack the odds in the shooter's favor.



TARGET TIP

The characteristic looping trajectory of the target once it has turned to show its full face means that the shot must be placed both in front and below. This sight picture can be visualized using a rectangle where on, say a left to right presentation, the target is in the top left hand corner and the shot needs to be placed bottom right. To give it more lead, imagine that the box needs to be stretched

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