

The “moving spot” technique.

I could detect the urgency in the client’s voice at the other end of the phone. “I’ve been shooting sporting clays for years now and I just can’t seem to get above 70%.” I wondered just how many times I have had heard that before. The voice continued; “There’s some shots that are just about impossible for me. I’m coming to the Dallas area on business, I thought you might be able to help.” We then engaged in a lengthy discussion on this client’s particular problem targets but smoothing out bumps in the road over the phone isn’t exactly my strong suit, so I said I thought I could help. We arranged a time and a date to meet.

The day came and Bob, (as I will call him), explained that his nemesis was the long crossing shot and anything with a compound lead at extended range. Now Bob was a decent fellow who lost no time in making it clear to me that he took his shooting seriously and it was obvious that he had a strong desire to succeed on the sporting clays course. We started the lesson on one of the skeet fields. Quartering shots were powdered with an aggressive precision, so no problems there but then as we progressed to the center station, on a full crossing shots, his success was “patchy” and I got the impression that many of the targets were hit more as the result of irregular gun speed than anything else. On the center stake of the skeet field I have a piece of 2 x 4 that is painted white, which I use as a visual aid for students. I pointed it out to Bob. “See that piece of 2 x 4 over there?” He nodded. “How long do you think it is?”

Bob carefully scrutinized the piece of wood, thought for a moment, and then said, “about four feet.”

“Exactly, now shoot this target again,” I said, “ but before you do, mount your gun on the end of the piece of wood. The lead you need is the length of that 2 x 4. Try to imagine the piece of wood is between the target and the barrel when you trigger the shot and see what happens, in other words, look out in front of the target about the same distance as that piece of wood and pull the trigger”.

“Bang!” Dead bird. “Bang!” Dead bird. “Bang!” Dead bird. Suddenly, the targets were breaking with almost monotonous consistency. Bob, for the first time in his shooting career, was learning to be more precise but without unnecessarily tracking the target. His gun hold-

point, insertion point, gun-speed and rhythm were the same each time and the targets were breaking in the same place as a result, consistently. The look on Bob's face said it all. "This all seems too easy but isn't what I'm doing called measuring?"

"Guess what Bob," I replied, "No matter what some people may tell you, this *is* a game of measuring. Anyway, the target's breaking now, isn't it?" Bob nodded in agreement.

So I continued. "The two things that everyone asks when they shoot at a moving target are: -

1. How much lead does it need.

2. What does this look like to me over the end of gun i.e. *at the target end*.

"This is just a way that I use to indicate to you how much lead you need to see on that particular target, at the target end. It seems to work, doesn't it?" I asked. Bob nodded again.

I taught Bob, over the next two hours or so, a logical way to apply lead and how to read targets. The next day was Sunday and he had booked another three hours. As we progressed around the sporting clays course, I would ask him at each station to carefully evaluate each target with consideration for angle, distance, speed, trajectory and to decide where along the trajectory he intended to shoot each target. By station ten, it was obvious to both of us that the light was getting brighter and he was breaking more targets than ever before. Then we arrived at the high tower. On one of the presentations, at the request of some of the members who would be going to the Nationals, we had a long crosser and I do mean *long* – well over 50 yards. As I pulled a target, Bob surveyed the black speck that appeared over the trees with dismay. "Is that a midi?" he groaned.

"Nope," I shook my head, "it's a standard, but you can still hit it from here". The look told me that he was skeptical. Bob opened his gun and dropped a couple of shells into the chambers.

"Bang" missed bird. "Bang" missed bird. Disaster. Bob missed the target with his first four shots and I could sense that already, frustration was kicking in. He opened his gun and the ejectors rattled the spent hulls noisily onto the gravel path. Turning to face me with a quizzical expression he retorted: - "See! *These* are the ones I can't hit!" In an effort to salvage the situation, I persuaded Bob to try again.

"How much lead do you see as you trigger the shot on this crosser?" I asked. It was obvious from Bob's expression, that he had no idea. I desperately needed a visual aid to get my point across. There was a stock-proof fence round the base of the tower, with a tubular steel ranch

gate for access. I pointed it out to Bob.

“See that gate over there?” Bob nodded. “How long do you think it is?” Bob carefully scrutinized the gate, thought for a moment, and then said, “about 10 or 12 feet.”

“Near enough, now shoot this target again,” I said, “but before you do, mount your gun on the right side of the gate. When the target is at the other end, that’s the lead you need. Try to imagine the gate is between the target and the barrel when you trigger the shot and see what happens, in other words, look out in front of the target about the same distance as the length of that gate and pull the trigger. Just lock onto the target, make sure you develop the line correctly, then look out ahead to where you think the target will be when the shot charge gets there and trigger the shot.”

Bob couldn’t believe his ears. “You mean, I shouldn’t be looking at the target when I trigger the shot?”

“Nope, not if you want to hit it,” I said. “If you want to hit it, you’ll be looking at the space in front of the target where it’s going to be when your shot arrives. If your gun fits you, it will shoot where you look, right? If you’re looking at the target as you trigger the shot and the target’s moving, you’re going to hit exactly what you were looking at -- the space where the target was when you pulled the trigger. Besides, if it *was* the right way to do this, the target would be breaking, wouldn’t it?” Bob looked puzzled. “There is a way to shoot targets at extended ranges where you don’t look at the target as you trigger the shot and it works for a lot of shooters,” I continued. “Try it and see.”

Bob carefully positioned himself for the shot. I bet was more apprehensive than he was, silently praying that this time, the target would break.

“Pull!” The target screamed across the tree line and seemed to remain in view forever. Bob smoothly inserted on the line in front of it, stayed with it for a heartbeat, and, (I was peering down the barrel over his shoulder), at exactly the right time in my mind, he fired. There was a noticeable delay between the report of the gun and the shot column reaching the target, but the target broke. The look on Bob’s face was a picture and he came out with a few choice adjectives that I had never heard before in Scotland.

“Were you looking at the target as you pulled the trigger?” I asked Bob.

“No, I was looking out in front, just like you said I should,” he replied. I explained to him that with narrow angles and trap-type targets he could get away with looking at the target as he

triggered the shot. On targets of this sort, minimum angle and a wide shot pattern is usually enough to save the day and that is why he had been successful with the quartering targets and sometimes successful on the full crossers at moderate ranges. But with full crossing shots at extended range targets and also in many other situations with complicated, compound leads, he would need to apply something more specific if he was to improve his 70% average.

On certain presentations, I advise many of my clients to *initially* focus on the leading edge of the target to define the line, and then look out in front as they trigger the shot to where they want their pattern to go. It is called the “moving spot technique.” The late Nash Buckingham first described it many years ago, and many other top shooters use it successfully today. The most note-worthy of these is none other than Richard Faulds, but many others, including Jon Kruger, also use it successfully. I then went into a lengthy explanation about central and peripheral vision and how the “imaginary spot” technique of applying lead works. But Bob looked puzzled and shook his head in disbelief, as most of my clients do when I tell them this.

“Do you remember what your visual perception of the distance in front of the target was?” I asked him. Bob nodded. “See if you can do it again”. Bob proceeded to do just that, several times. He shot the rest of the course as if he was floating on air but my story does not end there. The next week I heard from him again. He excitedly explained that his shooting had dramatically improved but there was another reason for the call.

“Remember what you said about primary concentration on the target and then looking at a space in front of the target as you trigger the shot?” he asked. “Well, I found an article about Jon Kruger and guess what? He says the same as you! I’ll fax you a copy.” I thanked Bob and said that I would like to read the article.

Sure enough, on page 50, in the December 1998 issue of *Sporting Clays* magazine, there was an excellent article by Nick Sisley entitled “Stellar Star of the Game.” I quote from the article:

<<You’ve heard the axiom over and over, “Look at the target, look at the target.” Again, surprisingly, this isn’t what Kruger does. Instead, he’s trying to focus on a spot somewhere out ahead of the target. Why? *Because that’s where his shot-string has to go.* Once he -- or any of us -- pulls the trigger, there’s a time lapse between then and when the shot charge gets to the

bird. This is why lead is essential. Of course, target speed and distance govern how far ahead of the target Kruger will be trying to focus.>>

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So why does this technique work? For some of us, establishing longer leads causes problems, it's a sort of anxiety separation thing. We feel the need to focus on something solid. We try to focus on the target and the gun in the same frame but of course we can't, our eyes don't work like that. So, on these extra long crossing shots, as we look so far ahead that the target fades into our peripheral vision what do we do? You've guessed it, look at the gun. Even a quick glance back at the bead or barrels and the established lead will evaporate, resulting in an inevitable miss behind. And the more lead the targets needs, the more this happens. Learning to apply the moving spot technique stops this but it doesn't work everyone. Of course, you still have to learn exactly *how far* in front of the target to look and you still have to have a smooth swing and a gun that fits, but with practice you will learn the required leads. With good coaching, you will learn them quickly. So before you dismiss the concept of doing this, on SOME of your targets, why not give it a try? You never know, you may just reap the benefits and find a few extra targets. And that's not a bad thing for any of us is it?

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