



BOW

To The Target

Are descending targets wreaking havoc on your sporting scores? Maybe it's time you consider how a weight-forward lean in your shooting stance can make you a pro at dusting droppers.

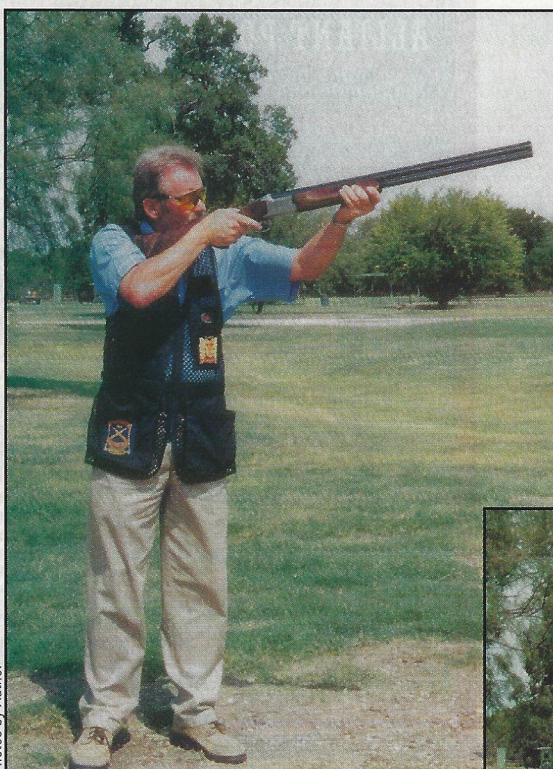
By Peter F. Blakeley

For most shooters, what I call "standard" target presentations don't present much trouble. Take springing teal, for example. What is the best way to tackle a pair of springers? That's easy. If they are thrown from a manual machine at a reasonable distance, shoot the first one on the way up and spot shoot underneath the second just as it peaks. Simple, isn't it?

But what if the teal are 40 yards away, or the cunning course designer has included a fast, quartering-away midi and a springing teal in a true-pair presentation, leaving the shooter no alternative but to break the teal on the way down? A bit trickier, eh?

Now, what about battues? We all know how baffling battues can be. As they leave the trap arm, the only part we can see until they turn over and present their full face is their razor-thin profile as they slice through the air. They are usually traveling faster than you think, and the absence of the more concave dome shape of the standard clay makes them aerodynamically unstable, which produces the characteristic battue flight.

Lots of shooters struggle with the battue, but there is an easy way to tackle them where they are most predictable, just as they slow down and turn to present their full face. But what about the second target of a true-pair battue presentation? Once again, this is a bit more tricky. As the second battue accelerates as it plummets earthward, responding



Photos by Author

to gravitational pull, this is where many of us crash and burn. What was previously a good score card can quickly become blemished with a row of doughnuts, and elation quickly turns to disappointment.

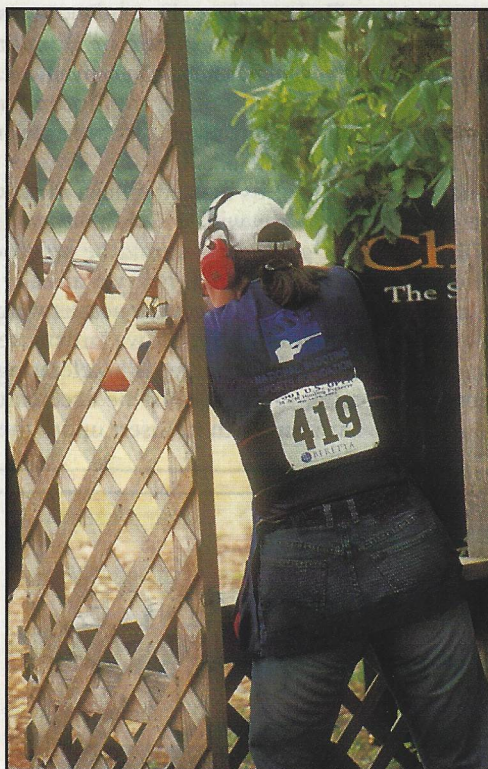
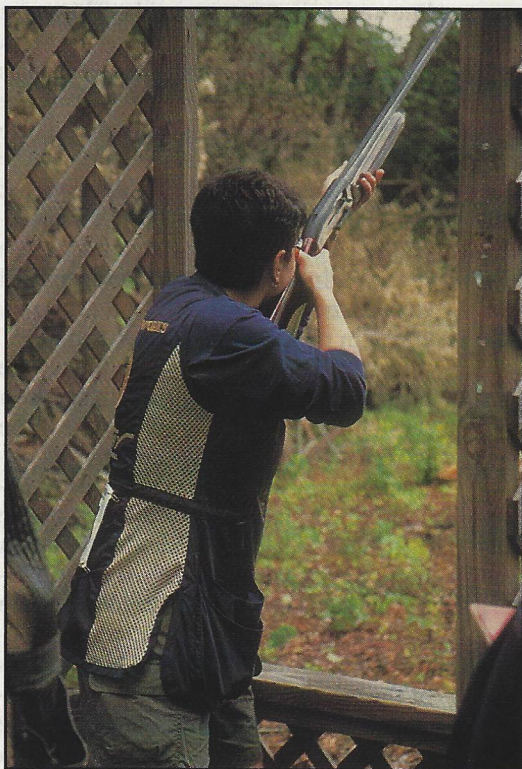
Basic shooting fundamentals dictate that we must never, under any circumstances, slow or stop the swing of the gun be-

By bending forward slightly from the waist up, a correct posture helps prevent the gun from moving away from the shooter's face as he attempts a dropping target.

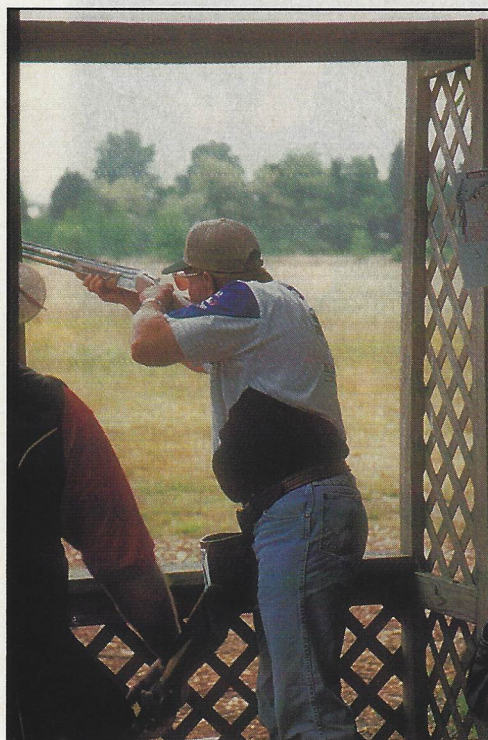
With a dropping target that is progressively accelerating, it is easy to pull the gun away from the face when following it if the shooter has assumed an erect stance. Such a position will make the gun shoot high, which is not much good on a descending bird that you must shoot under.

cause if we do, all the forward allowance we have established will evaporate, and a miss behind is the result. So why do so many of us struggle with dropping targets? Quite simply because we fail to see that many targets that we conveniently categorize as dropping are not only dropping but also accelerating. It is because of this almost impercepti-





Photos by George Conrad



ble nuance in their speed that dropping clays require a different approach.

Don't despair. Specialist target presentations require a specialist approach to beat them. With these unusual dropping targets, here's how to do it.

First, let's look at exactly which targets drop under power. We know battues do, and we've all been told many times that the battue is the *only* target that accelerates as it drops. *Wrong*. Unless my eyes are playing tricks, the next time you shoot the second target of a pair of springing teal, watch carefully what happens as the edge-on teal plummets earthward. There is a degree of acceleration as the target drops, and this is where the wheels come off for many shooters who fail to see this and try to intercept the target with a "dead" gun. A hurried poke and a miss over the top is the result. Now, I know there are guys out there who can get away with this poking technique, but can they do it consistently? I doubt it. Don't forget that high scores are the product of consistency, and a hurried poke isn't going to give you that.

All targets edge-on to the ground progressively accelerate as they drop, and this includes standards, midis, chandelles, rockets, and especially the battue. Admittedly, the standard target and midi do not accelerate as rapidly as the battue or lower-domed rocket as they drop, but they all accelerate, and on a long, dropping teal, this can be a problem.

With all targets that are accelerating as they drop, the best way to score consistently

is to learn to "bow" to the target. On a fast, *rising* target, such as teal or a driven target off a high tower, to produce a smooth, assertive swing through the bird, the hips must push forward and the upper torso should move back. Weight is transferred from the front foot to the back foot as we do this.

With any *dropping* target, however, the exact opposite is true. The shooter must insert his muzzles under the target and bend forward slightly from the waist, allowing his weight to shift smoothly onto his leading leg (left foot for a right-hander). This forward bend from the waist is extremely important. Why? Because if the shooter attempts to move the gun on the target's dropping line with his arms only, he will usually pull the gun away from his face, which will in

through is even more crucial with this type of presentation.

Are there any other target presentations where this bowing approach will work to our advantage? Under normal circumstances, targets driven away off a high tower may not be accelerating, but what if the cunning course designer decides to angle the machine down and throw these targets under power? The best medicine for this target is again pull-away. Why? Because once again, if the target is accelerating, the gun must also be accelerating to compensate, and sustained-lead will not work. If you try to swing through this target from behind, you will find that it takes a bit of catching. Instead of a smooth, precise movement, you will probably end up with a hurried poke.

Just as you would shoot a high driven bird with the weight on the *back* foot, doesn't it make sense to shoot an outgoing overhead target with the weight on the *front* foot? A much smoother, progressive swing in the same direction as the target will be produced if you do this. Just like edge-on teal and battues that require a smooth gun movement on the target line, this "bow to the target" approach on targets that are dropping under power from a high tower will ensure that the head stays on the gun.

To set yourself up for these driven-away, overhead targets, put your weight onto your back foot and look back for the target so you will have good visual contact as soon as possible. Keep your gun fairly high, but not so far back that the barrels are out of your peripheral vision. Be prepared to move the gun on the "flash" of the target or the built-in lead allowance you achieve will quickly evaporate, and you will end up chasing the target.

As you call for the target and begin to move the gun, allow your weight to transfer to the front leg. Once again, make sure that the upper torso bends forward as the shot is triggered. This will help to produce a good, continuous, smooth swing as the shot is taken. This type of target is best shot where it is most vulnerable to your gun, as near to you as possible, where it is presenting its most vulnerable concave underside. Every millisecond you delay pulling the trigger on this target will make it more difficult to break.

Don't forget that the lead requirement on this going-away target will be just as much as on an incoming driven bird. But don't be fooled. On these high, going-away targets under power, the optical information will suggest that the target is only moving slowly. It isn't.

For some reason, many shooters think that they can give an outgoing bird less lead than a similar incoming shot.

Trapshooters have a saying: "It's easier to go up than down with a shotgun." Very true. Our muscular coordination always seems to work better as we lift the gun rather than lower it. Dropping targets can be tough—if you let them. So always remember to "bow to the target" and give them the respect they deserve. Then smash them with near-boring consistency.



The author is the resident shooting coach

at the Dallas Gun Club. He has been a coach for over 25 years, and his shooting qualifications include Clay Pigeon Shooting Association instructor, British Field Sports Society instructor, associate member of the Institute of Shooting Instructors, senior member of the National Association of Sports Coaches, National Skeet Shooting Association certified coach, and author of *Easy Skeet*, a new perspective for the beginner. His instructional video, *Read The Line, Feel The Lead*, is available from Sunrise Productions. You may reach him at the Dallas Gun Club by calling (972) 462-0043.

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