

# Doing That

# Swing Thing

By Peter F. Blakeley

**The perfect mount and swing is a subtle blend of arms and body movement, with no point where the mount ends and the swing begins. And best of all, it won't cost you a dime to get yours right.**

**A**ny of you shooters been to the US Open? Before you get excited, I mean the US Open golf tournament. Ever watch Tiger Woods make an incredible drive or sink an impossible-looking putt? I have. It seems amazing that he can eye the ball, then eye the cup, then eye the ball again and sink the putt, doesn't it? Ever stop to think what goes through his mind before he hits the ball?

Well, I don't know Tiger Woods, but I do know some good golfers, and they told me this. With every shot, they make a calculation of the angle they need to hit the ball, the speed of the hit, and the terrain the ball must cross. Of course, to make it all come together, they need to hit the ball in *exactly* the right spot. And I do mean exactly. A fraction of an inch either side, and they've blown it.

Many years ago I watched England's John Bidwell win the World FITASC championship. There was naturalness in his shooting, and he seemed to stroke targets out of the sky with a confident flourish. Anyone who has seen Bidwell shoot will know what I mean. When he called for the target, he was ready. I don't mean *nearly* ready, I mean absolutely, 100-percent mentally focused,

eyes looking for the target in the right place, body poised to make his move to intercept it.

Everything was spontaneous and unhurried. Bidwell's eyes were locked onto the target, and at the same time, his gun was moving unerringly into his shoulder pocket to complete the mount. The computations of speed, distance, and

***“The golfer practices his footwork and swing, the tennis player religiously practices his serve, but the shotgunner just expects it to happen miraculously. It won't.”***

angle were complete by the time the ocular stimuli from his brain gave him the signal to trigger the shot. Don't forget we're talking FITASC here, mandatory low-gun. If the mount had terminated in anything less than perfection, just like a poorly hit golf ball, the shot would have been unsuccessful.

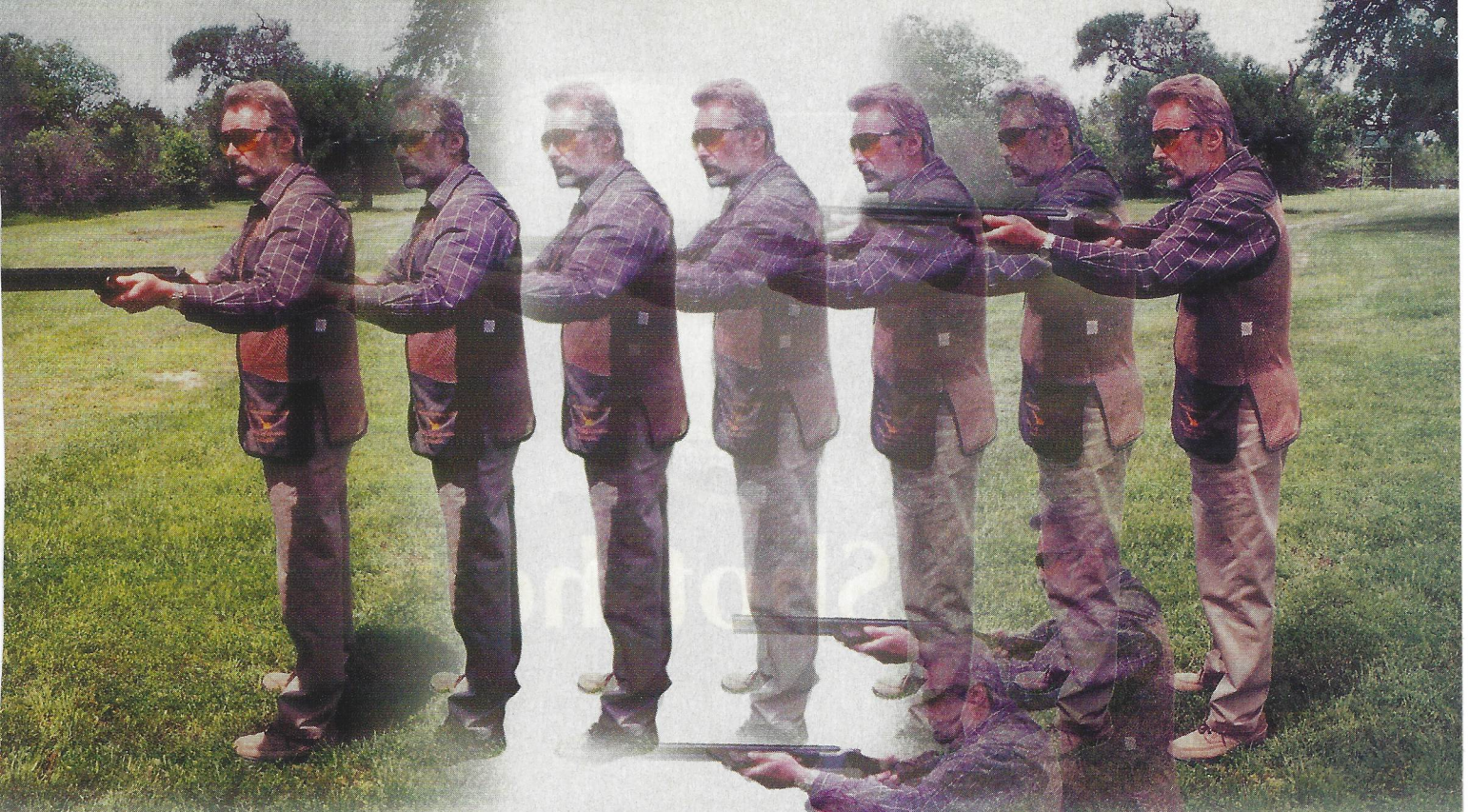
So just what do a world-class golfer and shooter have in common? Similar

objectives. Both are using basic hand-eye coordination to hit a target with an inanimate object. With the golfer, the ball is the equivalent of the shooter's shot string; the club the intermediary used to propel the ball to the target instead of a shotgun. But for both sports, physical mechanics need to be perfect to realize any success. What's called for is economical grace and elegance from the first preliminary move to the final follow-through.

If there was one main reason why people miss more targets than any other—apart from the obvious one of miscalculation of forward allowance—what do you think it would be? Bad gun fit, mount, and swing. Now hold on, that's *three* reasons, isn't it? No, not really.

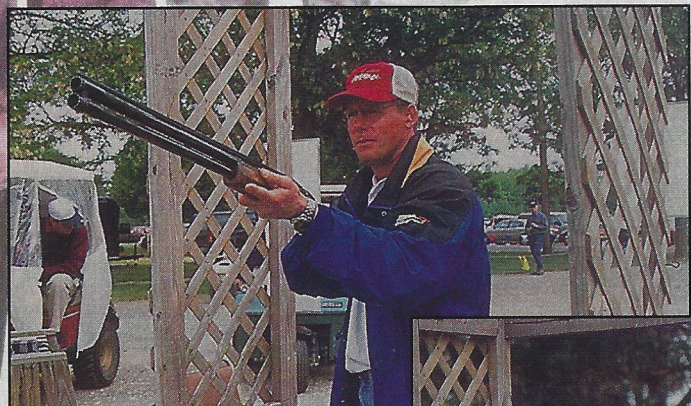
Most shooters, when asked what they would like to achieve, come up with the same answer. Consistency. When we shoot a shotgun, consistency depends on gun fit, mount, and swing. They are the Holy Grail of shotgunning. Any one of the three is useless without the other two, and with successful shotgunning, they belong together; I am reluctant to separate them. Make no mistake, a smooth, coordinated movement, with the gun in exact empathy with the target, is one of the most critical factors of successful shotgunning and can pay the



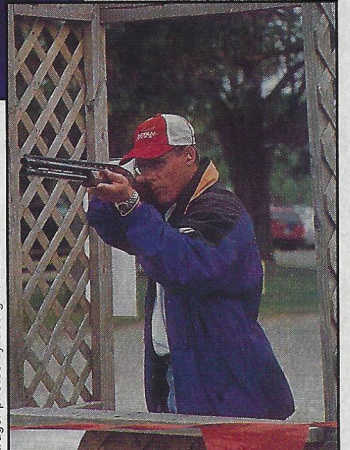


In the ready position, the toe of the leading leg points toward the break point. The upper torso is rotated back toward the trap so the eyes can make good visual contact with the target as soon as possible.

The mount should be a progressive movement, an integration of the legs, body, and arms. There should be no point where the mount ends and the swing begins.



The swing and mount of a top shooter, like US Open champ Jon Kruger, is but a single, unified move of the shotgun to the target and body.



Kruger photos by George Conrad

The shot is taken as the mount is completed. The shooter should be "into" the gun at this stage, the head locked into the stock and the butt of the gun firmly in the shoulder pocket.

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biggest dividend of all when we shoot sporting clays or in the field.

For the shotgunner, his gun is the necessary intermediary, the connection between him and the target. Although a gun may fit its user like the proverbial glove, if his mount and swing are sloppy, he's wasted his money on the gun fit. Alternatively, perfect technique cannot overcome the handicap of a badly fitted gun.

We are all perfectly adaptable and resilient animals, and the human body is highly contortive. If a gun isn't the right prescription for its user, the shot-

gunner may learn to shoot it by wiggling his head about to align his eye in the right place. He may even become a reasonable shot. But he will never reach his maximum potential until he is using a gun that is tailored to match his personal physical requirements. As the mount is completed and the gun comes into the shoulder, the dominant eye should be in perfect alignment with the rib. If it isn't, a fraction of an inch off at the gun end will result in a miss by several feet at the target.

So if a good mount is so critical, why don't we pre-mount the gun like we do

with trap and skeet? On some sporting clays targets, we can. But don't forget that with trap and skeet, we are dealing with more predictable targets. On many sporting clays presentations, visual contact with the target is better if the gun is out of the shoulder, and it also encourages us to shoot more rhythmically.

But just how far out of the shoulder? It depends entirely on the target presentation. For example, on a pair of trap-type targets that are getting away fast and require minimal gun movement, it would make sense to shoot the first target of the pair as soon as possible. To do this, there is no reason why the gun should be out of the shoulder when the bird is called for. Alternatively, on a long incomer, a common mistake is to mount the gun and track the target all the way in. With this presentation, the longer you have the gun in your shoulder, the more time there is for something to go wrong. As a general rule, the distance the gun is away from the shoulder pocket at the call of "Pull" is directly proportional to the amount of movement to the target required.

"Ah ha!" I hear you say. "I know some guys who always shoot sporting clays with a mounted gun, and they are *really* good shots." So do I, but I also know lots of world champions who shoot with the gun out of their shoulder. All these guys have developed a stylish mount and swing, a confident elegance that makes it all look easy.

In sporting clays, all the shotgunners who win regularly seem to have a flawless mount and swing and a gun that fits them perfectly. Nevertheless, I see lots of shotgunners who have been shooting for years but they haven't, despite all the informative articles and videos and quality instruction available, grasped the fundamentals of a good mount and swing. While they have a genuine desire to shoot better, they think there is an easy way out and that they can cut corners.

The golfer practices his footwork and swing, the tennis player religiously practices his serve, but the shotgunner (and wingshooters are more guilty of this than competition shooters) just expects it to happen miraculously. It won't. Some shooters get there quicker than others on pure natural talent, and every once in a while along comes a phenomenon who is incredibly talented and makes things look too easy. But for every guy who's like that, there are a thousand others who get there because of hard work and determination. They have the will to succeed.

A good gun mount and swing is the

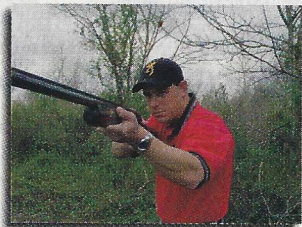
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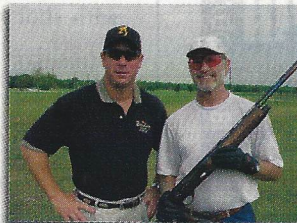
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combination of several peripheral issues, and the proper technique is one of the most important things to consider for consistent shotgunning. And the best of it is, it won't cost you a dime to make sure you get yours right.

The perfect mount and swing is a subtle blend of arms and body movement. There is no point where the mount ends and the swing begins. Many shooters try to use a two-part gun movement; they mount first, then try to move the gun accurately on the trajectory by using upper body movement. This is a mistake.

The human torso pivots easily on a horizontal plane. Put the gun in the shoulder early, and at the end of the swing, the muzzles will be prescribing an arc known as "dropping off line." There is also a good chance that the gun will be laying across the closed shoulder pocket instead of in the open shoulder pocket as with an arms-only gun mount. This is often why a hurried mount results in recoil transferring to the top of the arm instead of the shoulder. The hurried mount, where the gun is slammed into the shoulder with such force that it almost comes out again (what I call a "bouncy mount") should also be avoided. Push through, but don't rush through, or your face won't be where you expect it to be as the mount is complete.

The gun should be raised to the face and shoulder with a controlled lift of both arms working in unison. At no time should the back hand move the butt to the shoulder first, allowing the barrels to pivot around the front hand. This is known as "chopping down" on the target, and poor muzzle control will be the result. The head should remain erect and moving slowly in the direction of the target throughout the whole process.

As the gun mount is developing, the swing should be moving the gun onto the line of the target smoothly. The power to "drive" the gun should come from the ankles up, using the legs, thighs, hips, and upper torso in a perfectly smooth, fluid flow of physical movement using all the muscles. By doing this, you will get maximum efficiency with minimum effort, all without tiring one set of muscles, usually the arms. This culmination of events should ensure that the shooter will not "track" the target unnecessarily and will "stay in the gun" instead of lifting his head.

Any new motor skill must be practiced slowly at first, like the steps of a dance routine or a karate move. With practice, the mount and swing will become spontaneous, a subconscious ac-

tion as natural as blinking an eye. It will be achieved without conscious thought, and with sporting clays and bird hunting situations in the field, this is important. The shooter can then allow his conscious mind to concentrate on the more important task of computing all the necessary variables. The perfect mount and swing should be silky smooth, with no wasted, superfluous movement. On some targets, there may be no time to waste.



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. Watch for his instructional video, *Sporting Clays, The Search For Ultimate Performance*, to be released soon by Sunrise Productions. You may reach him at the Dallas Gun Club by calling (972) 462-0043.

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