

Read The Target, Feel The Lead

To excel at sporting clays,
you must determine

what the target will be doing by the time the
shot reaches it, not what it's doing
when you pull the trigger.

There's a big difference between the two.

By Peter F. Blakeley

How often have you overheard someone at a tournament, when asked how much lead they saw, reply, "Oh, I just shot straight at it." Really? Well maybe they did, but logic and the laws of physics tell us that regardless of what a shooter sees or thinks he sees, if the target was moving, there is no way that this is possible. I promise you, a "shooting straight at it" attitude is a recipe for disaster.

The only way we may *think* we are shooting right at a target is if there is excessive gun speed and the forward allowance is provided by the shooter's reaction time as the gun is accelerated through the clay. Shoot at the target, and there's no doubt that sometimes you're going to hit exactly what you are shooting at, the empty space where the target was when you pulled the trigger.

Let's clarify the situation right now. Much of what you read about shooting at moving targets is misleading. And here's something else to think about. If your gun fits, you "shoot where you

look," and when you pull the trigger, you're looking at the target. Where does the forward allowance bit come in? By magic? I don't think so.

Of course, we do need to concentrate hard on the target to find out what it's doing in relation to us. But no moving target, and it doesn't matter if it is the clay or feathered variety, ever flies in a straight line or is ever stationary, and we are never, ever shooting at any of them. We are always putting the shot into the anticipated flight path. To be good at this game, you have to decide what the target will be doing by the time the shot reaches it, not what it's doing when you pull the trigger. There's a big difference.

The next time you watch a football game, look at what happens when the quarterback throws a running pass. His brain is rapidly calculating not only the necessary forward allowance, but the direction, speed, and distance of the receiver. All of these components need to fit neatly into place to enable him to throw the ball so that it can be collected smoothly. But if the quarterback gets

it wrong, his teammate can slow down or speed up to synchronize the move. Unfortunately, when we shoot at moving targets with a shotgun, this doesn't happen. Miss them the first time, and they don't adjust or come back to give us a second chance. So we need to get it right the first time.

Failure to identify target behavior accurately on every bird will give you lots of 0s on your scorecard. Although the size of your shot pattern will compensate and save your bacon on some occasions, get a bad read and the wheels will come off. So just how do we stop guessing and learn how to build up a personal mental repertoire of sight pictures? It's easier than you think.

There are four things we must consider before we shoot any moving target:

1. The speed of the target.
2. The distance to the target.
3. The trajectory (line) of the target.
4. Where we decide to shoot the target on this line.

Our foot position is dependent on this, as is our timing, especially on pairs. Like a game of pool, you should always make sure that the cue ball, in this case, your gun, is in position for the second shot.

Shooting is a game of trigonometry. Vary the angle of the target, and you vary the lead requirement. To put this into simple terms, a straight-away shot requires nil lead, but as the angle increases, so does our ability to calculate the perception of the lead requirement necessary to score a hit. Reading these angles incorrectly is what defeats most shotgunners.

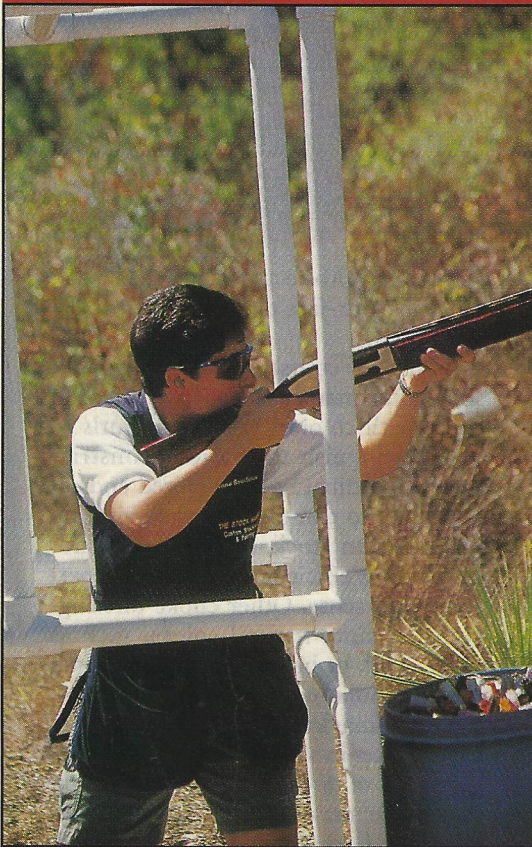
What's the best way to develop the ability to read target angles accurately? Without a doubt, the most convenient way is on a skeet field, and, wherever possible, this is where I start my clients. Most of the instructors I know in the UK do the same. Many top sporting clays shooters initially hone their skills on the skeet field. George Digweed is a prime example. He shot competitive skeet for many years and is the current record holder in the UK. Here in the US, Olympic shooter Dan Carlisle is another excellent example of a skeet shooter who excels on the sporting circuit.

There isn't a skeet layout at your club? No problem. Failing access to a skeet field, I start clients on a reasonably fast outgoing target and move them around in a semicircle at a measured distance, about 20 yards. As the student moves around, he progressively increases the lead, and before long, he is breaking a 90-degree crossing target. By doing this, he gains confidence very quickly, learning to pull the trigger when the target/barrel relationship looks right. Nobody shoots a target in the same place as the next guy, yet both may be shooting it at the proper time for themselves.

One of the best demonstrations I have ever seen of how the perception of lead changes as the angle changes is by using a piece of 2x4 about four feet long (see February's "Shedding Poke-And-Hope Shotgunning" for a graphic illustration of the following). This piece of wood represents the lead requirement that the laws of physics dictate we would need on a 90-degree crossing shot at 20 yards if shot with the sustained-lead method. As the student moves around in a semicircle, the changing view of the piece of wood shows him the lead.



Lady sporting champ Diane Sorantino, like all top guns, knows the importance of diagnosing a target with care before formulating a plan to shoot it.



Simple, isn't it? The actual lead is the same every time; it is the *perception* of lead that changes.

I can't claim credit for inventing this demonstration, which was shown to me many years ago by a very famous shooting instructor in the UK. While it isn't foolproof, it certainly makes the light come on a lot quicker for many shooters. Everything the student learns by shooting the targets in this way can easily be applied to the sporting clays course, and eventually to wingshooting.

All targets should be divided into component parts—narrow-angle crossing shots, wide-angle crossers, and full crossing shots. All quartering targets can in turn be divided into two other categories, either incoming or outgoing. I call outgoing targets closing-angle shots (reducing angle in relation to the shooter) requiring progressively less lead; incoming targets are opening-angle shots (increasing angle in relation to the shooter) requiring progressively more lead. Incoming targets always need more lead than outgoing targets.

Gun movement is also directly proportional to target angle. A straight-away target requires minimum gun movement, while a full crossing shot calls for maximum gun movement. Obviously, targets requiring compound leads are the hardest to read. It is just a matter of deciding which category each target fits into before you try to shoot it.

**Shooting is a game
of trigonometry.
Vary the angle
of the target,
and you vary the
lead requirement**

One of the most commonly missed shots is the overhead, quartering-away target that is at an acute angle to our line of sight, making it seem much faster than it really is. Most shooters will give this narrow-angle target a huge amount of gun movement and lead, missing in front. As the distance to

continued on page 48

**. LEARNING IS ABOUT UNDERSTANDING.
 UNDERSTANDING IS ABOUT KNOWING.
 KNOWING IS ABOUT TRUSTING.
 TRUSTING IS ABOUT LETTING GO.
 LETTING GO IS ABOUT PERFORMING.**



**PERFORMING IS ABOUT TRUSTING
 YOUR ABILITY.**

Your *ability* does not control your performance –
 your *ability to trust your ability* controls your performance.
 It's not what you *know* that makes you better.
 It's what you are *willing* to learn.

Utilizing innovative instruction techniques,
 OSP teaches a common sense approach to:

- Mechanical excellence, and
- Mental focus and trust

GIL & VICKI ASH

can help you improve your game and your performance –
 Call 281-897-0800 to reserve a place for you, or your group.
 It is, after all, up to you.

February 16-18, 2001 Comanche Hills Ione, CA	March 23-25, 2001 Limestone Springs Birmingham, AL	April 27-29, 2001 Saddle & Sirloin Club Kansas City, MO
February 23-25, 2001 American Shooting Center Houston, TX	April 13-15, 2001 American Shooting Center Houston, TX	May 4-6, 2001 Deep River Sporting Clays Raleigh, NC
March 2-4, 2001 American Shooting Center Houston, TX	April 20-22, 2001 Cedar Creek Rod & Gun Columbia, MO	May 11-13, 2001 American Shooting Center Houston, TX

Sponsored by:



Beretta U.S.A.



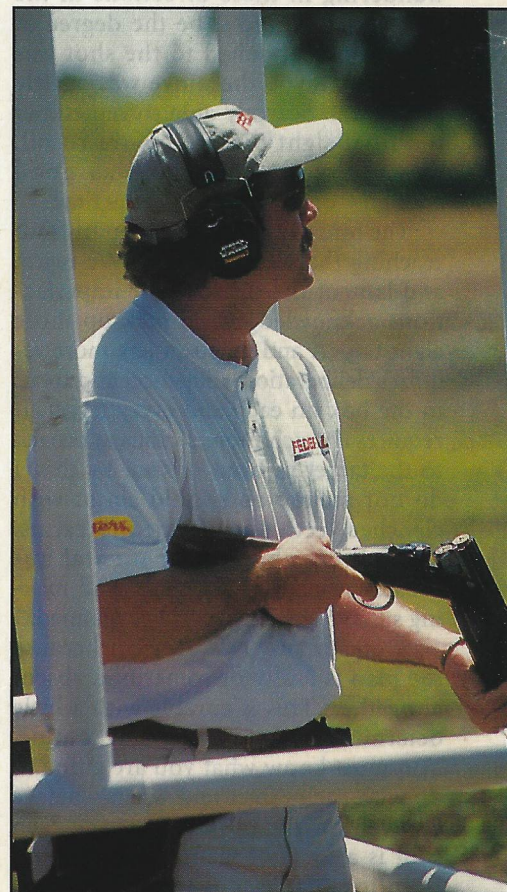
NEW WEB SITE: WWW.OSPSCHOOL.COM

15020 Cutten Rd. Houston, Texas 281-897-0800

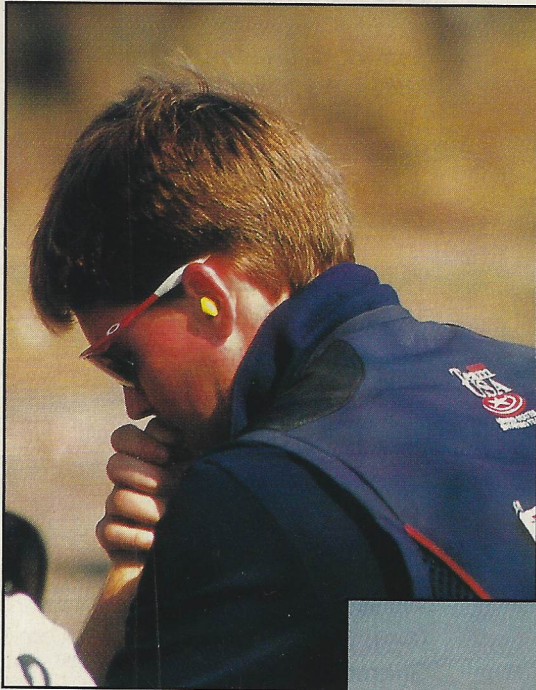
the target is increasing, the angle of the target relative to the shooter is decreasing, and the target is also slowing down, so the lead doesn't increase by that much. In other words, a narrow-angle, quartering shot that only requires a small amount of lead at 20 yards doesn't need a huge amount at 40. The exact opposite is true of the opening-angle, quartering-in shot. A quartering-in target may need considerably more lead as it gets closer because the angle to the shooter is increasing all the time.

After two or three lessons, depending on the progress of the student, I move to the sporting course. I always ask my clients to explain to me what the target is doing before they shoot it. The position of the trap is often a good clue to the nature of the target. Is it a narrow-angle shot, wide-angle shot, or full crossing shot? In the place where the student intends to shoot it, is it rising or falling? Is it more than 20 yards or less? How fast is it?

Why did I say earlier that initially it's always best to shoot all the targets at a known distance? Because now the

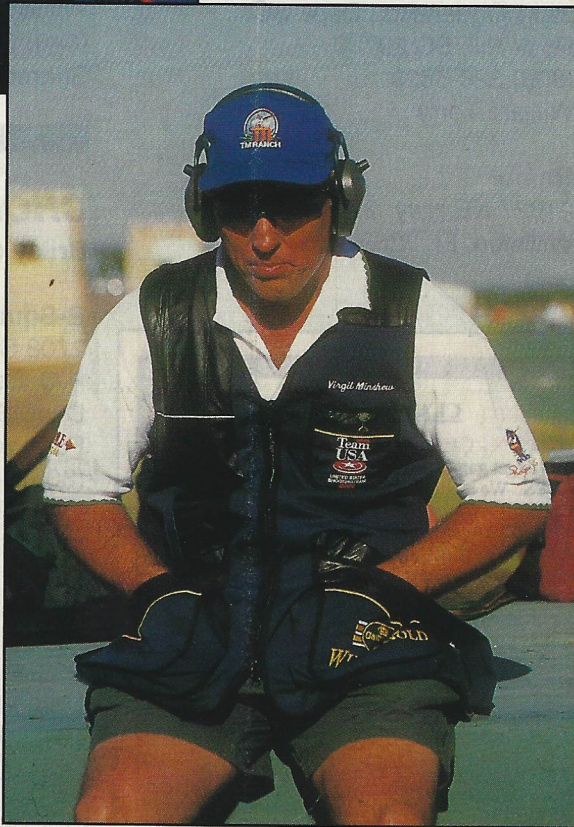


Visualizing a target's flight path—and where you plan to break it—before calling for the bird is vital to success, no secret to sporting champ Andy Duffy.



Watching a master-class shooter like Jaybie Cantey should make it evident that concentration is key to a focused clays approach to cracking clays with consistency.


What's on Virgil Minshev's mind is for only him to say, but it probably has something to do with the trajectory of the next bird he's going to dust. The ability to recall sight pictures, learned from shooting countless targets, plays a big role in a champion's performance.



shooter has something to relate to without guessing. He has a visual reference to the lead he sees on a narrow-angle shot, wide-angle shot, and full crossing shot at 20 yards. What his eye perceives to be the correct amount of lead can now be applied to other targets.

For example, one shot that gives most people a headache is the long, 90-degree crosser that always requires more lead than we think, and we shoot behind it. But now, if a shooter is familiar with the amount of forward allowance he thinks he needs on a full crossing shot at 20 yards, logically, he must need at least twice this on a similar target at 40 yards.

How do you judge the distance? Eventually, you will develop the ability to feel the lead on each target and pull the trigger without hesitation. But don't expect it to happen overnight. It won't. But every time you pull the trigger, the light will be getting brighter, whether or not you hit the target.

As a parting shot, the best advice I can give any shooter is what Annie Oakley said to a reporter from the *New York Sun* in 1892. "It's a feeling (describing the moment when to pull the trigger), the man who hesitates is lost." Then she added, "But practice helps." 

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. You may reach him at the Dallas Gun Club by calling (972) 462-0043.



A Most Unusual Shotgun Store

Whether visiting Vero Beach, or browsing the web, step inside our private showrooms. Chat one-on-one with the gunsmith, sip a cappuccino or two.

Choose a barrel, pick your wood, select from an astounding array of receivers. You deserve nothing but the best, and duPont offers only that.

Something new, something used? Either a Kolar or the Krieghoff. Would it be an original K-32, a timeless K-80, a new K-20, or the Classic Rifle?

So many decisions, so much to choose. While we piece it all together take a peek round.

Visit our Sugar Magnolia's boutique, filled with eclectic treasures, jewels, shooting apparel and fine English leather.

With as little as a visit to our physical or virtual address, you could be shooting a KGUN today.

duPONT/KGUNS

570 BEACHLAND BLVD • VERO BEACH, FL
800-73-KGUNS • HALKGUNS.COM