



TALL TOWERS, Short Answers— Part 2

Following up on last issue's treatise on crushing high crossing birds, instructor Peter Blakeley finishes up this month with tower techniques for targets that are driven toward or away from the shooter.

By Peter F. Blakeley

In the last issue we looked at fast crossing shots off the high tower. Now let's discuss the best way to tackle the straight incoming or going-away driven shot. The technique is completely different.

Low driven targets should be taken well out in front with the weight over the leading leg. This is because the oblique angle makes them the vertical equivalent of a narrow-angle quartering target, and the lead requirement is minimal. But a true high bird of 40 yards or more is nearest to you when it is directly overhead, so logically this is the best place to shoot it. This means that in some cases, we must be able to move the gun past the vertical. Unfortunately, this is just where most of us run out of swing, the gun stops, and we miss behind. On a high driven target, the lead requirement is considerable, so a smooth swing is essential for good results.

When we shoot any moving target, we must put the shot charge into the *anticipated* flight path, which means that a high driven bird will vanish behind the gun as we pull the trigger. Then what happens? Usually, we lift our head to look for the target, once again the gun stops, and we miss behind.

So how do you maintain visual contact with the target as it vanishes behind the gun? There are two ways you can do this. You can learn to look "through" and beyond the barrels with your other eye, the left eye of a right-shouldered shooter. With practice, the correct amount of lead can be established accurately each time as the gun overtakes the target.

Notice I said with *practice* because some of my clients, when they try this for the first time, don't have the faintest idea what I'm talking about and continue shooting high driven birds by guessing where the target is as they pull the trigger. With practice, this "looking through the gun" technique works extremely well on driven tower shots as well as long springing teal and some trap-type shots.

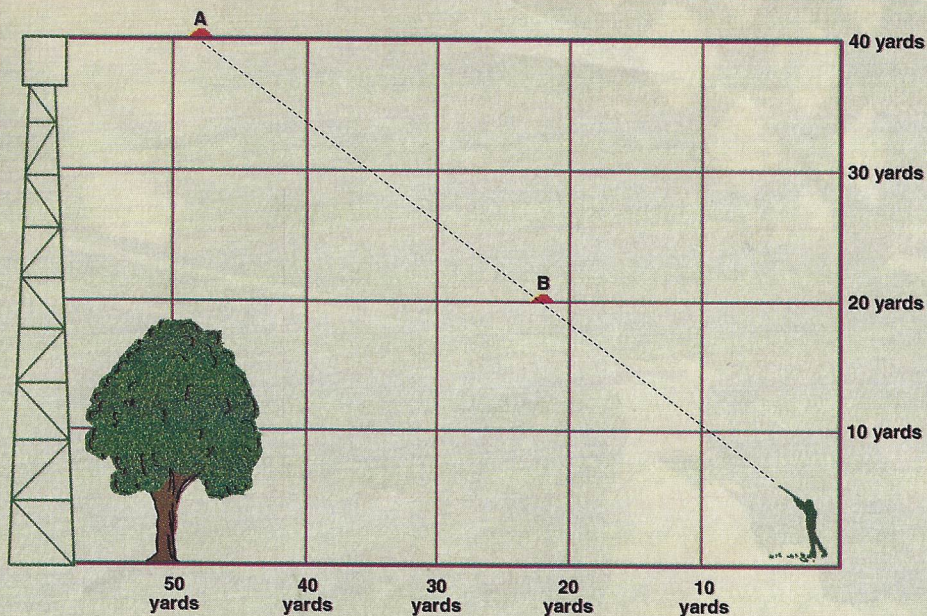
For shooters with a master eye problem, the trick is to close the eye that is *not* above the rib until the line is established, then open the other eye to establish lead. The second way we can maintain visual contact with the target is to turn sideways and take the target as a high crosser.

How do we make sure that we can produce a smooth, accurate swing up to and beyond the vertical? The secret is to transfer the weight to the *back* foot by raising the heel of the *front* leg (left leg for the right-shouldered shooter) slightly as the mount is completed.

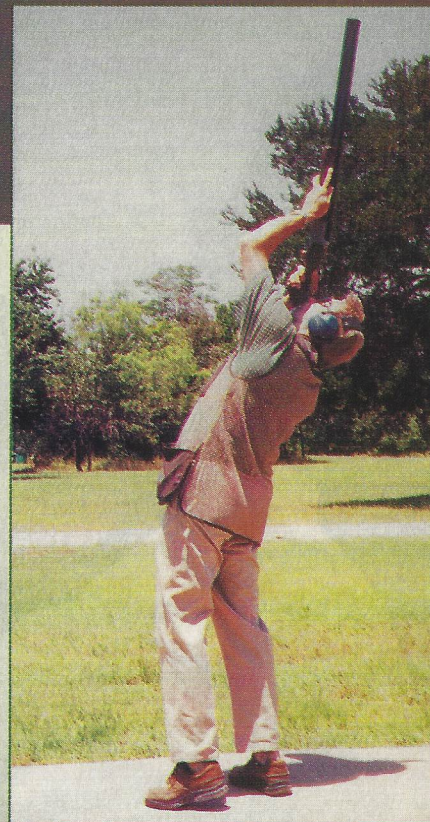
Try this at home. Keep both feet firmly on the ground and move your gun to the vertical position at an imaginary target. While in this position, raise your front heel *slightly*. See what happens? As the heel is raised, the hips push forward, and the upper torso moves back. You should now be able to swing well past the vertical. This is a progressive, smooth movement that takes place just as the gun is coming into the shoulder, not a sudden lift with the heel. Just as with long crossing shots, most of the movement on the target line should be made with the arms.

Just as you would shoot a high, incoming 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? Of course. A much smoother, progressive swing in the same direction as the target will be produced if you do this.

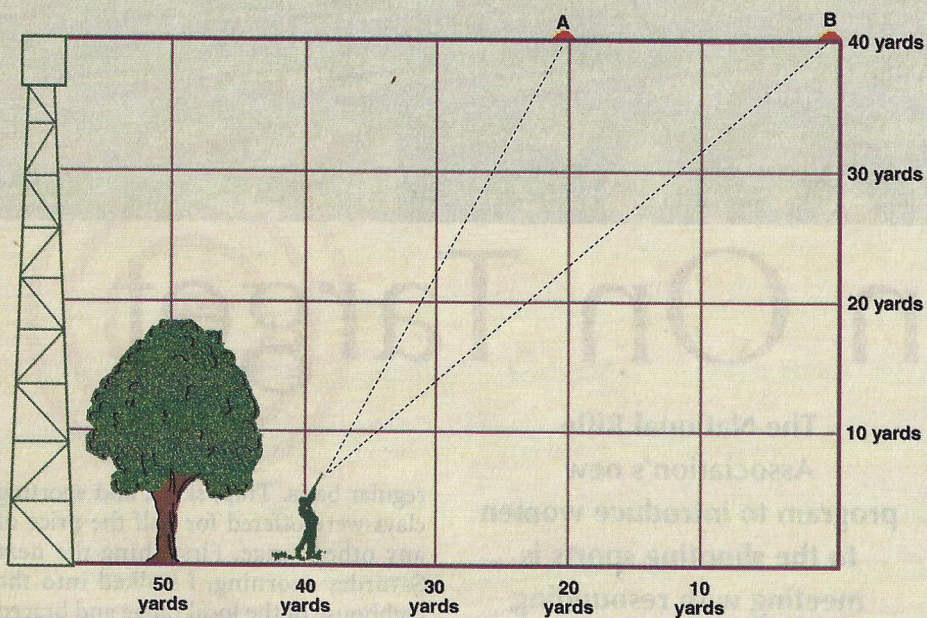
The best medicine for this target is sustained-lead or pull-away. Why? Well, if you try to swing through this target from behind, you will find that it takes a bit of catching. Instead of a smooth, precise movement, you will probably end



When shooting these two high *incomers* (targets A and B), good visual contact is possible only as the targets clear the tree. Target B (20 yards up) comes into view over the tree when it is about 20-30 yards from the shooter, while target A (40 yards high) is visible when it is 60 yards distant. The low target will be over the shooter almost three times as quick as the high target, making it seem much faster. It isn't. Speed and distance are deceptive on high-tower shots. The high target is more vulnerable to the gun when it is directly overhead.



When shooting *incoming* birds high overhead, raising the heel of the *front* foot transfers weight to the *back* foot, moving the hips forward and the upper torso back. This helps produce a smooth and assertive swing past the vertical.



On a *going-away* shot, once again, the target is most vulnerable when it is directly overhead. Any delay in taking the shot will cause the target to be much harder to hit and break since it will be more on edge. Target A is less than 40 yards distant, while B is 50. Most shooters let this type of high target get too far away before firing, a mistake.

up with a hurried poke. Every millisecond you delay pulling the trigger on this target will make it more difficult to break. One of the accompanying diagrams explains why.

To set yourself up for this shot, 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 have will quickly evaporate, and you will end up chasing the target.

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On a high *outgoing* shot, your weight should be transferred to the *front* foot to produce a smooth, progressive gun mount in the same direction as 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, this type of target is best shot where it is most vulnerable to your gun—as near to you as possible. This is where the target is presenting its most vulnerable concave underside.

Don't forget that the lead requirement will be just as much as on an incoming driven bird. The optical information you transmit to your brain will suggest that the target is moving slowly. It isn't. If its speed and distance from

you are the same, then logically the lead must be the same. For some reason, most shooters think they can give an outgoing bird less lead than they would give a similar incoming shot.

When a high incomer is approaching right at you with no sideways deviation to the left or right, it is difficult to swing smoothly through the target without a slight drift to the left (for right-handed shooters) due to muscle tension in the extended left arm and upper body as the gun hits the shoulder. The muzzles will drag off the line and prescribe an arc, and a miss down the side of the tar-

get will be the result. To compensate, move your grip on the fore-end back slightly. This will also help to produce maximum swing past the vertical because there is now slightly more weight forward of the leading hand than normal, resulting in slightly more momentum in the barrels to produce a good, continuous, *smooth* swing as the shot is taken.

With a pair of driven targets off a high tower, or any driven pair, for that matter, which one do you take first? Providing they are both coming toward you at the same speed, the answer for a right-shouldered shooter is the *right* one. By doing this, you will keep the gun pushed into your face as you shoot the second target. Try it the other way around, and you will probably push the gun away from your face and shoot down the side of the target.

Your foot position for a pair of driven targets is exactly the same as the stance I recommend when shooting high driven live birds. Stand facing squarely to the tower, feet approximately shoulder width apart; any wider will restrict your movement. As the right-hand bird is taken, the *left* heel should be raised slightly to give a more flowing movement to the right, then the *right* heel is raised as the bird on the left is taken. This will ensure the shoulders remain level throughout the swing.

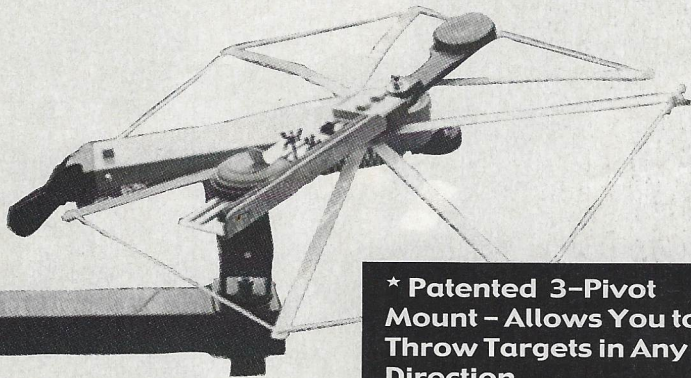
Finally, because we have absolutely no visual reference to anything as we shoot these high birds, just an empty expanse of sky, it is easy to become disorientated. Good timing, perfect foot positions, and perfect balance are more important on these high crossing shots than almost any other shot. For many years, I had the pleasure of witnessing some of the best high pheasant shots in the world. The ease and unhurried elegance with which some of these guys could stroke a really high bird out of the sky was incredible. But it only comes with practice.

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.

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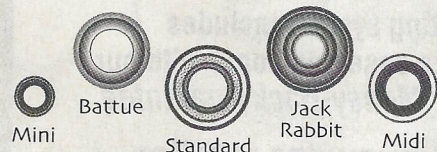
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