

Hone your technique

Tony Bracci looks at the most common mistakes made on the shooting ground and gives advice on how you can best rectify them

Sometimes we need a reminder to make sure we're doing the right thing when we are shooting. Let's start from the bottom and work our way up.

Footwork

Footwork in shooting is crucial to the movement of our body, as it is in any sport. It enables us to have a free moving swing and move the gun on the right line. Your feet should be set so that your body is in a neutral and relaxed position where you're going to take your shot. We see a lot of shooters setting their feet up where the target comes out and having to force their body to the position they wish to shoot in. This causes strain to the body that slows the swing and can also pull you off line.

This is most evident on a long crosser. Imagine setting your feet pointing

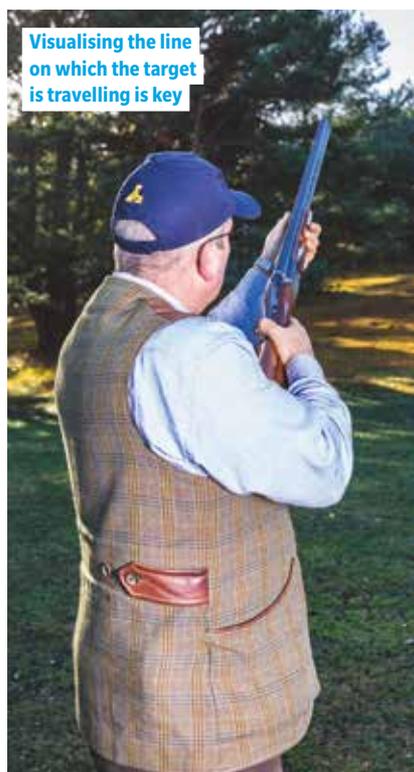
“The shotgun is not a precision weapon, it's something we use instinctively”

to the far right on a right-to-left crosser. By the time you've got to the kill point you would find your body getting tighter, which is not going to help with your follow through. The right way would be to start with your feet at the kill point and rotate your body back to the pick-up point. Then your body will move freely and smoothly to the kill point and follow through without any strain.



Footwork is vital to successful shooting

Position your body neutrally where you plan to take your shot



Visualising the line on which the target is travelling is key

HOLD POINTS AND PICK-UP POINTS

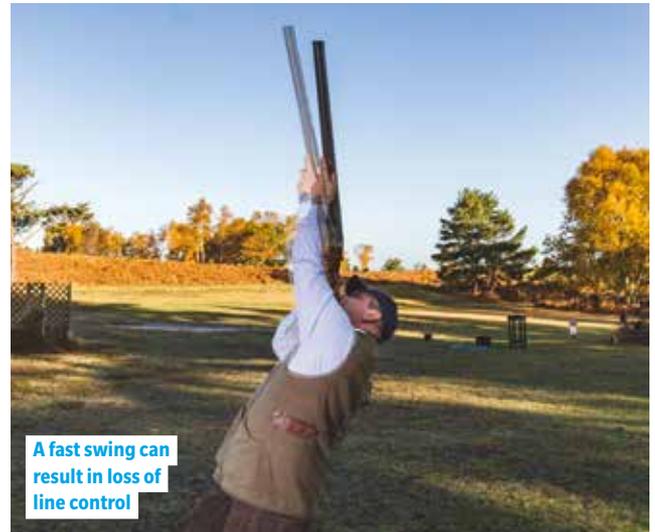
Whether shooting gun up or gun down, hold the muzzles on the line the bird is travelling on. We often see very neutral hold points, which involve a lot of effort to move the gun onto the line the bird is travelling on. This causes an erratic swing and the shot to be taken much later than is ideal. The pick-up point and the hold point don't have to be the same. You should know where the target comes into view but it may be better to hold the gun further out on the line. Try to visualise the line the target is travelling on, plan where you are going to shoot and move your hold point to give you time and space to shoot at the sweet spot. Then look to the pick-up point and let the target come to you and mount as it comes to your hold point.

Thanks to Bisley Shooting Ground for its help with this article.
Visit: www.bisleyshooting.co.uk

Common mistakes



A slow swing allows too much time to look at the gun



A fast swing can result in loss of line control

SWING AND METHOD

This sounds straightforward but we see a lot of shooters with faults in these areas. Swing should be smooth and consistent throughout the shot. It is not good for a Gun's consistency if they speed up or slow down, or go slow for one shot and fast for

the next. If the swing is too fast it is much harder to control the line; too slow and it allows you too much time to look at the gun and measure.

You have to find what suits you, whether it's swing through, pull away or maintained

lead. They all work. It is fine to use different methods over a round of sporting targets but we often see shooters using different methods on the same target and this is most definitely bad for your consistency and your scores.



The mount should be to your cheek with no movement from the head

MOUNT AND FIT

These go together. It is hard to mount an ill-fitting gun well but your mount has to be consistent to have a gun fit. You should be able to mount the gun with your eyes closed in front of a mirror and when you open them your eye should be looking straight down the rib every time. The mount should be to your cheek without any movement from the head. Your head and body should already be in the ready position.

When you mount the gun to your cheek, if your ready position is correct it will also go consistently into your shoulder pocket. We see a lot of guns that are too low in the comb, but rarely see guns that are too high. A shotgun with a comb that is too low will force the shooter to lift their head to see over the back of the action. This causes inconsistencies, the head not quite being in the same place each time.

EYES

This subject stirs up much opinion with instructors and shooters. A good coach should have an open mind and deal with clients individually to find a solution. Shooting with two eyes open will give the best long-term results. This way we can judge speed, distance and angles better, reduce perception of forward allowance and greater peripheral vision. The only downside is that the focus on the barrel position is vague, but we shouldn't be looking at the barrels anyway. If you think you have a cross-

dominance issue a small patch on your shooting glasses can work very well. Changing shoulders helps some clients but not others, but we do see shooters changing shoulders and still closing an eye. The only reason to change shoulders is to have the ability to keep both eyes open. The main hurdle in this area is that some shooters like to look at the barrels; this distracts the focus that should be 100 per cent on the target. The shotgun is not a precision weapon, it's not something we aim but rather we swing on the same line as a moving target and try to shoot instinctively. ■



Using both eyes allows judgment of speed, distance and angles