

THE MOST MISSED TARGETS

INSTRUCTION FROM ROGER HILL, A MEMBER OF THE UK-BASED INSTITUTE OF CLAY SHOOTING INSTRUCTORS AND OWNER OF PRO COACH SHOOTING SCHOOL, ESSEX, ENGLAND



OVER THE NEXT FEW ISSUES, THIS SERIES OF INSTRUCTIONAL ARTICLES FOR MID-CLASS AND CLUB SHOOTERS WILL IDENTIFY THE 'MOST MISSED TARGETS', WHY AND HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR SCORES. THIS ISSUE WE START WITH TEAL.

Regardless of target type, it is essential that we 'start right – and stay right' – so let's recap on the basics of target pick-up point, hold point and break point.

The visual pick up point is where the target is first seen as a clear image – not just movement. Do not get confused, you can see the movement of a skeet bird as it exits the trap house, but you have not 'seen' the target. Once you have established the true visual pick up point this will then determine your muzzle hold point, your stance, your move on the target (speed and direction) and the target break point.

The distance from the visual to the muzzle hold point is not any given distance, a teenager will react a lot quicker than say a 50-60 year old, so the gap between visual pick up and hold point will be a lot closer. Remember, shooting is a hand and eye co-ordinated sport, if the eyes don't see it, the hands can't move.

If the muzzle hold point is wrong you will miss targets. Holding too near the visual pick up point will result in the target beating the muzzles, causing you to chase the target and usually resulting in the gun moving too

fast and overtaking the target. This can result in too much lead, but more likely you will end up stopping the gun as you realize you have gone too far, with a miss behind.

Holding too far out from the pick up point usually results in the gun being moved too soon, making it difficult to ascertain speed and direction, probably resulting in looking at the barrels to try to measure the gap, causing the gun to stop or slow down.

Not being balanced at the break point is perhaps one of the most common causes of a miss. If

we are balanced we give our body approximately a 90 degree arc of free movement, 45 degrees to pick up, move with and pull away from the target, neutral at the break point and 45 degrees to swing out after the shot has been made.

To achieve this the feet should be shoulder width apart at about 5 after 2 with the left toe pointing at the break point (opposite for left hander, 5 to 10 right toe forward). With the weight slightly over the front foot, just relax the left knee to allow your weight to go forward. The old saying 'nose over toes' sums it up well.

Incorrect stance is the cause of many missed targets – regardless of target type.

(a) Having the lead foot too far towards the pick up point will cause you to run out of free movement when you are about to take the shot. As you continue to lead the target the shoulders will start to roll causing a miss underneath.

(b) If the lead foot is past the break point it will again cause the shoulders to roll, this time at the pick up point. This makes the pick up very difficult as the gun is likely to be too far under the line of flight, usually causing a miss over the top from excessive upward movement to make contact with the target.

(c) Using a gun that is either too heavy or with barrels that are too long will force you to counter balance by leaning back and putting weight on to your back foot. This will cause bad gun control and a miss over the top.

TEAL TIPS

One of the targets that seems to give mid-class and club shooters the most problems – and probably one of the few targets that can be easily missed in front – is the Teal.

Any target over a given distance will have a sweet spot where it is easier to shoot, usually when it is still under power and not being unduly affected by gravity. The teal however is a totally different ball game, as it is on a vertical, or near vertical, flight path. Over the same given distance as its horizontal cousin, it will slow down much quicker, as gravity gets the better of it. The first third of its flight is much the same as any other target trajectory, not unduly affected by loss of speed or gravity. It is the middle and last third of its flight that causes the problems.

There is a tendency for shooters to use their normal visual pick up point and muzzle hold point, somewhere in the first third of the target's flight where they normally calculate the target's speed and direction. This is when the errors occur. The problem with teal is that they slow down very quickly, so by calculating the speed and direction in that first third of flight, as you would for most



targets, it will be wrong at the point you want to break it and will result in a miss in front.

So we have to use the fact that the teal slows down a lot quicker than any other target to our advantage. First of all we make sure we are balanced at the break point. The target should be broken in the top third of its upward flight, just before it peaks. So your gun hold position needs to be at least two thirds along its flight line. Take no notice of the target on its way up to your hold point, let the target pass the muzzle. Move to the bottom edge of the clay, moving with it, but not passing it, to get the speed and direction. Fire and keep moving, but do not pass the clay. By shooting the bottom edge the gun will slow at the same speed as the target, which will result in the shot arriving above and in front of the target, thus giving it lead.

By shooting this method you will have less gun movement, giving you greater control and less speed on the gun – which also helps prevent the miss in front.

For simultaneous pairs of teal, pick the straightest bird as your

first target and start two thirds up its flight, so when you swing over to the second target you have got movement on the gun to shoot the other.

TO RE-CAP

- Never start too low or you will chase the target and get too much speed on the gun.
- Hold at least two thirds up the target's flight line.
- Let the target do the work by slowing down and giving itself lead.
- Short gun movement means greater control and more time to shoot the target.
- If you are chasing the target IT is in control and dictating what you and the gun do. ■

REMEMBER – “KEEP IT SLOW, KEEP IN CONTROL”

Roger Hill regularly coaches in the USA and the UK and can be contacted at roger@procoachshootingschool.com www.procoachshootingschool.com

SELF ANALYSE YOUR SHOT

...if you miss, use this checklist:

1. Was I balanced at the break point?

2. Technique check:
Visual pick up
Muzzle hold point
Break point–lead

3. Lastly gun mount – was the gun in my shoulder correctly, was my master eye in line with the rib?

Go through this list from the top crossing off what was right and nine times out of ten you will find the fault.