

SHOOTING LESSON

SWEET THREESOMES

The pull-away method is a great base for all shooters, but to be an excellent shot you need to master all three shooting techniques, says Dr Malcolm Plant

Let me ask a question. Any clay target course setter who's proficient at the job will know how you shoot, even if he hasn't actually seen you in action - but do you?

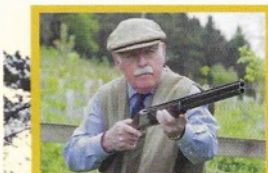
Every 50 or 100-bird sporting shoot he dreams up will incorporate every distance, angle, trajectory, size, type and colour of target

at his disposal as a direct challenge to you. But there's more, a clever course designer investigates your technique and timing as well.

Don't believe me? Then let's take a look at the flightline of the clay - in this case, for argument's sake, a 35-yard right to left crosser, 15 yards up against a clear blue sky. A nice target for a right-handed gun.



The Institute of Clay Shooting Instructors was formed in the 1980s to provide qualified coaches with opportunities for further professional development, by the provision of seminars, workshops, practical activities and educational visits. ICSI coaches can be found at www.ICSI.org.uk



Dr Malcolm Plant is chairman of the Institute of Clay Shooting Instructors and a Clay Pigeon Shooting Association senior coach.



HOW DO YOU SHOOT IT?

Whether you tackle it gun up (pre-mounted into your cheek) or gun down, there are only three places that the gun muzzles can start from:

- Somewhere behind the clay, meaning you tackle it with a **swing through** technique.
- Pointing at the clay, so you shoot **pull away** as advocated by the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association.
- Or in front of the clay, so you shoot **maintained lead**.

In actual fact there's a fourth method if you really like a challenge, and that's to **spot-shoot** it. This is where the muzzles loiter stationary, in thin air, somewhere down the flightline and you await the clay's arrival, pulling the trigger when you perceive the gap (forward allowance) to be correct.

For the single target we're looking at, there are consequences with the way you shoot, and if it is one of a pair, there would be a number of other variables to contend with too.



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SWING THROUGH
 Many shooters use swing through, without really realising. With this method, we accelerate up the clay's smoke trail, overtake the target and pull the trigger as we pass.
 The angular movement of the gun is always faster than the target, because we have to catch up and overtake the target. And generally, because of the speed, the gun is going in a straight line. Which means that when the target curls, as it so often will, we miss.
 With this method there is also only a small time window in which to pull the trigger and if this is not timed correctly the gun will be away and too far in front of the target to effect a hit.

PULL AWAY
 With the pull away method, the brain, eye and gun lock on to the target, as if a laser is pointing from muzzle to target, from the moment we start moving the gun and through the mounting process.
 The brain and gun now have target connection and the gun is travelling at the same angular speed as the clay. All we have to do now is pull ahead with a gently accelerating gun, and shoot. It's still a challenge of course, but the whole process creates an excellent base on which to build success, and consistency.

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SHOOTING LESSON



MAINTAINED LEAD

Maintained lead, in the hands of an experienced shooter, looks like delightful slow motion, poetry, in fact. The brain, the eye and the hands direct the muzzles towards a piece of blue sky where we expect the clay to be, very shortly.

But what if the clay doesn't show up, because the wind has caught it? Or it dips, or rises, unexpectedly? When this happens it is difficult for most of us to adjust and recover in time. I suppose we wait for the wind to drop and call for another clay.

TRICKY PAIRS

To be able to shoot sporting clays successfully, we need to be able to use all these techniques.

On a single target, the course setter might come up with something that simply does not allow you to use your preferred shooting style - for example, by giving you a small time window, as is often the case when a nippy target has to be taken between trees.

Even more consequences will almost certainly enter the equation when you have hit - or missed - the first target of a pair. If our sporting course setter is feeling particularly devious he will make it his business to wrong-foot you and ensure your gun is in the wrong start position for the second clay.



"Oh dear, how am I going to shoot this doubles combination?" asks Malcolm



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The first straight overhead driven is fine, but the fast, low left-to-right target...

ALL ROUND SATISFACTION

It stands to reason that if you want to shoot to a consistently high standard then you must connect with a high percentage of the doubles you come across. And to do this you need to train on all possible target and gun start presentations.

Clay shooters of course have an advantage in this respect because variety is something they encounter almost every time they go to the club. Field shooters aren't quite as fortunate, so my only advice would be for them to shoot as many clays as they can in the closed season. Better still, why not get into the habit of shooting clays year-through,

and as often as possible, in order to master the different techniques?

It's fun to experiment and your shooting will be all the better for it, but should you find yourself struggling, don't hesitate to go back to what you know best and that's to lock on, point at the clay and pull ahead.

Keep things simple. Place your feet correctly, mount the gun properly, keep your head down and follow the instructions on the tin. You'll hit it.

And finally, when you are waiting for your turn to shoot, work out what questions the course setter is asking, and plan your response accordingly. Don't wander on to the stand with your eyes wide shut.

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...is away too quickly. All I can do now is swing after it and hope for the best

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