

MISSING TARGETS

I have been asked to address missing...as in dead clay targets and live flying birds getting away unscathed, even though the shot looked perfect when the trigger was pulled. If this has never happened to you go oil your gun. For the remainder of readers we may have an answer or two for you.

Who among us has not heard the cry, "you're behind it?" Even if this refrain is correct what good does it do you? If you do not know that you are behind, ahead, too high or too low you are in a bind, but, much more importantly, if you do not know WHY your shot went where it did, you cannot correct it.

Our research in viewing many targets over shoulders of shooters has revealed that the better shotgunners almost always miss IN FRONT OF THE TARGET. We believe that we know why. They are more proficient at keeping their eyes on the target and not on the gun.

I was taught by my coach that if I could not see exactly where my muzzle was, in relation to the target, when I pulled the trigger that one of two things had occurred. Either I took my eyes off the target and put them on the gun, or, I left the target early with the gun.

The next time you miss ask yourself if you know where you missed. Then you can work with WHY you missed. If you cannot remember seeing the target break, you have almost certainly left the target too early. This is known as not staying in the gun. Usually all that follow through you need is to see the target break BEFORE you move your eyes to another target.

We are absolutely convinced that determining WHY you miss is infinitely more instructive than WHERE you missed.

If you find that you are looking at the muzzle you can be pretty sure that you have put the shot pattern where the target WAS instead of where it is GOING.

How can you tell? If you are seeing the gun in more than a distant blur in your vision you are probably looking at it instead of the target. Try this the next time you train. Write down an instruction to yourself that you are going to see the rings and ridges, any shadows, the direction of the target, and its speed before calling "pull."

Then keep your mind on seeing precisely what you wrote down until you have it committed to your subconscious mind.....where all your skills are located. If this takes you 5000 targets, so what! If you wish to improve you must pay a price.

Most hunters and less skilled clay targets shooters generally miss behind and over the top of targets. There are multiple reasons for this. Let's see if we can help you identify some

of them in your mount and move.

First, if you find yourself chasing targets you must learn to move your gun hold point further from the trap. Of course, you cannot do this on live game birds, but you CAN adopt a move that greatly reduces having to chase flying critters and clays. We coach our students to never allow the target to get passed the gun. If it does, move your hold point further along the flight line of the mark.

You must make the first move TOWARD THE BREAKPOINT! The vast majority of students we have come to us with a gun mount that mimics the directing of an orchestra. The gun goes up, then down, then rocks, and then chases the fleeing target. A miss at or near the tail end of that target is almost assured.

From this day forward, in your training, practice, and competitions, make the first move on all targets a PUSH toward the breakpoint. Forget about swing. Push the muzzle directly toward the sport you intend to kill the target and let the computer between your ears determine proper lead.

Another major reason for missing where the target has been (I hate using the word 'behind' because it gives a false reading in human minds) is poor foot position in the setup stage.

It works like this....someone told you to point your front foot toward where you plan to kill the target. Fine....for most shots. What do you now do if the target fools you eyes off the trap? Or the wind takes hold of it? Or the trapper delays the pull?

Here is what we teach. Make yourself as comfortable as you can AT THE KILL POINT. Be uncomfortable, if necessary, at your hold point. When you are comfortable in the setup you may well be uncomfortable in the kill zone. This leads to a 'rainbow' move of your shoulders in the direction of travel of the target taking you off line, and, thereby creating a miss over the top andwhere the target was, instead of is. This also will cause the body to shift weight from the front foot to be back foot. Falling off the flight line is going to happen every time.

This condition is particularly prevalent when humans have to move away from their natural pivot motion. Right handed shooters do this on left to rights targets and left handed folks do the opposite.

Here is how we recommend you practice you setup: place your feet in the kill zone so that you feel good physically where you intend to break the target. Then rotate your arms only to the hold point. Your body will follow a bit. Look for the target where you will see it as a mark and not a blur. You will quickly know how this feels. Play with it. Find out for yourself. What may be a good setup for me may not work for you.

Far too many people have a one size fits all mentality. We don't. Fuller sized people (how is that for politically correct verbiage?) may have significantly more pronounced foot position toward the kill zone than a lightly built person. You want to be as smooth as you can. Doing so will help you stay ON the target so that it is easier to stay IN the gun until you see the target die.

There are a handful of other errors that create misses behind which we can deal with in another article or you may call me to discuss.

Until next time.....

THE FOX