

WINTERIZING YOUR SHOOTING

If you live north of the Mason/Dixon line this time of year you are likely spending more time chasing live birds than clay birds. Your competition shotgun will sit in the closet, under the bed, or on a bench waiting to be cleaned until Thanksgiving...or later. Then it will sit until the robins return to their nesting spots.

You folks in the Deep South, who can shoot comfortably all year, may never have experienced the great fun of shooting when bundled up like the Pillsbury doughboy, and therefore, wonder aloud why we Northerners put shotguns aside about now. Try it sometime and you, too, will see why watching football can be joyous instead of waving a loading gun at flying objects that you cannot get to.

BUT.....you lovers of snow do not allow your shooting skills to wane. No sir. Now is the time to work on your move, mount, equipment, eyes, and physical conditioning.

WHAT, you say? ALL THAT? How will I have time for football?

Try the following just to humor me.....and maybe help you get a jump start on yourself when the primavera moon shines over your house.

Garner three or four mini clay targets. You know, those little ones that you cannot see very well beyond twenty yards. Are you with me so far? Good!

Place them on a table, shelf, on your spouse's head, or some other sound object and practice moving from one to the other as you would in shooting pairs come next shooting season.

Here is the catch. You MUST concentrate on moving YOUR EYES to each target edge BEFORE you move the gun to same. It sounds easier than it is to accomplish. Therefore, this is the time of year to work on your eye muscles and your ability to move your eyes FIRST to the target, then the gun.

After you have done this exercise a thousand times or so, drill or punch a hole in a target, suspend it on a string, attach said string to a limb, joist, or a bike holder nailed to the ceiling of your bedroom and swing it back and forth. Back away and train your eyes to move from the FRONT EDGE of the swinging target as it goes one way to the opposite edge as it pendulums back.

Do NOT be surprised to witness your eyes getting tired very quickly during this workout.

Oh, yes, practice this one about one thousand times over the winter.

You are not done yet. How about the flashlight in the barrel of your UNLOADED GUN? Here is the drill. Put a small flashlight (preferably one with a battery that works) in the top barrel of your competition gun, tape it there, turn it on, and work on moving along the seam lines of your favorite room until you can move, mount, and follow the joints of every groove, ridge, and straight line in that room.

Don't forget the lines that go up and down, those that angle badly enough so that you are having to learn how to lean.

When you get sick of that, move to another room and repeat the process a thousand times. Get used to having to change your move quickly keeping track of how smooth you become. Do this at the rate of one hundred times per day until you reach one thousand then start over again until you are smoother than a baby's bottom.

Have a doorknob or two in your house? I mean those that keep the door closed, not your brother-in-law. Train your move and mount, again using the flashlight, on perfecting your ability to put that light on the edge of that doorknob that you are looking at. Do these ten times in a row, and then do it on the opposite side of the doorknob. You should by now know how many times to perform this feat.

I have been blessed enough to have inherited a clock from my grandparents. (This is in addition to the pair of ill fitting pants and the dull jackknife that I acceded to from my wife's parents.) You know the style of clock I got weary of winding it up every eight days so I have put it to a better use.

I stand across my gun room and practice moving and mounting on specific numbers on that old clock all winter long. I do "a hundred a day." I suggest that you use snap caps so you can pull the trigger for real without risking a broken firing pin or, worse, accidentally setting of a genuine charge of powder. If you do not have snap caps put them on your Christmas list. If your Christmas list is already overloaded put your gun on "safe" and do the drill as ordered above.

May I mention that a physical fitness program could mean the difference between staying strong throughout a shooting season or a major event and wishing that the ordeal would end? IF you pump iron two days each week and run on the treadmill, highway, byway, or neighbor's back yard another two days, you will be in competition shape all year long.

It is hereby ordered that you go to the YMCA, the local gym, or the church basement and work your body. Of course, you will do this AFTER getting a physical exam by a licensed physician and not one of your shooting pals.

By the way, there is no excuse to give up your fitness outing when the shooting season comes around again. Maybe you push less weight, but keeping the curriculum going will not only be good for your game, but just may be good for your longevity on planet earth.

Remember this, if you commit to memory nothing else about this missive... you must be alive in order to pull the trigger. You must be in good physical condition in order to shoot well over a long tournament. If that alone is not reason enough to keep your body moving and shaking regularly then you are already on the downhill side of your shooting life.

I am now off to chase those pesky woodcock and ruffed grouse off my property. They squat, pay no taxes, and eat all of MY berries.

Until next time, I remain

Yours in shooting

THE FOX