

Keeping the New Shooter Coming Back

By Ed Scherer



Ed Scherer was a popular columnist on instruction for Skeet Shooting Review during the 1980s and 1990s. He passed away in 1995. The following is a print from July 1993. Ed's articles that have run in SSR in the past year can be found online at nssa-nasca.org.

For fear of losing the novices that frequent our skeet fields, this article is intended to keep them coming back. We'll teach them to hit more targets—so essential to keeping interest alive.

Allow the beginners the luxury of their own skeet field, away from the mainstream shooters who shoot regular rounds of skeet. Novices need some slow incomers such as high 6 and 7 and low 1 and 2. These shots will hone the swing, lead and alignments skills, so necessary for good skeet scores. The swing is the thing in skeet and the first skill to be learned. A good swing will forgive an errant lead.

Quoting from Lord Ripon, that great British game shot who downed 556,813

birds in a lifetime. He has this to say about swing, "Aim high, keep the gun moving and never check." In other words—swing and keep swinging.

Learning the skeet leads after the swing is perfect is possible with repetition. I did it in Okinawa from trial and error. The novice needs the luxury of a spotter who can call the miss. I had none, but was able to shoot more, adjusting the lead until I found the correct lead. Once that particular lead was apparent, it took a bucket full of shells to memorize it, with repeated hits, and then on to the next shot.

This writer had done his share of inquires as to why skeeters leave our game for other fields. Topping the list of reasons is the frustration of not hitting targets. Skeet targets require large leads so it's best to tell you the leads for each station and help you learn to hit them.

Heading the list of largest leads are stations low 3, high 4, low 4 and high 5. Those four shots require the largest lead on the skeet field and when broken at or near the crossing point require a full 3 foot lead. The problem confronting the skeeter is visualizing just how that 3 foot lead looks.

Determining Lead

One approach on determining the 3 foot lead is to actually refer to lead as a barrel width of lead. The 12 gauge barrel, when used as a reference, actually requires a "three barrel width" led on low 3, high and low 4 and high 5. For practical purposes, each barrel width of a 12 gauge barrel down range where shot is fired is a foot lead. Three barrel widths are required to hit the four targets mentioned above.

The problem encountered in using my barrel width method is the new bud-

ding skeeter may wind up looking back at the barrel as shot is fired to insure the 3 barrel lead, which you should not do. The surest way to insure a miss is to take the eye off the target as it is tracked and shot. Well, then, what is the approach?

Peripheral Vision

Ironically, the lead can be determined WITHOUT looking at the barrel. Our peripheral vision comes to the rescue. Ever have an ophthalmologist make an eye test? Remember how he asks you to look straight ahead in an eye test and then asks you to tell him when you see his fingers out at a right angle from where you are looking? When the fingers come into view, the patient says "Now" and invariably the doctor's fingers (or the target) are just about 90 degrees to the right of our gaze. Coming into play is that great gift we are born with—peripheral vision. That gift will come into play on the next step I will teach you.

Look into a large mirror, looking only at your nose, which becomes the target. Point a clenched left fist at your nose (or target). The fist must be placed vertically at arm's length. Next, stick your thumb straight up from the clenched fist. Suddenly the thumb becomes your gun barrel. Close an eye and while looking at your nose (the target) visualize shooting high 5 which requires the width of three thumbs or barrel widths. WITHOUT LOOKING BACK TO THE THUMB, see if you can move your thumb three thumb widths to the right. BINGO! You have now set up a 3 foot lead while your eyes were still looking at your nose when the measuring process was put into play.

Thank goodness you are not shooting

a rifle or pistol as those disciplines require a glance back at the sights as trigger is pulled. Not so on a skeet field. Looking only at the moving target is all that is required on a skeet field. Bet you didn't know that, did you?

Using Barrel Width

Let me share another little secret with you and it is why 100 percent of the top notch shooters use the fabulous tube sets. The barrel widths of the 20, 28 and .410 gauges are all the same because all three of these gauges are housed inside a 12 gauge barrel. The sight picture for a .410 gauge tube, housed inside that 12 gauge barrel is exactly the same as a 20 gauge tube housed inside that same 12 gauge barrel and that my friends, is the most important reason we shoot the tubes.

Here's further proof of the effectiveness of the tubes. This writer spent 42 years on a skeet field trying to break 100x100 with the .410. It wasn't until 1982, armed with a tubed .410 housed inside a 12 gauge barrel, that I managed my first 100 with the .410. Remember, too, that I shot in an era where a 100 with a .410 was just a pipe dream. And I had a double whammy going against me each time I attempted the 100 with a .410. It just wasn't done, and my part experience and those of the other greats such as Kerr and Ilse were all the same. We never had a 100 in the .410 so we were treading on strange waters each time we came remotely close to the fabulous .410 100 straight. The tubes changed all that.

Let's carry our mirror lesson a step farther. Take your skeet gun and making certain it is unloaded, point it at your nose in the mirror (target). Next, move the muzzle three barrel widths to the right for the correct lead at the four stations mentioned earlier. It works, doesn't it? No looking back at the muzzle please. Look only at your nose when practicing my lesson on leads.

Now that we have mastered the three barrel width shots, let's cut back on the lead and shoot high 3 and low 5. These two targets require the width of two barrels. The one barrel width targets are high



Ed working with one of his students.

2, low 6, low 1 and high 7.

Let's see now, we have just broken low 3, high 4, low 4, high 5 (3 barrel widths) high 3, low 5 (2 barrel widths) high 2, low 1 and high 7 (1 barrel width). Think you will be able to lead a target a barrel width and a half? That's what is required on low 2 and high 6. High 1 and low 7 require no lead and the remaining targets are at Station 8.

Again, the muzzle width comes into play on Station 8. One has only to visualize covering up these two targets with the gun muzzle and pulling the trigger as target is hid behind that muzzle to insure a proper hit. There are two other requirements for target hits once the leads are memorized. Head must be firmly in place on the comb as shot is fired and muzzle must continue to move as trigger is pulled. Remember, Lord Ripon said to swing and KEEP SWINGING.

Maintain Leads

Finally, the best shots have learned their leads through years of practice. The best shots also have learned to hold or maintain the leads before firing. It is a lot easier to learn the leads if they do not change when tracking the targets. The

swing through method has lost favor with most of the All-Americans as the lead changes as shot is fired and that is no way to memorize those leads. How can one memorize lead when it is always changing?

Want to break yourself of swing through shots? Point your muzzle further out from the target opening and start muzzle moving immediately as target emerges. That will help do it.

Having trouble on the long lead shots such as high 5 and low 3? Try sneaking up on these stations, shooting as you go. If one has learned the lead at high 6 and low 2, move toward high 5 and low 3 a foot at a time and keep shooting as you move off the shooting pad. By the time you arrive at high 5 and low 3, you might have just figured out the lead. We do the same on Station 8. In my shooting schools, we start the novices five steps beyond the low and high houses—off the shooting pad. As these targets are hit, we move one step at a time toward the shooting pad.

We want the novices back at our gun clubs because we like new shooters. These tips will keep you coming back and hitting more skeet targets.