



# YOU HAVE TO HAVE ALL THE CLUBS IN THE BAG

In this new series, top coach Stephen Nutbeam will be concentrating on helping the typical Sporting shooter move up to a higher level.



One of our most experienced coaches and course designers, Stephen has worked with some of the biggest names in the sport, specialising in coaching for top level competition. An England international himself at both Sporting and Skeet, he is also the proprietor of Longridge Shooting Ground in Gloucestershire.



**WHEN YOU FIRST LEARNT TO SHOOT EVERYTHING WAS MECHANICAL.** You acquired the fundamentals of stance and gun mount and built up a method for all the basic angles and target presentations. It is the way we learn everything in life, adding to a skill base until it becomes second nature and, with some hard work and good foundations, most people can become competent shots. Progressing beyond that level however is harder and many never do.



Every week in competitions up and down the country you will see shooters putting in scores just a few points either side of their long term average. They have reached a plateau and to move onwards they must expand their range and their skills.

I liken this to a top golfer who has to master all the clubs in his bag if he hopes to win. Some may only be called upon

once or twice a round, but without those skills he cannot hope to put in a competitive score. To reach the highest level in shooting you must have a complete range of skills, both technical and mental, the equivalent of the golfer's bag of clubs. You must be comfortable with a range of shooting styles, not just the basic technique you were first taught, and you need the ability to plan and adapt your game to suit the job in hand.

### OUTSIDE THE COMFORT ZONE

Most of the typical shooters I see have a comfort zone. As long as they are shooting within it they are very effective. But the good course designer is trying to make you shoot outside of the comfort zone, to shoot the targets his way not yours. It is why so many struggle when they step out of their familiar environment and tackle a major shoot like the British Open or the Classic for the first time. The targets in isolation do not seem much different but the course management skills needed to do well are.

To illustrate this let's look at a hypothetical pair of targets and how the course designer can alter the severity of the test simply by changing the order. The pair consists of a simple crosser, similar to a peg 4 low house on a skeet range, with a teal trap set around where the crossing point would be. The lenient course setter will have the teal as the first target, with the crosser on report. Both targets are very much within the comfort zone of all but the novice shooter — the stance can be set perfectly for the teal and there is lots of time to go back to pick up the crossing target, which can then be shot wherever the shooter wishes.

If the crosser is made the first target of the pair, things get a little tougher. Ideally the shot should be taken just before the teal trap, leaving the gun in just the right place to pick up the second bird. If the shooter holds on beyond that point, staying in his natural comfort zone, he will be forced to make an abrupt change of direction and will be out of control, chasing the teal as it gets away. Changing the rhythm of that shot is essential if you are to stay in control and this is one of the essentials of all Sporting — you must be

### GUN DOWN TO LEARN, GUN UP TO WIN



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With all but absolute novices I teach 'gun down' technique. It is the only way to develop the correct moves for consistent success and is one of the essential building blocks. There are times in competition however when it makes much more sense to shoot with the gun in our just out of the shoulder and it is something you will see all the top shooters do, especially on fast and flat trap-style targets. There are no marks for style in shooting, nor is there just one right way to do it. What matters is the number of crosses on the card, how you get there is your call.

Stephen Nutbeam is available for individual or group tuition, including gun fitting for competition shooters. Contact him on 07971 447138 or email [stephen\\_nutbeam@hotmail.com](mailto:stephen_nutbeam@hotmail.com)



in control not the target. It is the fundamental progression from the novice level, when you are a novice the target is always in control.

Now let's be really sneaky and make this a simultaneous pair. It's fairly obvious that shooting the crosser first is the only option, but the teal will still be some way out if we take too long. The expert shot may choose to abandon the pull away or swing through technique used earlier and 'ambush' the target — you may hear some shooters talking about 'chopping it off'. Essentially it is a form of fast maintained lead that is very effective when the shot has to be taken quickly and it is something you will see all the top shots do in certain situations. It may not be the method of choice every time, but it can buy you vital split seconds.

This is just one example of combining course management skills with a full range of techniques. It is a theme we will be returning to often over the coming months.

## MYTH OF THE MONTH

**“Shooting tighter chokes gives you a longer shot string.”**

This old chestnut can be heard most weekends in any clubhouse but in fact choke has very little effect on shot string, as the great American writer Bob Brister proved in his classic book *Shotgunning the Art and the Science*. Tighter chokes only increase the shot density in the vital centre portion of the pattern and are used to ensure that there are sufficient pellets to guarantee a kill at long range.

Implicit in this statement is also the idea that long shot strings are an advantage, which is also false. An elongated string will result in reduced pellet density at any point along it, increasing the chances of the clay slipping through the pattern.

