



READING TARGETS... LIKE

STEPHEN NUTBEAM'S
METHOD CAN HELP
YOU TAKE THE
GUESSWORK OUT OF
ASSESSING A TARGET

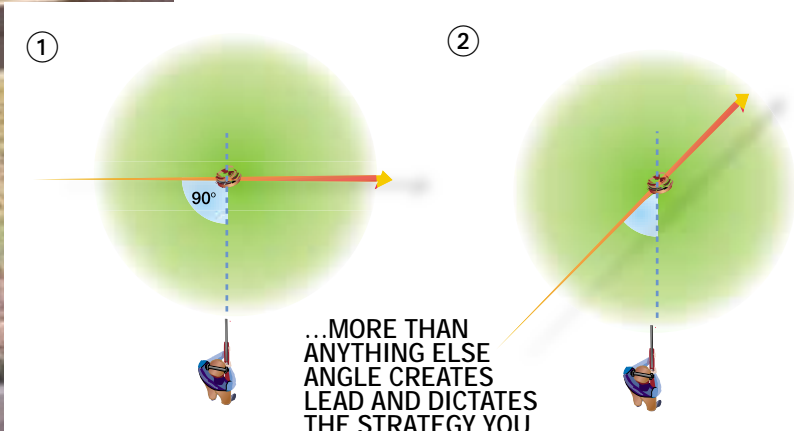
CLOCKWORK!

The harsh reality of Sporting competition today is that you cannot afford the luxury of a pair to 'get your eye in'. Scores are so high and the competition so fierce that your reading of the target has to be spot on before you step into the cage. Assessing the targets and working out your plan as you wait to shoot are vital elements in building big scores.

Lead (or forward allowance) is the big concept that every newcomer to the sport has to understand, but it is the ability to grasp the subtleties of lead that sets the good shots apart from the also-rans. Remember the course designer is trying deliberately to trick you; that target that looks straightforward

rarely is (unless he is being extraordinarily generous) and your job is to unravel the puzzle.

When I ask my pupils what factors determine lead most will suggest speed and distance, and both do contribute, but, more than anything else, angle creates lead and dictates the strategy you adopt on any particular target. We can see this by looking at the two extremes of a true crossing target and one quartering away from the stand. If both are shot at a position directly ahead, the crosser will be at 90 degrees to the shooter and require maximum lead. The quartering bird on the other hand is at a very shallow angle and will need very little. (illustrations 1 and 2)



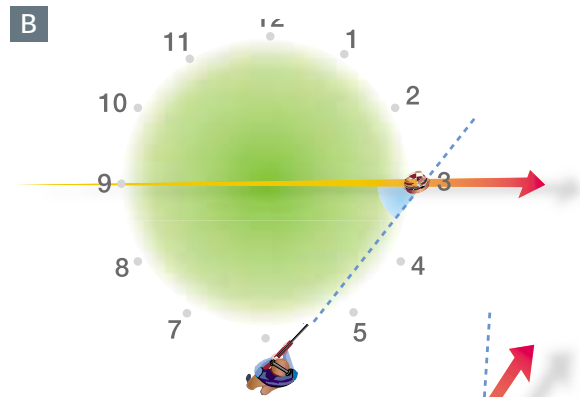
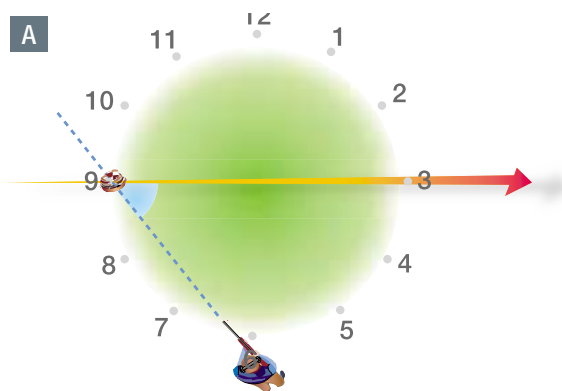
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USING THE CLOCK FACE

One way I have found very helpful when coaching is to use a clock face to help read a target. The shooter is always positioned at 6 o'clock and you then mark the position on the clock the targets starts from and where it finishes. Thus our true crosser from the previous illustrations starts at 9 o'clock and travels to 3 o'clock. The quartering target's trap is at 7 o'clock and the clay ends up at 1 o'clock. This is the first step in the analysis.

Shooting the targets directly out in front of you is not necessarily the only option however (although many novices seem to assume that they must shoot in the direction the stand is facing). Very



often in fact you will have several choices: you could attack the target and shoot it early; you could take it in front; or you could leave it until late in its travel. Each option has implications for the angle relative to the shooter and the amount of lead required.

A Here I have decided that I need to shoot it early, choosing a kill point at 9 o'clock on our original plan. Instead of the 90 degree angle it is now more like 45 degrees and much less lead will be required.

B Similarly by leaving it late until the 3 o'clock position the angle starts to narrow again and the lead picture decreases. It may be that very late on in the flight is actually by far the easiest place to break the target because the lead (and consequently the amount of gun movement needed to achieve it) is much less than at the 12 o'clock position. It is interesting that many shooters stepping up to FITASC for the first time (where two

MYTH OF THE MONTH

"Number 9 shot gives a bigger pattern spread"

Many times I see shooters reach for number 9 shot cartridges on targets such as close driven. Their rationale is that it will give them a wider spread. Pattern spread is determined by choke not pellet size, so all that choosing a smaller shot size will do is give you a denser pattern not a wider one.

It is often worth going to smaller shot however on these close targets, or those showing lots of vulnerable belly, but only in conjunction with more open chokes. The chokes will give you a wider spread and the increased number of pellets will help retain the same density in the wider pattern.

barrels are allowed on all single targets) often find themselves hitting a high proportion of targets with the second barrel. They will have underestimated the lead needed on the first shot but, provided they keep the gun moving, will have sufficient allowance for the second barrel as the angle closes.

trick to see these subtle variations is to use your barrels as a spirit level. Hold the barrels lengthwise and horizontal to the ground, just under the target line as you view the bird, and you will see any changes in elevation much more clearly and can factor that into your analysis.

The same applies with our quartering target (C). This may have needed significant lead early in its flight when the angle (and speed) was greatest, but as you can see the angle closes all the time until the shooter's sight picture will seem almost 'straight at it'. Provided it is staying within comfortable range, the easiest time to shoot this one may again be late on in its flight.

READING THE LINE

"What's that target doing then?" is a question my pupils will have heard over and over. More often than not the answer will be something like "crossing from the right" or "quartering in from left to right". My response will often be: "is that all?" Targets are rarely flying straight and level, even when they appear to be. They are rising or dropping, or the background has been used to create a visual trick. A

SEE HOW THE ANGLE (AND REQUIRED LEAD) REDUCE AS WE SELECT DIFFERENT KILL POINTS ON THE CLOCK FACE