



Training involves indoor as well as outdoor target practice.

BACK TO SCHOOL

The BASC's 'Improve Your Shooting' days are proving very popular with members. Ian Mason attended a day at Doncaster to find out why.



Clay stands presenting a variety of incoming and crossing targets were used to sort out issues such as footwork, gun mount and timing.

With the game season getting into full swing, it's vital that your field shooting skills are spot on. With this in mind, the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) have been hosting 'Improve Your Shooting' days in Wales, Scotland, and the Midlands.

At a cost of £65 for members, these days are great value and spaces fill quickly. Courses are advertised in BASC's magazine 'Shooting and Conservation'. Details are also sent out via BASC's regional news emails, so if you have not signed up to receive these, it's worth contacting your regional office to get on their email list.

I tagged along on a day held in September to find out why these courses are proving so popular. The venue was Euroguns, at Millrace Farm Finningly, Doncaster. Nineteen keen shooters from as far north as Northumberland and as far south as Surrey had signed up for seven hours of intensive instruction from BASC's coaching team.



The key themes for the day were respect for quarry, and clean kills. 'If your shooting skill is below par you are going to wound quarry,' said Dr Peter Marshall, BASC's director of shooting standards. 'The aim of today is to enjoy yourself and hopefully to learn a lot about how your shooting can be improved.'

I can vouch that the Guns enjoyed themselves and picked up many useful tips for improving their shooting accuracy. Talking to several afterwards, a common »

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Wildfowlers, rough shooters, and keen followers of driven game. Happy Guns with their BASC instructors.

theme was 'why didn't I do this years ago?' During the day I listened in on a few conversations and was struck by how little formal instruction many of the game shooters had ever received. On being handed his 28-gram cartridges, one veteran of many decades in the field asked 'what exactly does that mean, 28 grams of what?'

Classroom

The day began with a short talk highlighting the key factors leading to poor performance in the field. Briefly these were incorrect range judging, not shooting within gun/cartridge lethality limits, and not shooting within personal range limits.

Later on, when we moved outside, we were asked to judge the range of a series of decoys set around a field on high poles. This exercise proved that most of us tend to underestimate range. Several people judged a 50-yard bird to be 30 yards.

Other factors blighting field performance included poor gun fit and mount. Indeed it was quite remarkable to see the effect on one Gun's performance by getting the stock well into his shoulder pocket, instead of his habit of mounting low and wide, and then bringing his head down onto the stock.

Shooting sins

On the sins front, I thought I knew most of my mine, however, sharp-eyed BASC coach, Peter Wroe, hauled me up for swinging my gun across my dominant eye on a left to right crosser, rather than getting the gun under my eye and turning my body.

Quite a bit of time was spent patterning our guns. This involved shooting at a huge sheet of polythene at 40 yards, then tracing a 30-inch circle around the densest part of the pattern and counting pellet strikes within this circle. Using 32-grams of No 5 shot most guns managed the accepted minimum of 90 pellets at this range, but

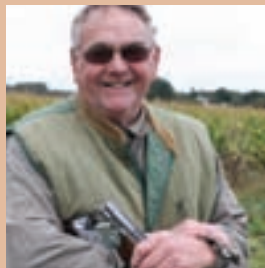
BELOW AND INSET: Our field looked slightly surreal, with decoys mounted on poles at strategic points. These were used to judge quarry range, and in the 'subtending' exercise. This involved mounting your barrels on a target and then sketching what you could see of the bird relative to your barrel ends. The idea was to memorise this sight picture and then use it in the field to help estimate quarry range.



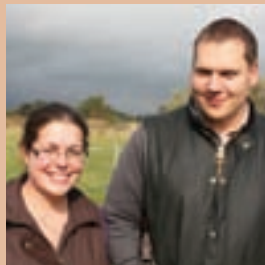
SPORTING GUN INFO



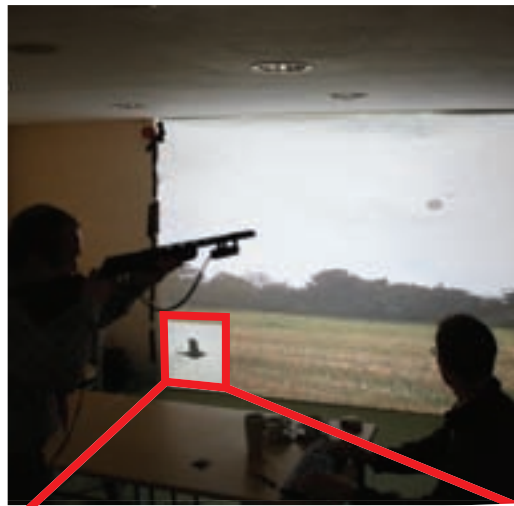
» Terry Worthington, from Doncaster does not shoot driven game, or clays, but is a keen rough shooter, especially walked up. 'I've been shooting 30 years, and over that time I suppose I've developed my own style. Today's instruction was very useful, especially learning the importance of good foot position,' said Terry. 'Really, I should have gone on a day like this 20 years ago. I've enjoyed it so much, I might even do a bit more clay shooting in the future.'



» Retired dentist James Newbold, has been shooting for 26 years, mostly game with the odd round of clays. 'I regard myself as a safe shot, but I have learned a lot today,' he said. 'The chief mistake with my shooting was that I was not mounting the gun stock firmly into my shoulder pocket. I was surprised at the difference this small modification made to the accuracy of my shooting.'



» Husband and wife shooters Michael and Davina Woolhouse hail from the Dales village of Carperby, North Yorkshire. Unusually, it was Davina who got Michael into shooting a couple of years ago (Davina has been breaking clays since she was 14). 'The main things got out of today were the importance of stance, and of not rushing the shot,' said Davina. Michael added that the day represented cracking value. 'When you look at the number of coaches, the cartridges fired, and remember that there's lunch thrown in, it's unbeatable value,' he said.



The indoor training simulator has a pop up window that shows the shot string relative to the quarry and the number of pellet strikes in vital areas.

several did not. 'It's vital all game shooters pattern their gun. If you don't, you're 'shooting blind', said Peter Marshall. 'Some work we did at BASC showed that two out of three shooters had never patterned their gun.'

Peter's other main point was range. 'Very few people can consistently shoot pheasants beyond 50 yards and most shotguns run out of killing power at 35-40 yards using an average load,' he said. Almost on cue a skein of geese flew directly over where we were standing. In my group most agreed the geese were within 30 yards and trigger fingers were itching. However a quick scan with a laser rangefinder showed the geese to be 55 yards.

To help rectify this, we practiced a technique called 'subtending'. This works by knowing how game birds appear when they are at different distances in your shotgun sight picture. Basically this involves comparing a bird in the sky with the size of your shotgun muzzles and learning the relationship between sight picture and range.

Shoot again

Peter also had a few words to say about field behaviour, about the importance of shooting pricked birds again to kill them, about marking falling quarry, and about using

a dog to retrieve quarry as soon as possible.

In addition to lots of clay shooting with coaching, the class also used an state of the art ST-2 indoor Shooting Simulator. This uses a shotgun with a camera and motion detectors attached, linked via a computer to a screen displaying flying quarry. Hit the quarry and they drop from the sky. A screen then pops up showing where your 'shot string' went in relation to the quarry, how many pellets hit vital organs, and a wealth of other data. One interesting nugget from the simulator feedback was that it showed how almost everyone slowed or stopped their gun swing as they were about to pull the trigger on a fast crossing target. Push through and accuracy rapidly improved. Like the rest of the day, the simulator was great fun, so if you see one of these BASC days in your region, I highly recommend going along. **SG**

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