



CLASS DIVIDE

PART TWO

ROGER HILL LOOKS AT THE LITTLE THINGS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CLASSES: KEEPING A JOURNAL AND DIARY AND A SIMPLE TRAINING PROGRAMME

In part one I looked at reading targets, stance, gun hold and dry drills. I also touched on keeping a journal. In this article I will look at the journal in more depth: its layout, how to collect the relevant information, and how to keep it up-to-date along with the shooters' diary/notebook. At this stage of your training you need to be writing things down, keeping information on how you are performing. Don't try and commit all this information to memory as you will miss a vital part. To get beyond A Class you must identify your weaknesses and build them into your training programme via your journal. By describing in your notebook a particular target that caused you a problem, you will see over three or four shoots a common thread running through the targets that you find difficult. It may be speed, height, direction or target size. Get it down in the notebook and also note which method of achieving lead you used and if you shot gun down or gun up. See figure one for an example of a shooter's diary/notebook.

At this stage of the game it is vital that you know which method of achieving lead you used. This is the one thing

that is often missing in a B Class shot. Often during a lesson I will ask a client which method they used to break the target, and a lot don't know or think they have used one method, but actually used something entirely different. I will look at this in more detail later on. So we are collecting information in our notebook. Now you need a journal to transfer this information into, to formulate a training programme that will get you through the problem and onto the next level and performing at your best. See figure two for an example of one shooting journal.

Information travels both ways from the notebook to the journal and from the journal to the notebook. The front of your notebook is used to collect information on faults and problems. Once the problem has been corrected through training, the results are put into the back of the notebook which now becomes a helpful memoir. So if in the future you come across a target you are not sure about or know you have had a problem with in the past, you go to the back of your notebook to jog your memory of what you need to do. For example, if the type of target is a fast short widow target (a

Shooting Journal

Date: _____ Ground/Venue: _____
 Practice/Competition: _____ Discipline: _____
 Time you shot: _____ Weather: _____
 Score: _____ Number of Targets: _____
 Cartridges - Load: _____ Shot size: _____ Make: _____
 Chokes used: _____
 Clothing worn: (winter/summer, wet/dry etc) _____

Meals - Day before: _____ On the day: _____
 Sleep - How long: _____ Good? Bad etc: _____
 How you felt on arriving at the shoot/practice: _____
 Goals for the shoot/practice: _____

How did you perform: _____

Improvement needed/ problem targets: _____
 Good points from shoot / practice: _____

Did you have any distractions (people talking, personal, physical, weather): _____

Do you need to change any equipment for the same situation in the future: _____

General Comment: _____

FIGURE TWO: USE YOUR NOTEBOOK TO TRANSFER INFORMATION TO YOUR JOURNAL IN ORDER TO CREATE A TRAINING PROGRAMME

target that you have very little time to shoot), during your training you may have found that you shoot this target best by using swing through, gun up from your visual pick-up point. Your memoir should say: "Fast, short widow target, shoot swing through, gun up from VP."

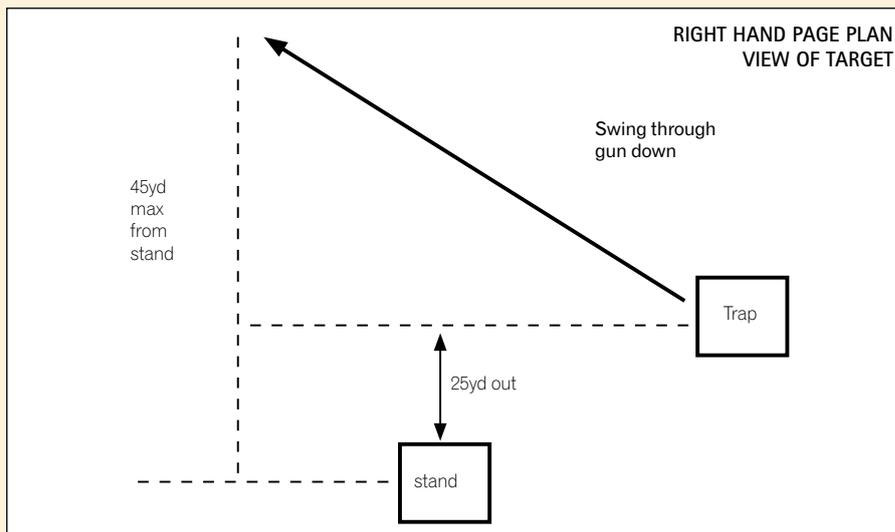
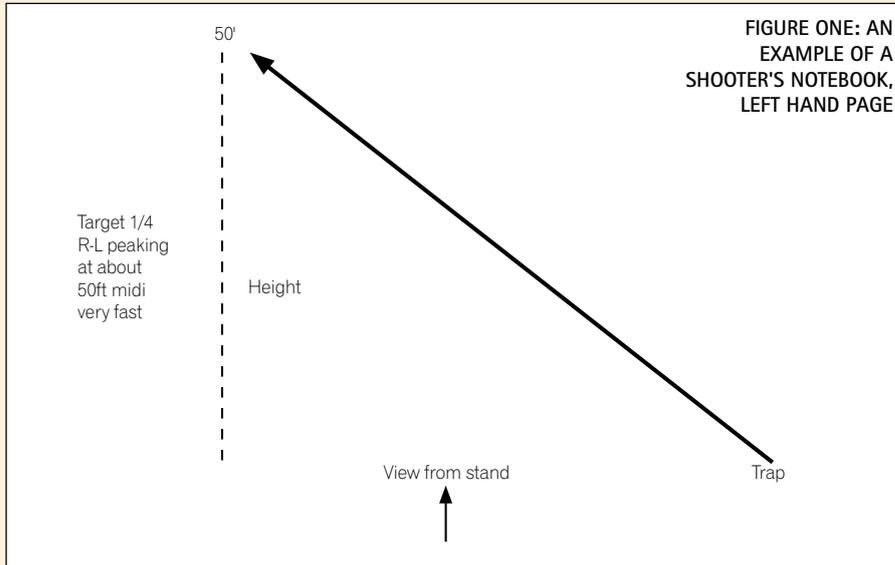
All this information-collecting will improve your

game and help to get you out of B Class and into A. To get to the top you must be able to identify your problems and once identified, they must be put into your journal and then into your training programme. Now that you know how to lay out your notebook and journal, we can start to look at what should be in the training programme.



A LEVEL UP

By Roger Hill



Shooting is a bit like golf. To play a round of golf you need all the clubs in the bag, not just one. You need to know which club to use for each particular shot. You would not play a whole round with just the putter; you would be there all week. Likewise with shooting you have to know which club to use and when, i.e. what method to use. This is what your training will give you. Find out which method to achieve lead is best for you on a given target – your options are: swing through/ smoke trail; pull away;

maintained lead; swing away (a combination of the first and second). Plus on any given method you have to decide whether to shoot gun up or gun down. This gives you a choice of eight clubs in your shooting bag. I will not tell you which method is best for a particular target, as it would only be my opinion. The whole point of this part of your improvement training is for you to find out what works best for you through experimenting. Even from lesson to lesson and from person to person I experiment

with different methods as what works well for one client might not work for another. That is what coaching is all about: working with the client, getting the best out of them, showing what works best for them, not demanding that your way is the best.

You can do the same. The key is knowing what you are going to do before you get into the stand, and you can only find this out during your training sessions. When you get into the stand at a shoot and miss a target or two by shooting swing through it's

not the time to change to maintained lead on the next pair. The damage has been done: you are 20% down on one stand and will still remain in B Class.

Back to your training: if you are learning a new target or working on a problem target, always use pull away as it is the easiest to correct and to work out what is going wrong. It gives you the most information on speed and direction, which is $\frac{2}{3}$ of what you actually need to break a moving target. It also lets you ensure your visual and muzzle pick-up points are correct.

Because you are waiting to pick up and move with the target, you can see whether the target has beaten you or if you are waiting too long for it. When you are confident at breaking the target shooting pull away and you know the lead picture then start to experiment with the other methods, and see which one feels right for you. Did you have more time with one than the other? Did you break the target faster or more slowly? Shoot five or six targets with each method and you will soon find out which one works best for you.

Make sure whichever method you are using that you start from the same visual and muzzle pick-up points. Once you have these points established stick with them. You can either wait for the target and move with it (pull away) or let the target pass you then swing through (but under control not chasing it) or move in front of the target (maintained lead). Try each method gun up and gun down. Once you have found the best combination for you



put it in your journal and in the back of your notebook.

Use your journal to structure your training. Say your notebook has identified that you have a problem with left-to-right high quartering targets. This is now in your journal under 'improvements needed'. In your goal section this problem has to be overcome. Set achievable goals: in your first session, sort out stance and establish lead picture using pull away, and in your second session, experiment with different methods, gun up and gun down. Always set reasonable goals and achieve them. Two or three sessions are better than one – learn your technique slowly.

When learning a new target also use this as training to read a target, as discussed in part one. Learn to use the background. Don't just look at the target, look at the whole picture to see what the target is actually doing. When you have worked out your visual and muzzle pick-up points, mark them, so you always look and wait in the same place for the target. This could be a dead tree, a darker shade of green or a fence post. Mark the target's flight line from its lowest to its highest point so that you are always just under the target's line of flight. Lastly mark the break zone; everything must come together in this. See the whole picture. If you do this every time you train, it will become second nature when you compete.

When you can read a target before you get into the stand and know it is right, all you now have to do is look at the target. When not

thinking about where you see it or are going to break it, you can give the target 100% concentration. Remember, look for the target before you call "pull" – don't call first then look. The further away you look the quicker you will see the target. This is because human vision comes back into focus quicker than out. If you are soft-focused on the background or the horizon (whichever is the furthest away at the muzzle pick-up point) you will see the target moving much quicker as it will be moving between you and your soft focus. Looking into the distance also helps to keep your eyes away from the gun, which is the last thing you should be looking at (see articles on Trap from March/April 2009). When reading a target, speed is relative to distance. It's a bit like standing at the side of the road and pointing at cars doing 40mph – your arm will be moving at 40mph. Now stand 50yd back and note how much slower your arm is now moving, even though the cars are still doing 40mph.

It is the same with clays regardless of how fast they look to be travelling. Take time to point at them and note how fast or slowly your arm is moving. You will be surprised that it is usually a lot slower than you thought. When you know the speed of the target you can then get the gun moving at the same speed as the target. This works very well on quartering targets that always look as though they are going at the speed of sound. Point at them and see how slowly they are going.

Learning all these things are the fine tuning part of

To recap

1. Keep a diary/notebook
2. Every time you have a bad stand describe the target. Use two pictures, one in elevation, one in plan, to identify the weakness
3. After four or five shoots, there will be a common thread running through the problem target. Transfer this information into your journal
4. Set up your training programme from your journal to correct any problems or weaknesses
5. Set yourself goals that are reasonable and achieve them
6. When a target has been learnt (lead picture etc) by using pull away, only then try other methods and gun up or gun down to find out what works best for you
7. When you have found out what works best for you, transfer the information into the back of your notebook, your *aide-mémoire*
8. If you are not sure about a target at a shoot, use your memoir (other sports do: in golf the caddy has notes on each hole, in rally driving the co-driver is calling out the route the whole time)

your training. If you are at the top end of B Class you can shoot. If you go through these processes every time you train they become second nature when you are competing. Every thing in these two articles is what will get you out of B Class and beyond if you are serious about improving your shooting. Pay attention to the fine details, getting it all right all the time. Don't try and sort it out on the stand at a competition – remember, two or three targets on every stand is 20%-30% away and you are still in B Class.

At this stage of your shooting don't try and do it all by yourself. What you are looking for now is tiny compared to when you first started shooting. At first you

were looking for 100% and it was easy to find 60% plus of that. Now you are looking for 20% or less at Sporting, for Trap and Skeet maybe as little as 3%-5%. Now is the time to get some help from a professional coach as the less you are looking for the harder it is to find. Two pairs of eyes are better than one, and some faults you can never see for yourself. In my experience at this stage the smallest adjustments can make big improvements. Just by tweaking your timing, stance or maybe a change in method you can make a huge difference, but it takes years of experience and a trained eye to see it. Remember: perfect practice makes perfect. Shoot safe, shoot straight.

Roger Hill runs the ProCoach Shooting School in Fyfield, Essex. He is a Fellow of the Institute of Clay Shooting Instructors and of the Association of Professional Shooting Instructors. For details of Skeet, Sporting and Trap Master classes, contact Roger at roger@procoachshootingschool.com, or visit www.ProCoachShootingSchool.com.