



STAY IN THE LOOP

Roger Hill on how to shoot loopers and battues

These two targets probably present the most difficulty in terms of learning the lead picture. With loopers and battues the lead picture is two-dimensional and constantly changing (as the targets start to fall they speed up, so the lead picture becomes bigger). Improving shots need a lot of practice and experimentation with these targets to find what works best for them.

The battue is very hard to consistently break early, as when it is edge-on before it turns it is wafer-thin and very hard on the edge. A standard looper flies fairly flat for a very short distance at the crown of its flight just before it starts to drop, leaving a very small window in which to break it. So timing is also crucial on both these targets.

What are the most common methods of breaking them? Some shooters advise cutting across the arc of the loop, while others suggest imagining the clay is at the centre of a clock and shooting around the seven or five, depending on which direction the target



THIS IS THE STANCE YOU WOULD NORMALLY ADOPT FOR A CROSSER

is headed. But how big is the clock? One foot across? Two or three? Both methods can be successful, but how do you learn that lead picture to make them work?

As a coach I have to teach the

shooter what that lead picture looks like. As we have said before, it is not a measurement but rather something perceived in your mind in order for hand-eye coordination to work.

So what are our options? Some standard loopers, if seen early while they are rising, can be shot on the rise using our teal technique: staying on the bottom edge and shooting the five or seven of the clay depending on the way it is looping. Over many years I have tried many ways of teaching this lead picture to my clients. The method I use now, which seems to take effect quickest, goes completely against every principle we have learnt up to now regarding stance. But it does show the shooter what the actual lead looks like on these targets. Once this has been seen and learned the shooter has the option to use other methods to achieve the right lead picture.

For the purpose of this article the target is a left to right looper being shot by a right-handed shooter. The



THE SHOOTER IS BALANCED AT THE TRAP FOR THE LOOPER



SHOOT BETTER SPORTING

By Roger Hill

method of achieving lead that gives us the most information. The speed and direction of the target is pull-away. This is what we will be using during the learning stage.

With all the targets I've covered so far I've started off by covering stance. The human body can only move so far left or right when the gun is mounted in the shoulder. If you keep moving beyond the limits of this free movement you will start to dip your shoulders, making you roll off the line and causing a miss underneath (that's why being balanced at the point of break is usually so important). But with the looper this is exactly where we want to place the shot pattern: in front and underneath, with a two-dimensional lead picture just as the clay starts to turn and drop (but before it picks up too much speed). So how do we use this natural body movement to our advantage?

Stance for the looper has to be balanced at the trap or slightly to the right of it – not, as with every other target, at the break point. So when you enter the stand you need to be facing the trap off to the left, as though you are going to break a target somewhere over the top of it. This may feel totally wrong and awkward to start with but with a little experimentation you can get yourself comfortable. Now move the muzzles to the right and up to your muzzle pick-up point just under the flight line of the target, at the point where it is just starting to turn. Just before you call for the target soft-focus just to the left of the muzzle pick-up point (your visual pick-up point). Let the clay come to you: do not be tempted to move too soon or to let the clay pass the muzzles. (For improving shots 'swing-through' and 'maintained lead' techniques make it very difficult to achieve a two-dimensional lead picture).

Lock onto the target and move with it. This will give you its speed and direction, even though it is two-dimensional. Once you are moving with the target start to pull away from it. Due to being off-balance as you pull



THE SHOOTER STARTS TO ROLL WITH THE TARGET

away your shoulders will start to roll, pulling the muzzles under the target and thus giving us a two-dimensional lead picture. Because you have moved with the target and got its speed and direction, your perception of lead becomes a lot easier for the brain to work out and the shot starts to become instinctive instead of logical (you don't need to look at the gun to try to work out where to put it). Remember, lead is a feeling not a measurement. By using this method you will soon learn what the picture looks like.

To get your stance right perform some dry (empty gun) runs. Move your muzzles with some targets so that you can adjust where you start; you do not want to be too far round to the left as there's a chance you could lose your balance and fall over.

When you have learned this lead picture you can perhaps experiment with cutting across the curve of the loop. Be careful though, as this method relies very much on having good hand-eye coordination whereas pulling away off-balance cuts out all the variables and guesswork, leaving you only the lead picture to experiment with

The other option with this target is to shoot it as it drops. However, it's

very hard for the improving shot to learn the lead with this method because it gives an ever-increasing lead picture as the target gains more speed.

The looper is probably one of the hardest targets with which to learn your lead picture and will take a lot of practice to perfect. As with all training, take your time when practising. Start on the gentlest of loopers and build up to the real screamers. If you find you just cannot get to grips with this target, take a lesson. Any professional coach will be able to get you breaking them. This is far better than keeping at it on your own as you'll simply perfect your fault and then find that it is difficult to correct, with or without a coach. Frustrating – particularly as there seem to have been a lot of loopers at the big shoots lately!

So, to re-cap

- **Shoot the pull-away method.**
- **With stance, be balanced at the trap or just to the right of it (left-to-right target).**
- **Bring the muzzles up and away from the trap to your visual pick-up point, just under the line of flight, where the clay just starts to turn.**
- **Move with the target to get its speed and direction.**
- **Pull away just as your shoulders start to roll.**
- **Be instinctive with your lead. If it feels like it is going to break, go with the feeling.**
- **Never, never try to measure lead.**
- **Lead is perceived.**
- **This type of target has a very small window in which to shoot it as everything about its lead changes all the time. So be confident.**
- **Remember the old saying: do not be afraid to miss and you won't.**

Shoot safe, shoot straight.

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