



SHOOTING THE RIGHT BIRD FIRST IN DOUBLES

Over the years I have had many questions posed to me about trapshooting, but the most frequent question that I have been asked has to do with the fact that I shoot all the right birds first in doubles. I thought it might be helpful to write an article about how and why it is that shooting the right bird first on all the stations works for me.

When I started shooting, like most people I began with singles. I desperately wanted to shoot doubles, but my mom said that I needed to break 25 straight in singles before I could try the two at a timers. Well after a few months I finally did break that elusive 25 and went to ask my mom if I could try doubles. With Mom's blessing I quickly signed up for a practice round and asked the Range Manager, Rick Courtright for a quick tutorial on how to shoot them. Rick told me to shoot the right bird first on posts 1, 2 and 3 and then the left bird first on posts 4 and 5. It wasn't the most in depth trapshooting lesson that Rick ever gave me but I didn't care, I was going to go shoot twice as many bullets in half the time.

I started on post 1 and things were going pretty well. I wasn't breaking them all by any means but I was breaking a few pairs here and there and by the time I had finished post 3, I thought that with a little practice, doubles was actually not all that hard. Well, all those happy thoughts came to an abrupt and screeching halt once I got to post 4. There was no problem with the first birds but I found that my barrel also came to an abrupt screeching halt on all the second birds. Undaunted, I walked to post 5 with the thought that all I really needed to do was keep the gun swinging and all would be well. Oh, I kept the gun swinging alright, but now, I found that my head was nowhere close to being attached to the stock. You can imagine how well that worked out.

When I walked off the line there was another group of shooters going out to shoot a doubles practice. One of those shooters was a guy named Dennis Hamamura. He was the best doubles shooter in the Upland Gun Club and I figured I better watch this guy and see how he shot the targets on posts 4 and 5. What I saw was that not only did he break them all, he shot all of the right birds first. I thought to myself, in singles the right hand target on 4 and 5 were my favorite birds, but the timing at which I shot them was faster than what was needed to break them in doubles as a second target. Maybe, if I shot them first I would have more success. So, I asked my mom if I could try one more round of doubles and when I did I shot every right bird on every post first. The results were about the same on posts 1, 2 and 3, but posts 4 and 5 were considerably better and even more important, to me, was that they felt more natural.

I have shot every round since that first round shooting the right bird first on every post and despite some very notable shooters over the years saying that I was doing it wrong, I feel that I have had a pretty successful go of it. I have had yearly averages of 98% or higher 31 times and in 2003 I carded an average of 99.67. In 2008 I broke 1130 straight over the course of five months. That being said, success was not immediate and it took me three years and 4500 ATA targets before my averages cracked the 90 percent mark. However, when I did it was like someone turned on a light switch and I could suddenly see. In the target year of 1984 I shot 2200 targets and put together a 87.36 average, but the following year I shot 2900 targets and held a 95.41 average. As with everything, practice makes perfect. The thing that I did was to stick to the plan. Sure there were bumps in the road and did I make slight changes to my technique?

Absolutely, but the core strategy never changed. The same can be said about my Singles and Handicap strategies, but that's a different article.

Many folks get intimidated by doubles simply because there are two targets in the air at the same time. Heck, just shooting one target can be tough, right? Well here's the thing; what makes that one target tough is the fact that the machine is oscillating and you don't know where it's going to go. Think about it, if the machine was locked on a certain target and you knew which way it was going every time, how much better would you shoot? A lot, I'm sure. Well in doubles the machine is locked and you know exactly where the first target is going. You also know where the second target is going. Whether you shoot the right bird first on all the posts or if you shoot doubles in the more conventional method, not being intimidated by two birds in the air is step one towards being a successful doubles shooter.

Now for all you conventional style doubles shooters out there, here are my takes on shooting posts 1, 2 and 3. On post one my hold point is just to the left of where the right bird leaves the house (six inches to the right of the back left corner on most trap houses) and about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{5}$ the target's total height. The height above the house can change depending on what the targets look like and what the wind is doing, but generally I will shift the hold point down more often than up. When I say to the left of the right hand bird, this is because the "straight away" target from post 1 is actually a slight left angle. My intention with this target is to make an aggressive move to it and also to eliminate as much lateral movement as possible while shooting it fairly low in the horizon.

Using this method allows me to attack the second target from beneath without using the dreaded dip method on the second bird. I say dreaded because while there are times when it is absolutely necessary, the dip method leaves the shooter open to cutting the dip off too soon and shooting behind the second target. This is because it is easy to block your sight of the target with your barrel right at the critical time when the trigger needs to be pulled. Post 1 should be an easier post for right handed shooters because they are bringing the gun into their face when moving to the left for the second target.

Post two is similar to post 1, however the hold point is farther to the right. On this post the "straight away" target is a slight right angle. It is not much of an angle though and shooting it requires no need to be on its right hand edge. The height of my hold would be the same as it was on the previous post and shooting it aggressively, again helps with what you will have left on the second bird.

The third post is the first tricky post, because you are dealing with two legitimate angle targets. My hold point for post 3 is on the front (where the target comes out) right hand corner of the house. Depending on the target height I will usually hold slightly lower to ensure that in no way do my barrels interfere with my ability to see the target as it goes over my gun. The move to the first bird is a diagonal move up and to the right and as before, with enough speed that I won't be shooting a falling target on the second bird. Hey trap guns shoot high, right? Shooting a dropping angle target with a gun that shoots high seems like more math than I can probably do in the short time that I have to do it.

Ok, now we can talk about post 4. My foot position is similar to my post 4 foot position in singles and handicap, with my left foot at the 12 o'clock position and my right foot at 4 O'Clock, but with the toes of my lead foot (left) turned more to the right.

The reason for this is to be able to use my left leg as a brake. My hold point is 2 feet to the right of the front right corner and about 6-12 inches high. As with the other posts I will adjust down if needed but almost never up. It is very important that the target goes over the top of my barrel and not through it. The move to the target is an aggressive diagonal to the right with no follow through. All pretty simple so far, right? Essentially what I am shooting is a quarter right singles target that I know is coming. Because I know it's coming I can shoot this target a bit quicker than if it were an oscillating singles target. It is important to stop the movement to the right immediately because if you don't there will be too much momentum when you start swinging the barrels to the left. Too much momentum can cause you to swing past the second bird. I like to use an exaggerated dip, or what I call a hook to the second target, ensuring that I approach it from beneath.





Post 5 if you are shooting the right bird first can be a little scary at first, however if you are able to shoot the first bird aggressively, consistently breaking pairs from this post is completely doable. The set up starts with the foot position and for me, that is a 12 O'clock and 5 O'clock stance. As with post 4 the left foot is pointed more to the right so that I can use my left leg as a brake. I hold the gun 5 feet to the right of the front right corner and usually no more than 4 inches high. Because I am a two eyed shooter I am able to look just over my beads with my "soft focus" and still see the first bird coming with my peripheral vision. A one eyed shooter may not be able to cheat as far to the right. An aggressive move diagonally up and to the right with no follow through is required for the first bird, so you need to be ready when you say "pull". Alright, the first bird is a boiling cauldron of soot, now what?

Well you need to remember that the left target is a mirror of the right bird on post 1. That is to say it is not a straight away. It is actually a slight right angle, or what I call an inside straight away. Now, I have just shot a hard right and now I need to move the gun to the left in order to shoot another target that is tailing to the right. As with post 4 I use the exaggerated dip or hook move to the second target and here is where the left leg is used as a brake. Because 70% of my weight is on that front leg, it is a pivot and since my foot is pointed toward the right, my knee and my hip will help me start to bind up as I get closer to the bird with the gun. This helps to keep me from blowing right by it with the momentum of the leftward swing.

If this all sounds too complicated, understand that as a right handed shooter, shooting the right bird first on every post allows me to bring the gun into my face for every second shot.

This is important because, not only is it easier to keep your head on the gun, it is easier to control the swing to the left because the swing is coming toward the body. On posts 4 and 5 shooting the left bird as a second target makes sense because the target is not moving away from you at an angle, in fact on post 5 it is coming in. What this means is that the targets are closer together when they are shot and therefore there is less gun movement between the two targets.

It is important to remember that whether you are using this method or shooting doubles in the more conventional way, being ready when you say "pull" and getting your eyes (eye) to the second bird immediately after shooting the first target are critical factors. So too is your balance. Many shooters do not control the front end of the gun well and this results in the shooter being stood up after the first shot.

When this happens it is easy to be on your back leg when on the way to the second target. Bad things like stopping the gun, lifting your head and arm shooting can and will make for a long and painful day if you try to shoot off the back leg.

Shooting the right bird first on every post may not be for everyone, however more and more folks are coming over to the dark side all the time. About half of the people that I do lessons with ask me to show them how to do it and the vast majority of those folks are glad they switched. If you are someone thinking about shooting the right birds first, I hope this has been helpful. Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day. It takes time to become comfortable with anything new. Practice, pay attention and stick to your game plan. Good things will happen.