Shooting Vision and Visualization

By Frank Neumayer

Q uestion: I wear glasses and contacts, and I know good vision is important when shooting, but I'm seeing the targets well enough to break some decent scores. Prescription shooting glasses are pretty expensive... so I hesitate. What are your thoughts on the subject?

Answer: Seeing the target well is so critical to being successful that I consider it the "most" important of the fundamental elements of clay target shooting. If you want to post high scores on a consistent basis, it's imperative that you see each and every target as well as possible every time. I consider good vision so important that I have my eyes checked every year to make certain that my prescription hasn't changed. If there is any significant change, especially with my distance vision, I promptly update my shooting lenses regardless of the expense. I consider my shooting glasses an investment of equal importance to any of my shotguns! The major benefit to shooting glasses is they offer broader visibility coupled with interchangeable lens colors for those ever changing lighting conditions. Over the years I've narrowed down my lens choices to two or three colors so the expense is manageable when necessary. For every clay target shooter who takes competition seriously, the cost of shooting glasses should be seen as only a small part of the expense... it's just that important!

Primary and Secondary Vision

Start out by making certain your vision is corrected to the standard 20/20 baseline. With that done, let's focus on understanding the two major components that make up your vision. These components are your primary and your secondary vision. Your primary vision (acuity) relates to your ability to "hard focus" on specific details with clarity and distinction. This happens when you center your vision on the moving target and lock onto the leading edge. Your secondary (periphery vision) deals with large objects or scenes including the background. With your eyes out in the breaking zone, the rib, bead, and barrel should appear only as a blur. At the time you call for the target, your focus is broad and general and you're not applying any detailed or hard focus on the target as yet. Following the call, the target is first seen as a blur in your secondary or periphery vision, and then as you start applying hard focus by locking onto the target and its leading edge, your primary vision takes over and allows you to complete the target breaking process successfully.

One eye versus two eyes

When a shooter uses only one eye they engage in the process of "aiming" at the target. This limits their secondary or periphery vision and limits the amount of light coming into their eyes. With less light coming into our eyes, they dilate, we squint, and when this happens we lose depth-of-field. We're also limiting ourselves to about 50% of our field-of-view, along with a substantial decrease in our depth perception. One-eyed shooters will usually hold a lower gun in order to pick-up the target quicker as it leaves the trap house. Then, as the target first appears they sense depth, and as it comes closer they lock onto it as they enter into the process. This third dimension offers us a much broader field-of-view, and allows for much deeper depth perception and clarity throughout each and every phase and step of the target breaking process.

Visualization

One of the most important elements required when it comes to breaking "moving" clay targets is the ability to visualize. Crucial to being successful, is a shooter's ability to visualize the flight path, speed, and direction of the target before the call, especially when shooting Skeet, 5-stand, and Sporting Clays. Visualization when shooting clay targets is simply the ability to create or replay a picture in your mind of a moving target that really isn't there. Some people think they don't have the ability to envision an event before it happens, that they don't possess this unique capability. My belief is that every person has the ability to imagine to some degree or another. The key lies in ones ability to maintain concentration and sharp focus. If you're having a hard time with this concept, you simply need to apply a little more effort on concentrating, imagining, and staying focused on a single subject or object in order to improve your ability to visualize.

A key to being able to visualize target presentation, is to have done your homework and studied every aspect of the game you want to shoot. Also, in order to have mental pictures to recall, you first need to have watched, focused, and imprinted on your mind, the exact flight paths, speeds, and picture in your mind a ball player running the bases from first to third, and then from third back to first. Pay particular attention to the details you've placed on the runner. What's the style and color of his hat, socks, shoes, and uniform? What number is he wearing? Maybe, you can even envision your favorite player in this scene? Now... with your eyes open, can you still envision this same scene with all your specific details included? The key is being able to block out the sensory overload that goes on when your eyes are open, and still sharply focus all of your attention on this scene from your mind. It may not come easy, and it may take some extra effort and discipline, but when a shooter is consistently able to visualize like this, most all of the distractions become minimized and their full concentration is focused in the game, and on tracking and breaking every target presented.

Again, seeing the target well at all times is crucial to breaking good scores and winning events. It's important that you make certain that your vision is corrected as well as protected at all times. Not only are shooting glasses used for protection, but equally important is the large variety of lens colors available that will present the target with the best clarity and definition possible, while at the same time allowing your eyes to relax and focus sharply. For me the Orange Crimson Purple lenses seem to work the best for orange targets in normal and bright light, with lighter backgrounds. In overcast or low light conditions Yellow, Gold, or Clear lenses seem to work the best for green targets, with darker backgrounds. Because every shooter's eyes are unique and different, you should see your eye doctor and lens provider for all the specific details. Remember, your vision is such a precious gift; I almost lost mine years ago in an accident, and ever since then I've never taken my vision for granted!

If you have a specific question, send me an email at claybran@msn.com and I'll do my best to get it answered. Please keep your questions brief and to the point. See you at the club... Frank