Gun Wisdom

Kicking the Bear

By Clayton Rue

Eye dominance issues have a tendency to rear their heads on specific presentations. The trick is figuring out which ones trigger problems for you.

Many years ago, I routinely struggled with straight away/up/incoming targets. That is, until Kevin Sterk (NSCA Level III Instructor and Chief Shooting Instructor for Griffin and Howe) watched me shoot a couple of these targets and told me I was missing them due to my eye dominance. At the time I was a Master-Class shooter and already an NSCA Level III instructor, so I was skeptical of his diagnosis. But, as all shooters should be, I was open to learning something new.



Kevin then introduced me to a new way of looking at eye dominance. Historically, eye dominance has been assigned by using a test that gives a binary answer of either right-eye dominant or left-eye dominant. The results of this test were then used to decide which shoulder a shooter should shoot his gun off of, and that was the end of the discussion.

But eye dominance is not as simple as right or left. Through the research of people like Dr. Richard Colo, OD, we now know that our brain assigns an eye dominance position based on input from both eyes, and he explains, "Eye dominance is never as simple as left or right, but is a cyclopian position located somewhere between the right and left eye." Now, this statement is way above my pay grade, but I now see evidence of what it means in my students every day.

Simply put, if a person's eye dominance position is located somewhere between his right pupil and the bridge of his nose, then he is broadly categorized as right-eye dominant. The converse is true if his eye dominance position is located on the other side of his face. What is important to understand about this is that only a rare few people have an eye dominance position that exactly aligns with the pupil of the eye.

So, what does this mean to a shooter? It means that most of us will have an off-set between our unique eye dominance position and the eye we are using to look down the barrels. This offset can be large or small, as can its impact on the shooter. And this offset is like a sleeping bear. It will sleep peacefully in its den until the shooter decides to go in and kick it. Then the shooter's score card takes a mauling, and he will wonder what just happened.

So, what can we as shooters do to minimize the effects of eye dominance on our scorecards? The best answer is to get a detailed eye test performed by a highly trained and experienced instructor. Then, he will be able to draw on his years of experience to help you identify presentations that will most likely kick the bear for you and provide you some corrective action steps to help keep the bear in his cave. Until you can make this happen, there are several steps that can be taken by every shooter to help minimize the impacts of eye dominance.

KEEP THE BEAR IN HIS DEN

First, you should always minimize your barrel awareness on targets that cause problems for you. Dr. Colo states, "The level of conscious relationship between the bird and barrel determines the significance of the eye dominance point." What this means is that the more aware you are of the bird/barrel relationship, the more likely you are to experience a miss due to your eye dominance.

Minimizing your barrel awareness can be accomplished in several different ways. First, you should increase your intense focus on the leading edge of the target. This will decrease your awareness of the barrels and allow the subconscious to execute the shot for you. This is excellent advice for every target.

A second universal suggestion is to ensure your eyes engage with the target before your muzzles begin to move. This allows our focus to go directly to the leading edge of the target. If you start your muzzles moving prior to your eyes engaging the target, your eyes will want to go to the muzzles, and we all know this will really piss off the bear. So, remember, on every target: eyes first!

Another way to keep the bear in his den is to minimize the amount of time your barrels and the target spend in close proximity to each other. The more time you spend with your barrels connected to the target, the more likely the conscious mind will try to take over. The more your conscious mind gets involved, the more likely your eyes are to look at the lead. And as soon as you look at the lead, the bear has you.

One of the most effective ways to minimize time spent with the target is to attempt the problem target from a low-gun ready position. This will keep the muzzles as far away from the eyes as possible for as long as possible. It's only when you become aware of both the barrels and target that your eye dominance may become a problem for you. And since we all know that when shooting from a low gun ready position, we should always release the shot at the exact instant the

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