THREE STEPS TO HEAVEN

So your shooting season has started and, despite all that practice, your form has deserted you. What do you do now? Chris Hanks from Lady's Wood Shooting School discusses the key areas to concentrate on.

With the season now well under way, we are starting to see customers here at Lady's Wood who have shot a few days returning for a mid-season brush up. We are also seeing those who "let work get in the way" during the summer — a poor excuse for not practising in the close season — are coming in reporting to us that the wheels have fallen off.

Often in November the shooting school feels like a doctor's drop-in clinic. A consultation takes place on our way to the first stand, a few shots are taken and a diagnosis of problems quickly established. This is quickly followed up with a direct dose of rectification and within an hour (most of the time) symptoms diminish and the patient returns to the "game".

There are a few common problems that we see frequently this time of year but there are also ways to avoid them.

GUN MOUNT

I am a stickler for getting gun mount right. Shooting starts from the ground up, as with a good stance, correct weight distribution and a smooth, consistent mount — taking the shot is so much easier.

The mount is either rushed and leads to over-leading the bird and coming off its line or the cheek is simply not on the stock in the correct place or the head is not down/forward enough. This even goes to the extremes of a cheek not even touching the gun.

Generally, with a well-fitted gun a consistent mount is relatively easy to practice and establish. I find practising at home with an (unloaded) gun can really help create a good muscle memory. The easiest way is to stand facing the corner of a room with your body angled as if that is where your target is coming from. Focus on the corner where the walls meet the ceiling and slowly mount your gun. You must ensure you are standing correctly and mount as if the corner is your target. Take three to five seconds from gun down to fully mounted, hold for three to five seconds in the mounted position focusing on your target spot then dismount taking again three to five seconds. Taking just five minutes to do this before bed for a few nights will make such a difference.



Those who mount incorrectly may not even have their cheek touching the gun.

FOOTWORK

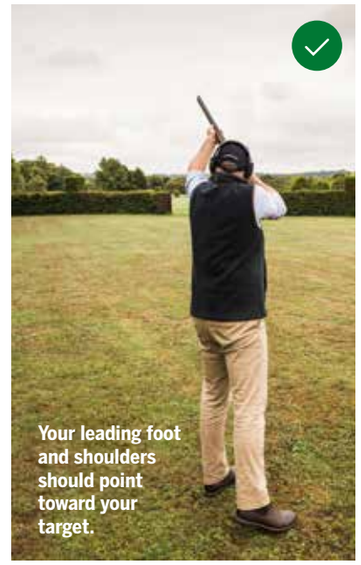
Many people, during a flush of pheasants or when a covey of partridges bursts over a hedgerow, forget that they can move. People come to me saying they are fine shooting birds over their heads but struggle with crossers. Apart from the obvious requirement of establishing the correct lead and line, the next most common fault to shooting these birds is footwork, or lack of it.

At Lady's Wood, as with any other good game shooting school, we have the facilities to teach Guns the correct way to move on the peg. This is greatly aided by the lack of shooting cages. On our small and high towers we can simulate birds from all manner of different heights, speeds, angles and distances which all equate to you the gun, being better prepared for the peg.

When a bird presents itself to either your left or right you must step toward it with your leading foot and step far enough around so your shoulders and leading foot are pointing towards the place you wish to shoot it. Easier said than done.



If you don't place your feet correctly, you will struggle to step into the swing.



Your leading foot and shoulders should point toward your target.

A good way to practise this away from the shooting school is during your five-minute pre-shoot drills. You can step to alternate sides from the central position of being angled to the corner the room and step, mount and swing — with the swing following the line of where the ceiling meets the wall. Timing of the step, mount and swing is very important and will take some practice. Though the drills at home are good, there is no substitute for being guided through the process by an experienced game coach. ➤



Practise mounting your gun for a few minutes every day to get good muscle memory.



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"Each Gun has their problem bird, bad habits and faults that could be improved upon. There is no substitute for good practice."



The Guns would all get to a certain point in their swing and bang — they missed behind because they had all their weight on the back foot, so much so that one was leaning backwards.

WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION

I had three customers who all suffered with the same problem of straight/driven birds. They couldn't create enough lead to hit higher birds. Lower birds of 20 to 30 yards were not a problem for them and they were all pretty consistent. But as soon as we attempted to move up on to the higher birds 40 yards and over, they couldn't create enough lead. They would all get to a certain point in their swing that was just before vertical and bang — miss behind. They had become increasingly frustrated with themselves out on peg that "something wasn't right" and I could see the problem.

Each one was starting with all of the weight on the back foot. One of them, so much so, that they were leaning backwards before mounting. To rectify the problem we needed to alter their posture to being much more upright with a straight back, then transfer around 60 to 70 per cent of their weight to the front foot. Now with the stance, weight and gun mount rectified the shots were being taking sooner and with the kick in of the hips and as the gun came from 45˚ though to 90˚, they were able to add a little more speed into the barrels and therefore lead on to the bird.

Give this a try if you struggle to lead on higher driven birds and if you want to practise it at home — make sure you have fairly high ceilings and no low-hanging chandeliers in the room.

These are only three of the common faults we come across during the season; each Gun has his or her problem bird, bad habit and faults that could be improved upon. There is no substitute for good practice and experienced guidance to build confidence in yourself and your ability as a gun.

For more information about the services offered at Lady's Wood Shooting School, visit ladyswood.co.uk