

# Proper Use of Hyper Focus

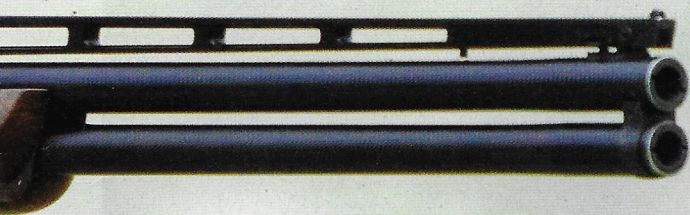
Trying to hyper focus on the target too soon will lead to visual faults and missed targets.

BY JOHN D. SHIMA

One of my most common maxims in coaching clay target shooters is to watch the target until it breaks. When I say “watch the target,” I mean to watch it continuously, even after the gun fires. Watching the target continuously is critical because this visual input to the brain activates and maintains eye-hand-foot coordination, which synchronizes muzzle speed to target speed.

I believe synchronization of muzzle movement with the speed of the target is more important than the lead picture. Visual deceptions will occur whenever the muzzle is moving faster or slower than the target. These visual deceptions will alter the shooter’s perception of actual lead because asynchronous movement of the muzzle attracts the focal point of the shooting eye, which severely alters depth of focus.

I’ve discussed the optical illusion phenomenon in my books and in several articles. The shooting eye will naturally shift focus from a moving object in the distance to another object that is larger, closer or moving faster. This phenomenon causes the shooting eye to suddenly shift its point of focus from the clay target to the end of the muzzle, or somewhere in the space between the two moving objects. Whenever the shooting eye shifts its point of focus, it also affects the shooter’s depth of focus. Consistent lead pictures rely on a consistent depth of focus in the break zone.



## CONCENTRATION AND FOCUS

I am firmly convinced that a quiet mind and continuously watching the target during the shot sequence are the keys to consistency in the clay target sports. Prior to each shot, the shooter must eliminate all unnecessary thoughts, just pay attention to watching the next target, and then focus intently on a piece of the target while firing the gun.

It requires concentration to use your conscious mind correctly. Eckhart Tolle explained in *The Power of Now*, “The beginning of freedom is the realization that you are not the thinker.” Tolle was admonishing his readers to stop identifying with their thoughts. Instead, make a conscious decision to live in the present moment, in which there is no thinking, only experiencing. When the mind is quiet, there is no fear and no judgment — only awareness. When a shooter’s awareness is exclusively paying attention to the flight of the next target, the only thing the conscious mind should be concerned about is how to focus his or her eyes on the target.



ing the past decade, I’ve introduced several terms and concepts to explain another one of my maxims: “The way you look determines what you see.” When someone who knows how to shoot hires me to fix a shooting problem, my primary objective is to determine what “pictures” their eyes are seeing when they are pointing their shotgun at clay targets. A shooter’s

▲ You must maintain a consistent depth of focus in the break zone (no looking at the gun!) in order to see a consistent lead picture.

perception of lead pictures is ultimately influenced by the depth of focus at the time the shotgun is fired. The elements of depth of focus are:

- **Soft Focus** – I’ve described expanded soft focus as “driving vision” because the peripheral visual field is expanded to detect movement while your central vision is looking down the road. Expanded soft focus at the eye hold allows the shooter’s eyes to look above and beyond the muzzle to see the target emerge into the visual field to determine its



◀ Quiet your mind to the point where you’re only focusing and experiencing, not thinking.

speed, direction, and distance.

• **Blended Focus** – As the target emerges, the soft focus will allow the shooting eye to center its focus on the target while maintaining an awareness of the muzzle moving along with the target in the foreground. This allows the adaptive unconscious to synchronize muzzle speed to target speed. As the target approaches the break zone, the twinge of uncertainty will cause the blended focus to shift from 70% on the target to 50% on the target and 50% on the muzzle to verify the lead picture. This shift in depth of focus decreases muzzle speed.

• **Absolute Focus** – As the target approaches the break zone, the shooting eye must shift to 90% focus on the target, which creates the perception of a muzzle receding into the foreground. This tends to increase the ego's twinge of uncertainty, which can only be overridden by hyper focusing on the target.

• **Hyper Focus** – Despite the subtle feeling of uncertainty, the shooter must instruct his or her eye to instantly hard focus on a specific portion of the target, which is the signal to the adaptive unconscious to pull the trigger.

Managing the watching reflex requires conscious attention to each element: soft focus -> blended focus -> absolute focus -> hyper focus. The continuous flow of visual data enables the adaptive unconscious to manage synchronization of muzzle speed to target

▼ Hyper focus is reserved for the break zone, and it is the signal to pull the trigger. Don't hyper focus too soon, because it won't last.



speed, and the instant of hyper focus provides the signal to fire the shotgun automatically while it continues to track the speed of the target.

## MANAGING HYPER FOCUS

I introduced the basic incomer drill for skeet shooters more than 30 years ago to re-wire the brains of analytical shooters. Since its inception, I have used the incomer drill to manage problems that shooters experience with assorted mechanical, visual and mental aspects of the game. I use a specific variation of the drill to help shooters understand their depth of focus, and to properly manage the transition from soft focus to hyper focus during each shot. The hyper focus drill consists of the following sequence of shots:

- Station 1 - an incomer, an outgoer and an incomer.
- Station 2 - an incomer, an outgoer and an incomer.
- Station 3 - an incomer, an outgoer and an incomer.
- Station 4 - a low, a high, a low and a high target.
- Station 5 - an incomer, an outgoer and an incomer.
- Station 6 - an incomer, an outgoer and an incomer.
- Station 7 - an incomer, an outgoer and an incomer.

When the eyes are allowed to watch a single moving object naturally, they will maintain a relatively consistent depth of focus, unless they are distracted by another object. When there are two moving objects in the visual field, the eyes will naturally focus on the object that is largest, closest, and fastest. With this concept in mind, it seems reasonable that maintaining your depth of focus on an incoming target on stations 1 and 7 will require more patience and concentration than on stations 3 and 5.

So, the purpose of the drill is to pay attention to the manner in which your eyes transition from expanded soft focus at the eye hold, to blended focus, during synchronization and tracking, to absolute focus in the break zone, and finally to hyper focus as you fire the shotgun. Any concern about the outcome of each shot will be a distraction that maintains blended focus and prevents the transition to hyper focus on the target.

## TIMING OF HYPER FOCUS

I am convinced that the visual deceptions experienced by most shooters are the result of mismanaging their depth of focus, which means they attempt to hard focus on the emerging target too soon. Timing for hyper focusing on the target is determined by the desired break zone. For the purpose of the drill described above, the designated break zone is above the center stake for incomers and before the center stake for outgoers.

Just as there is a specific cadence for shooting doubles at each station, there is a proper cadence for “see it, watch it...focus, fire” for incomers, and “see it...focus, fire” for outgoers. In other words, it requires a measure of patience to watch the slower incoming targets emerge.

Concentration on managing the cadence of focus and the depth of focus should eliminate the tension of execution and the twinge of uncertainty, because there is no intention to break the target. The flight of the target is merely used to rehearse the cadence applied to the shooter’s depth of focus.



▲ The hyper focus drill, outlined on the previous page, will help you train your eyes and your mind to focus correctly.

lems” rather than training the shooter’s eyes to correctly focus on the targets.

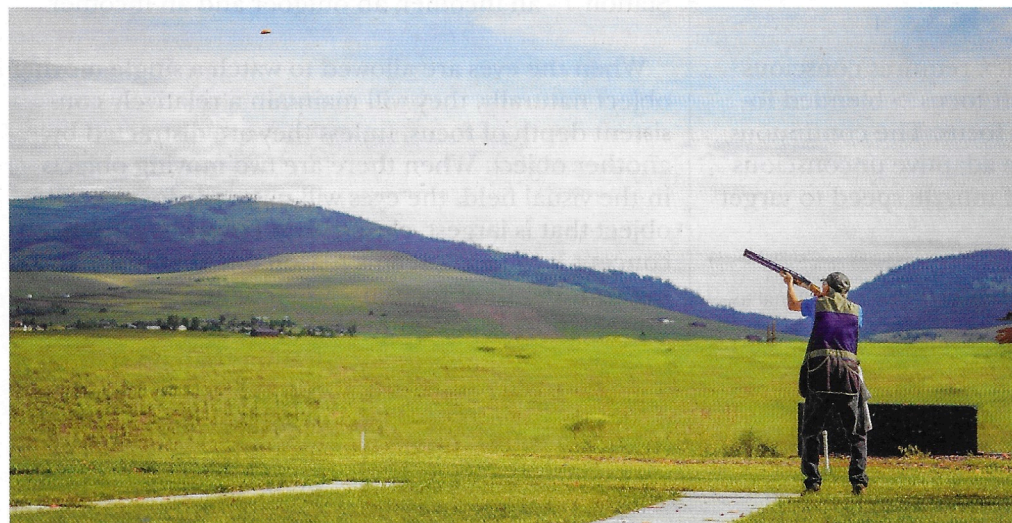
Every experienced shooter understands the relevance of visual acuity (eyesight) and eye dominance.

I find that most shooters are not aware of the relevance of visual fatigue. The small intraocular muscles that change the focal distance (depth of focus) of the lens of the eye fatigue with frequent use. Focusing too hard on targets too soon overuses these small muscles and accelerates visual fatigue.

Since most shooters spend most of their waking hours looking at objects or text that is within

a few feet of their eyes, the converging muscles are much stronger than the diverging muscles. Hence, it is much easier for the shooter’s eyes to converge and focus on the end of the muzzle than it is to strain to remain focused on a smaller target 20 to 30 yards beyond it.

The purpose of the focusing drill is to strengthen the intraocular muscles responsible for visual divergence, not to develop shooting tactics just to overcome the visual deceptions that result from visual fatigue. The unfortunate consequence of ignoring visual fatigue causes shooters to experiment with various shooting tactics to break targets, rather than focusing their attention on the underlying visual problem. *CTN*



▲ Vision fatigues quickly, which is why you can’t afford to waste it by focusing on targets too soon.

## EFFECT OF HYPER FOCUS ON VISUAL PERCEPTION

I created the maxim “How you look determines what you see,” because the games played by clay target shooters are highly influenced by the conflict between the shooters’ visual perception and environmental reality. Missed targets are more often caused by visual deceptions than by inadequate shooting skills. Yet, most shooters, and many instructors, rely on various shooting tactics to “fix the shooting prob-