

## SHOOTING TIMES how to...

# Learn the basic shooting positions

Charlotte Lycett Green reports on how simply mastering the basic positions for rifle shooting will help you to make an accurate, safe shot in any situation

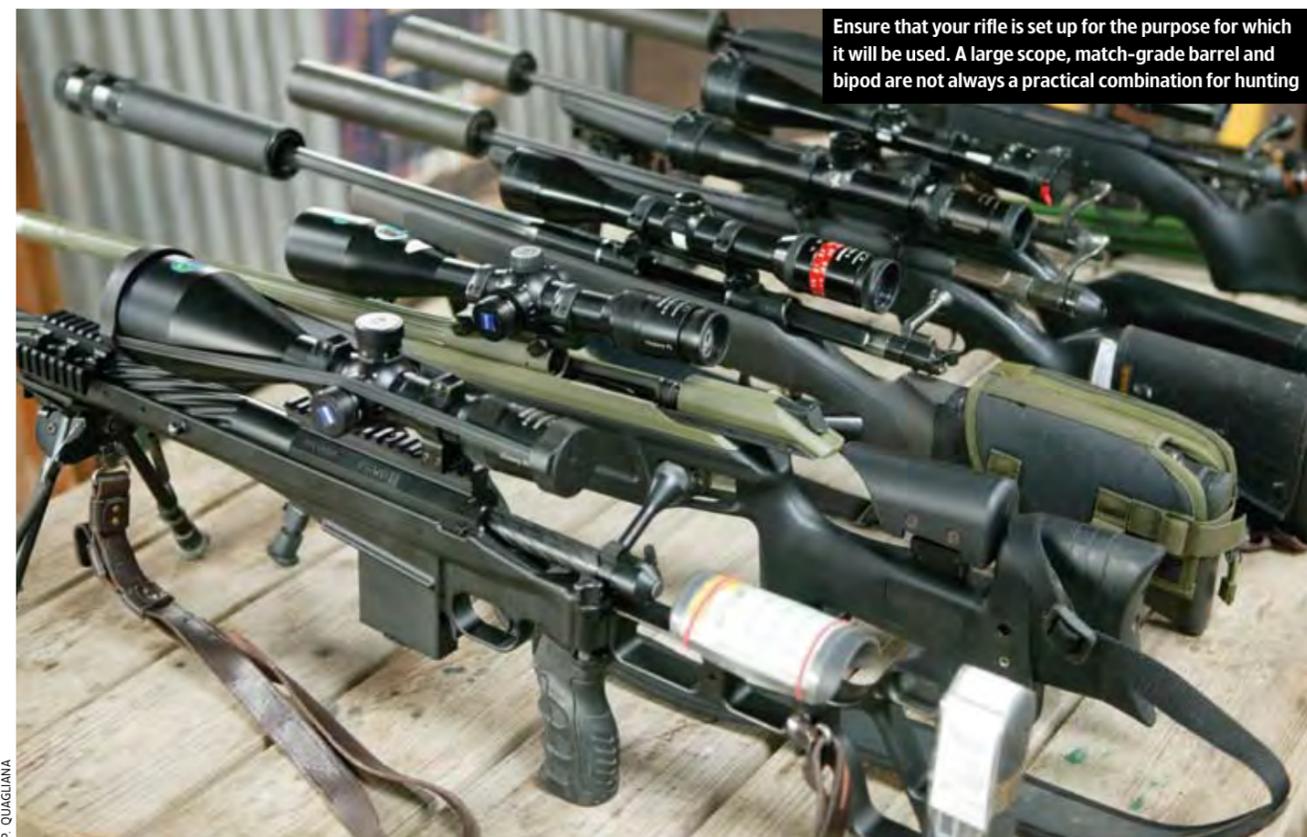
In the spring, I visited Andrew Venables' WMS Steel Challenge shooting facility in mid Wales for a day's rifle shooting coaching in preparation for a hunting trip of a lifetime to New Zealand (*A day on the range*, 5 May). The site provides clients with the opportunity to shoot at life-size painted steel targets of corvids, rabbits, foxes, deer and boar, among other types of targetry, at all possible ranges and in natural surroundings. There are no manicured firing points and the rolling topography

added challenges of steeply angled shots and gusting wind. It's a realistic environment to shoot in and an invaluable experience for anyone with a passion for rifle shooting and a desire to improve.

The purpose of my visit this time was to discuss different shooting positions and how they can be used effectively in practice. There is a huge range of shooting accessories now available to the rifle shot, each claiming to improve accuracy, shrink groupings and provide the solution to all our problems. Though

modern technology has largely improved shooting equipment, Andrew first of all favours a back-to-basics approach, with solid skills and experience being the foundation of accurate and safe shooting, rather than a reliance on the latest accessory to muddle through.

"Manufacturers are always trying to invent solutions to problems that don't really exist, which has resulted in a flood of new products being invented," he explained. "The solutions to your shooting problems are only found



Ensure that your rifle is set up for the purpose for which it will be used. A large scope, match-grade barrel and bipod are not always a practical combination for hunting

P. QUAGLIANA

if you look back to how it was done before we had access to all this new stuff. You need the solid basic skills before you begin to experiment with other things, and often the simpler your rifle's set-up, the better.

"Here at the shooting facility, we

constantly practise what we don't do out shooting. As such, our knowledge is based on the theory of what we and our firearms are capable of, but which we hope we will not have put into practice."

The theory is that, as rifle shots, we should be able to make a shot in

any situation, whether it be from a tree, sticks, sitting or standing, or to have the confidence simply to say no to the shot.

To ensure this is possible we must first be using the correct rifle for the job and, second, we need to practise shooting from different positions.

## Are you using the correct set-up?

"The Mauser MO3 allows for different barrels and calibres to be fitted to a common stock and action, making it a one-gun solution in whatever calibre's needed," explained Andrew. In a three-stage process, he demonstrated how the rifle could be equipped for practical use.

### 1: The theoretical stage

Here, the Mauser was fully dressed with all its accessories, including a sound moderator, a match-grade barrel, sling and bipod. It was long and heavy when I raised it to my shoulder as well as awkwardly weighted, thanks to the moderator and bipod. Though it would be rock solid when shooting from the prone position at 300 yards, it would be less practical for anything else.

"I find that people will often choose a match-grade barrel because it's theoretically more accurate, so they think it will help their stalking. However, you've felt the weight of the rifle with the moderator and bipod on — now tell me whether it's a practical set-up for stalking on the hill or in woodland," asked Andrew.



### 2: Strip it down

For the next stage, Andrew removed the sound moderator and bipod, leaving the sling attached, and handed me the rifle. The difference was noticeable immediately. While still a touch heavy, the rifle had become much more pointable and practical.



### 3: Why do you need a match-grade barrel?

"There is an increasing trend for rifle shooters to want to shoot the smallest groups possible, and as a result they have a rifle that's set up with a bipod, large scope, moderator and match barrel that will shoot a tiny group at long range — in essence, it's set up for theoretical rather than practical shooting. Here, I have stripped the rifle back to a handy state with a standard-weight barrel," Andrew said. "The difference between using a match barrel and an ordinary barrel when you're shooting live quarry is minimal. It's the difference between shooting a 3/4in group compared with a 1in group. The lightweight hunting barrel will normally put three shots into a similar-sized group as a match barrel might put 10 — and the question is, how many shots do you fire when you're hunting?" When the match barrel and moderator were compared with the ordinary barrel and moderator, the latter showed a clear difference in length, weight and portability (see picture below).



▲ There is a clear difference in length between the match barrel and moderator (top) and the standard hunting barrel and moderator (bottom). Weight and portability are also affected

To complete the experiment, Andrew reattached the sound moderator — he prefers to use one for the benefits it provides in reducing recoil and protecting your hearing and that of those around you.

The rifle was now ready for an excursion into the field. "The point is that the rifle must be fit for the purpose you are going to use it for, not for the theoretical," said Andrew. "When you arrive at new ground, you never know what the terrain is going to be like, so if there is 2ft of grass everywhere then a standard bipod is going to be of no use and you will be carrying and shooting with unnecessary weight. On the other hand, you might shoot there regularly for the same species and decide that your favourite position is sitting, in which case, fitting a long bipod could be beneficial. Successful shooting is all about being flexible and having the ability to shoot with 'nothing' first and foremost. Then you can add the accessories you know will work on the ground that you're shooting on."

# Adopting the correct positions

For safety and economy, the various slung shooting positions should be practised initially while dry firing (simulated firing using a checked unloaded rifle in a safe place) and then with a .22 rimfire or small-calibre rifle before using full-bore with live ammunition.

## Standing

### 1: Standing freehand

Take up a typical shotgun stance, with weight through your feet and your body and rifle pointing naturally at the target. It is hard to hold this position, so the longer you wait to take the shot, the more wobbly everything will become.



### 2: Standing using a sling

There are two types of sling that can be used:



**A synthetic two-point sling**  
A two-point sling that enables a basic slung firing position.



**A 1907 leather military two-point sling**  
With a loop that fits around your arm, when used correctly, this provides a stable support that can be used in any position.

#### How to use it

1. Pull the loop in the sling out to one side.
2. Put your hand and arm down through the loop and twist it clockwise so the sling wraps round your arm, then grip the fore-end.
3. Place the butt of the rifle into your shoulder. Drop your supporting elbow into the side of the chest to create tension in the sling, ensuring that you're pointing naturally at the target.



**Experiment:** try a basic freehand stance and then try the same thing using the military sling — you will see that stability is improved dramatically.

## Prone

### 1: Using a sling

Pull the sling around the upper arm and rest the fore-end on the supporting hand. This will create tension in the sling and a stable position.



### 2: Hawkins method

Use the fist to support the fore-end — make sure that you have adequate muzzle clearance.



## Sitting

This is a handy position to master. Remember to avoid any unnatural muscle tension.

### 1: Using a military two-point sling

1. Depending on your degree of flexibility, sit either with your legs crossed or stretched out and elbows resting on your knees. Your feet should be secure, so kick your heels into the ground to gain a bit of purchase and make the position more stable.
2. Using the sling correctly, find the steadiest position that avoids muscle tension or straining. It helps to have something to lean against, such as a tree or bank, which will provide some support to your back.



### 2: Using a Harris bipod

1. The position for using a bipod is the same as for using a sling. Make sure your heels are dug in and that you can rest both your elbows on your knees. How you do this will take some experimenting and will depend on how flexible you are.
2. Make sure the bipod is at the correct height and ensure that your sight picture is correct before making the shot.



## Sticks

Many stalkers use sticks when stalking in woodland, but they can be difficult to deploy quietly and without obvious movement. Remember that in woodland situations you're never that far from a tree, which could provide a perfect rest with minimal movement and noise. All you have to do is get to the tree, put a hand on it and you have almost exactly the same shooting position as you would from sticks.



#### How to use shooting sticks

1. Rather than resting the fore-end directly on the sticks, try different positions where your hand maintains control of both the sticks and the rifle. This will make reloading and any other movement easier — you don't want the position to fall apart if you need to take a second shot.
2. Stand up straight — avoid sticking your backside out and pulling down on the rifle, as this will create tension in your back, which will start to hurt after a while. ■



To contact Andrew Venables, tel 01686 440782 or 07767 365804. WMS sells the English bridle leather military two-point sling that we used on the day. Viking Arms imports a version from the US, which can be ordered at most gunshops.