

THIS MONTH: The basics

GETTING BACK TO BASICS

Andrew Venables of WMS Firearms Training introduces his new training series to help us all shoot safer and better

Fear the man with one gun. It's an old and well-proven saying, although the word 'man' should now perhaps be replaced by 'person' as in nature the female of the species is often more deadly. In practice, our financial affluence enables us to own a number of guns and the market place is bursting with kit and choices, offering an increasingly bewildering array of options, extras and products which all promise to make us better rifle shots.

Confused? Let's get back to basics. What makes a good rifle shot? And what do you actually need in relation to hitting the target or bagging your quarry? These questions are going to take a lot of answering, so I am grateful to the editor of this new magazine for offering me the space to try to do it.

Over the next 12 months, you, the readers, and I will take a journey through the most important basic principles and methods to empower

you to make the shot when required. Today there is an increasing tendency for people to buy an instant solution to an apparent problem, rather than seeking the answer in training followed by practice. One question I am often asked is: "What shooting sticks are the best? I really need some." When I enquire why, I'm told: "I stalk in dense woodland and need the sticks to shoot deer from 20 to perhaps 60m."

The marketplace offers dozens of different types of sticks including things to attach to your belt, bipods, tripods, quad-pods and suchlike, many of which can assist with shooting from perhaps 60m to as far as practice tells you is sensible. In dense woodland at 20-60m I find a set of sticks a total buggance, when added to binoculars and rifle: I only have two hands after all. At 20-60m, shooters should be able to cope with making a slow,

Shooting aids have their place in modern day shooting...

... but should not be a substitute for mastering proper technique



PICTURES: ANDREW VENABLES

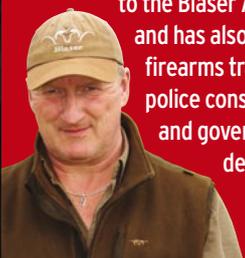




Andrew believes that: "A modest investment in preparation and practice will transform your hunting ability, ensure you can make the best of your chances, and make that expensive trip far more rewarding."

MEET THE TEAM

Renowned as one of the UK's top rifle shooting instructors, Andrew Venables has over 35 years of experience in shooting training, wildlife management and hunting. In October 2015 he was appointed as the first non-German instructor to the Blaser Academy and has also provided firearms training for UK police constabularies and government departments.



smooth gun mount and taking a standing shot every time to land the round in the required chest kill zone.

A standing shot?! Surely not, I hear you cry. But yes, with practice, standing shots are perfectly achievable and fast and deadly in animal management scenarios at closer ranges – if you have the proper technique. One of the problems with the current trend of using shooting aids in all positions is that rifle shooters can actually get away with having poor basic shooting skills.

Practising off a bench with shooting bags encourages us to let go of the rifle and rely on the aids to do the job. Heavy-barrelled hunting rifles with light triggers encourage a feather-light hold of the pistol grip and petting the trigger to release the shot. But why is it called pistol grip? Because you're meant to actually grip it to control the firearm in recoil, not subcontract the task to a bipod and a posh suede bag full of sand.

Interestingly, correcting these basic errors in shooting is the most important part of what I do on a day-to-day basis. Training someone to use the ballistic drop compensating reticule in their scope, or to understand how to set up for a long shot in a cross wind of 'X' is pointless if they can't discharge the shot without

THE FOUR SAFETY RULES

1. All guns are always loaded. Treat them as such, regardless of their 'declared condition' and you won't go far wrong.
2. Never point the gun at anything you are not willing to destroy. Imagine the firearm in your hands is like a light sabre and will slice anyone you swing it through.
3. Keep your finger off the trigger until your sights are on target (and you have made the decision to shoot). Breaking this rule is the reason for most negligent discharges

and, combined with breaking Rule Two, most deaths and injuries caused by firearms.

4. Be sure of your target and what is beyond it. Don't shoot at anything you have not fully identified as your target/quarry and be certain where your bullet will end up.

Various firearms professionals have distilled these wise words into their current form, with the version above credited to the late Colonel Jeff Cooper of Gunsite fame.

undue movement, blinking, flinching, losing sight of the target in recoil or snatching the trigger.

When I allude to 'the basics' there are four rules, one set for safety [see boxout above] and one set for accuracy. If you take these, make them yours and apply them in all of your future shooting you will be safe, accurate and humane in your actions – subject to lots of practice of course.

In the light of these words, when was the last time you felt uncomfortable looking into the muzzle of a firearm held by some friend or shooting associate? I'm going to say fairly recently and, from my perspective, fairly often given the general standard of firearms safety I see from day to day.

“STANDING SHOTS ARE PERFECTLY ACHIEVABLE – AND FAST AND DEADLY AT CLOSER RANGES”

The problem is most prevalent in latecomers to shooting who were not disciplined at an early, impressionable age. It is also evident in some target shooters who are told when their guns are loaded and unloaded by Range Conducting Officers. Once told “Weapon clear” they often seem to think it becomes a cricket bat, pool cue or walking stick and wave it about accordingly. When Rules One and Two

Being safe doesn't mean you can't enjoy your shooting



« are broken we are heading for disaster. Also, bear in mind that there are two types of shooter:

- ❶ Those who have had a negligent discharge
- ❷ Those who are going to have a negligent discharge

The most dangerous shooters of all are the ones who make assumptions: 'I thought it was unloaded'; 'I thought it had a heavier trigger'; 'I didn't think anyone was there.' In the light of this, how can we shoot safely? The best way is to always speak out if you feel uncomfortable or unsafe with another person's actions. How safe would we all be if we never missed the opportunity to say, "Slow down" or "Please point that elsewhere." I generally find the best reaction is to point my finger at the problem and simply say, "Stop."

Safety duly considered, I want the monthly articles to deal in detail with the fundamentals of good rifle shooting which also compress into four rules, as distilled by the British Armed Forces over the years:

- ❶ The shooting position must properly support the weapon
- ❷ The weapon must point naturally at the target
- ❸ The sight alignment must be correct at all times
- ❹ The shot must be released without undue movement

On a basic level, if you observe these rules you would never miss, right? Actually it's more complicated than that but these principles stand through the whole process even though that process can vary depending on position, type of sights, shape of rifle, and so on.

In my forthcoming articles I will outline how to put all of this together to make that vital, effective first shot. Remember, small groups don't harvest quarry – single, reasonably quick, well-placed shots do.

Next time I will be considering mindset and how best to hold and

CONTACT

To find out more about Andrew and WMS Firearms Training:
www.wmsfirearmstraining.com
 01974 831869
andrew@wmsfirearmstraining.com

support the rifle. In the meantime, practise pointing your index finger at the muzzle of a carelessly pointed firearm and saying, "Stop" in a forthright manner. **RS**

Next month:
Mindset and handling the rifle

Taking a proper grip is one of the essential elements of good rifle control



Whatever your target, make sure your rifle naturally points at it

