

## SHOOTING LESSONS

Dear Technoid,

I have been shooting sporting for three years. For the first two years, I made steady progress up to class C. Now I find no progress what so ever. Should I take individual lessons? Take up golf? I usually break 40 on my home course and 35 or so in NSCA tourneys. Do you have suggestions?

Richard

Dear Richard,

You should definitely take some lessons. Save golf for your dotage.

It always amazes me why shooters are often so reluctant to take lessons from a pro. No golfer or tennis player would ever seriously think about starting out without some lessons. No football player is ever without a coach. Why do we shooters insist on going it alone? Are we shooters dumb or just hard headed?

Maybe it is the John Wayne syndrome. "The Duke never needed anyone to teach him how to shoot in those movies, so I don't either." Well, real men do need lessons in how to shoot if they really want to improve.

I spent a couple of summers coaching International Skeet out at the US Olympic Training Center in the '80s. My "students" were some of the best shooters this country has produced. Two will be representing us in Atlanta 1996. They knew that an experienced coach could help them improve their performance in small ways that might just mean the difference between an Olympic medal or a bus ride home. At their level, they were more anxious for coaching than most beginners are because they knew its value.

A good coach can do a number of very important things for a shooter. More than anything else, a coach can save a shooter money and time. In order to find out the best way to do something like shoot, one has to also try out all the worst ways too. Like a mechanical rat in a maze, the uncoached shooter has to explore all the dead ends at random before finding the correct route. A coach can steer you clear of dead end approaches and concentrate on the productive methods. Savings time and money can be substantial.

As your technique solidifies, a coach can help you fit your gun. Gun fit and shooting style are a chicken and egg type deal. You cannot shoot well with a gun that does not fit properly and you cannot fit a gun until you know how to shoot properly. A coach can help you do both at once. The savings in gun stocks alone can pay for your shooting lessons for a year.

The weekend warrior shooter probably benefits most from coaching because he has the least time to devote to the sport and must make the most intelligent use of it. He does not have the time to explore all the wrong ways by himself.

Over the years I have often tried to casually help the odd shooter on my squad. I seldom do that any more because my advice is usually ignored. I have learned that most newer shooters will not listen to what you say unless they are paying for the advice. The more they pay, the more they listen. I am sure that this is a result of receiving so much bad advice from so many club house "coaches", but ignore the Technoid?! Why, my words are absolutely golden, impossible to impugn, veritable pearls of wisdom, the truth and nothing but...

Of course, coaches differ in style and ability. Just because someone shoots well does not mean that he is a good coach. Matt Dryke (Gold Medal, Los Angeles, International Skeet) is easily one of the finest shotgun shooters ever produced in this country. The problem was that he had such tremendous natural ability that he could do and see things that a normal person could never learn. You want to select a coach who is good because of his technique (which you can learn), not natural gifts (which you may not possess).

You also want a coach who "speaks your language". Everyone has a style and method of communicating. A good coach (national sporting clays champion Andy Duffy is an excellent example) can say the same thing in several different ways so that one of the explanations gets through. Andy's great achievements have come through technique and practice, not through preternatural super ability.

I once took a lesson from Roger Silcox, the dean of English school coaches. Roger just about wrote the book on sporting clays coaching. Roger teaches (and perhaps invented) the English CPSA style of low muzzle starting position. I have always been more of a high muzzle put- the-barrel-on-the-bird type. I did not get as much out of that lesson as I should have because only one style was being taught to the group and it was not a style that I was comfortable with. That certainly was not Roger's fault. The CPSA method is immensely popular and has achieved very good results. The problem was that I have spent 25 years learning to shoot another way and am too old a dog to learn new tricks now. I should have known that before I signed up. I could have hired him for a private lesson where we could have profitably worked on my specific weaknesses. Roger is still one of the best, but even the best is not the best for every individual. Coaching can be very subjective.

Another thing to watch out for when being coached is the group vs private lesson. Group lessons are obviously much less expensive, but you must make sure that you get the personal attention that you need. If you share an hour lesson with a friend, make sure that your friend's shooting abilities are the same as yours. The instructor naturally will spend more time on the weaker shooters. You do not want to pay for a lesson and keep hearing "Great shot. Next!" If you can afford it, always get a private lesson. Limit that lesson to only one hour. There is just so much that you can remember at one time.

How do you find a good instructor? The best way is always word of mouth. You might also try the NSCA's list of approved instructors on their Internet site or in Sporting Clays monthly magazine. Whatever you do, the small amount that you pay for instruction could be one of the best shooting investments that you can make.

Regards,  
Bruce Buck  
Shotgun Report's Technoid