

Adam Calvert is a freelance shooting instructor with a global reputation. Formerly director of shooting at EJ Churchill Shooting Ground, he is also renowned for his gunfitting service.



Expert instruction

Q Is there a danger of getting over-excited on a simulated game day and shooting too much, thereby allowing some bad habits to creep in. Or can you never shoot too much?

A We are all aware that any type of shooting practice out of season is good for you; it helps you to maintain your timing and general fluidity of shooting during the close season. I find that good simulated clay days are a fantastic way of a) having fun, which is the most important thing, and b) focusing on your technique, particularly your timing, stance, footwork and gun mount, which can all really benefit from good quality trigger time.

Safety first as always and be aware at all times of where your muzzles are pointing, remember your beating line has just been replaced with trappers who are equally vulnerable.

I often unfortunately see far too many people over indulging on the cartridge numbers, particularly on some of the bigger simulated days. I find that most people can fire somewhere between 50 and 100 cartridges per drive, before their form starts to fade. Now I know a lot of people will be saying: "Oh I can shoot more than that" but if you watch them closely and if they are really focusing on their technique and really trying to improve then I find that this kind of number is roughly what you should be shooting. You can of course make things much easier on yourself by using a lighter load which will give you less recoil, particularly if you are using a side-by-side.

Simulated days are also a great place to focus on your problem



A simulated day provides the opportunity to practise on problem birds but be careful not to overdo it as bad habits can be cemented.

targets. We have all got them, so you can single these targets out and really work on perfecting them. Start by taking your time to read the bird and judge where its most vulnerable point is going to be, taking care at the same time to make sure that your footwork and timing actually allow you to make the shot at this point. Make sure you finish the shot and do not lift your head until you see a satisfying break. And back a weak break up immediately with a second barrel.

One of the big dangers, as you start to shoot more and more on simulated days, is that you start to repeat your bad habits if you are not careful. Once you start to repeat a habit then it actually

becomes the norm and once it's the norm, it's incredibly difficult to break. Rushing a bird or making the decision late often leads to an unbalanced back-bending driven bird or crossers taken with no foot work and a rainbow shoulder.

I am a huge fan of videoing my clients whilst shooting and use a free iPhone app called Hudltechnique which allows you to slow the process right down so you can actually watch what is happening. I am afraid the camera doesn't lie.

Rather than your partner feeding your cartridge habit, try loading for yourself for a box of cartridges and ask your partner to video you, obviously from a safe angle.

In summary, make sure you don't over shoot, take your time and control your own pace. Pick your birds, shooting the easy one to begin with to build confidence and then move on to the more challenging ones as your confidence improves. Really focus on killing each bird with the correct technique, and don't be frightened mid-drive to have a little break. Let a few targets go past, start again and stay at your own pace, rather than the pace dictated by the quantity of clays. Most important of all, enjoy it. ■

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Dr Watson is away