
At-Home SHOTGUN PRACTICE

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BY PHIL BOURJAILY

You can become a better shotgunner without burning a grain of powder or a gallon of gasoline. Practice at home with an unloaded gun, or in some cases with no gun at all, strengthens good fundamentals. Sure, practice at home isn't as much fun as shooting, and you have to draw the curtains lest the neighbors think you're strange or dangerous. But if you want to get better, 10 to 15 minutes of at-home drills a day should be part of your practice routine, especially in the winter months when you can't always shoot.

▲ Gun mount should be smooth and effortless. Practice it at home by focusing on an improvised "target" and mounting the gun to it. There's no such thing as too much gun-mount practice.



GUN MOUNTS

Whenever you botch a gun mount you're almost certain to cost yourself a target. Home gun mount drills should be part of your routine.

Double or triple check your gun to be sure it's unloaded. Start from a low-gun ready position with the butt down by your hip. Lock your eyes onto a target — I use the beak of the wood duck in the print on my wall — and mount your gun to it. Don't concern yourself with speed. Focus on bringing the gun to your face, not your face to the gun. Keep your eye on the target all the way through the mount, then check the alignment of the beads afterwards. At first, just a few mounts in a row are enough to tire your arms, but you can increase repetitions as you go on. A lot of top shooters do 100 to 200 a night.

If you shoot a premounted gun, you can still derive benefit from gun mounts. They will help build the endurance you need to keep shooting on long days. I once met a junior Olympian, a petite high schooler, who told me she did her gun mounts every night with her father's 12-pound 10-gauge goose gun. Do that every night and you won't have to worry about your arms turning shaky at the end of a long match.





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You can also do this drill with a flashlight in the muzzle, as seen in the photos and explained in the next drill.

FLASHLIGHT DRILL

Take your gun mount practice up a notch by putting a flashlight in your muzzle. Gil and Vicki Ash have popularized this as the OSP Flashlight Drill. It's simple and it works. I have done this drill a lot, and I was also very impressed with the results my younger son got from the drill when he first started shooting.

You put a AA Mini Maglite in the muzzle of your 12-gauge or a AAA MagLite in your 20. You might have to use an

open choke tube or wrap the light with electrician's tape for the right fit. Dial the beam down to its tightest focus. Now you've got a beam that shines where the gun is pointed. Practice gun mounts on the ceiling in the corner. With a low gun, hold the beam on the corner, mount the gun and watch the beam. Keep it in the corner, which means not see-sawing the gun as it comes up. Start in slow motion and work your way up in speed.

Next, trace the seam of the ceiling and the wall back and forth as if shooting crossers. Start with a low gun with the beam on the seam. The first move of the gun mount should be with the muzzle on the path of the target. Keep the



beam on line. When you first try this, the beam will dip up and down. Practice until you can keep the gun on line, then speed up. One of the side benefits of the flashlight drill is that having that beam projecting onto the wall forces your eyes off the bead and out to where the gun is pointed, and that's always a good habit to reinforce, especially for new shooters.

Interestingly, when I Googled "flashlight drill," the first thing I found was a drill for golfers that works very much like this one. I mention this only because golfers tend to be ahead of us shooters when it comes to practice drills, so if golfers think flashlight drills work, shooters should pay attention.

SIMULATORS

Various shooting simulators on the market promise to improve your shooting at home. In my experience, they work. The systems I have most experience with are Dry Fire and the Ultimate Practice Shooting System from Robert Louis Company. With both devices, you put a laser in the muzzle of your gun and a trigger button on the trigger. You then "shoot" at a moving dot projected from an oscillating projector. It works. As a high school trap coach, I have seen kids who have never shot before learn on the Dry Fire, then go out and break 20x25 first time out at trap. Shooting a laser at moving targets is a good way to knock the rust off your swing.

On the other hand, I once asked five-time Olympic medalist Kim Rhode about simulators before we bought a Dry Fire for our trap team. Rhode said they were all fine and did a good job. I asked her which kind she used.

"Tell your kids to play video games instead," she said. "That's what I do. It's great for your focus and eye-hand coordination."

Rhode turns out to be a huge gamer. Her favorite? Frogger. It's not the tip you'd expect from a gold medalist, but there it is.

VISUALIZE

Visualization is practice you do with no gun at all. You just imagine yourself shooting. See yourself go through your routine and make a good shot, and you will make good shots on the field. The more detail you can imagine as you see yourself shooting, the better.

If you've watched the winter Olympics, you've seen skiers pantomime their runs as their mental warm-up. Visualization right before a match helps, and you can also build it into your practice routine.

A few years ago I met Italy's Chiara Cainero, the 2008 Olympic skeet gold medalist. I asked her about practice. She told me she shot 200 to 300 targets a day, which is not many for someone at her level (Rhode shoots 500 to 1,000 a day), but then she said "I visualize all the time." I asked if she saw herself shooting at the Olympics. "Yes, but not winning the Olympics," she said. "I see myself shooting at the Olympics."

That's the difference between visualization and daydreaming. Imagining yourself waving to the crowd at a medal ceremony is daydreaming. Picturing yourself loading the gun, getting ready, seeing the target, making the right move and watching the target shatter is visualization.

Athletes in other sports, such as basketball players, watch video of themselves making shots the night before a game to build confidence. I can remember doing the same years ago before I shot much or knew anything about visualization. I had been invited on a hunt by a gun writer I admired and was quite nervous about shooting well. The night before the hunt I watched a pheasant-hunting video to calm myself. As I watched, I thought, "That looks easy, I can do that." The next day I shot my limit without a miss. Now that everyone carries a video camera in their pocket, have someone film you breaking birds and then watch it and call it practice — because it is. *CTN*



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