



# The FOUR PLATEAUS

Your sporting clays journey is not a straight line to the top — it's a series of ups and downs, with some plateaus along the way.

BY GIL AND VICKI ASH

**W**e shot our first sporting targets in the spring of 1983, in northwest Houston. A round was 25 targets, and on Gil's first round, he missed the last bird due to a gun malfunction. He was hooked, and in the first tournament of 50 targets, he shot a perfect score and was big-time hooked! This beginning led to us traveling the country with our son, Brian, competing at different clubs and sharing what we knew and had learned about this new game called sporting clays.

Wow, has the game changed since then, and the science of sports vision has evolved. In our first book, *If It Ain't Broke, Fix It*, we talked about score plateaus that our students went through — why they had occurred and what had to be practiced to get past them. Sixteen books later, we admit that although the game itself has changed, the plateaus still exist. But what needs to be done to move through them

has changed a little.

With the invention of the MRI a few decades ago, medical science's knowledge of what went on in the brain was expanded exponentially, and the science of sports

**SCORE PLATEAU: 65**

You are here because you have fallen in love with the game and you can't get enough of it. Up until now,

every time. When they mount the gun, it is like hitting the space bar on the keyboard of your computer — it just happens. That is where consistency begins, and if you will learn to move and mount

the gun now, you will learn as much as three times faster going forward.

At this stage, while you are learning to move and mount the gun without looking at it and you are starting to settle into a comfortable grip, stance, foot position, break zone and hold points, you are probably still moving the gun too fast. Your gun fit is evolving, and you are learning how to merge the gun in front of the target on line and take the shot as you mount so you don't have time to check the lead, which makes you look at the barrel and miss. You are battling thinking while you shoot and not being in control, which creates incon-

▼ To get to the next level, practice your gun mount until you can do it without thinking.



▲ Most shooters hit their first major plateau around the mid-60 score mark. This is almost always a consistency problem.

vision was born. The half life of scientific information now is so much shorter than it was back then, because we continue to learn more and more about how the brain interprets the visual input from the eyes and how to train the brain to do it more specifically and quickly. We are amazed at what we are experiencing in our coaching results and what a positive change what we are learning has made in our ability to diagnose problems and immediately engage in the real solutions that fix the problem long-term. In this article we are going to talk about four plateaus that all shooters share, what causes them and how to practice your way out of them in the most efficient way.

you have just been playing around with different things, and while you can hit some of the targets some of the time, there is something missing in your game.

It's consistency — no matter how much you shoot and practice, you just can't find the consistency button. You are learning to move and mount the gun — or you should be, because if you think you will get very far in this game without learning to move and mount the gun, you are badly mistaken.

Many of the pros shoot gun-up, but what they don't have to do is check the beads to see if the gun is mounted, because they have a consistent move and mount and know without looking that the gun is mounted properly



sistency. Because you have not put in the time to learn to move and mount the gun, you close the gun, mount the gun, check the beads in the break point, move the gun to the hold point and check the beads again, cut your eyes to the focal point, call pull, chase the target down and try to fix the bungled shot at the end. Then you curse and blame your result on everything but yourself!

The reason you are here is because you are having to think about what you are doing with the gun, which puts the gun in the shot — your brain is either in the cage with the gun or downrange with the target, and you can't be in two places at once. Learn to move and mount the gun and 65 is in your rearview mirror!

**How to bust out of the mid-60s plateau:** Practice gun mount and gun swing at home using OSP's flashlight drill. [www.ospschool.com](http://www.ospschool.com)

**SCORE PLATEAU: 75**

You are here because 75 percent of the targets in the round can be shot with 3 inches of lead or less, and the size of your pattern makes up for many mounting and pointing errors — but if you have learned to move and mount the gun, you won't spend much time here. Now you have to learn sight pictures (and there are only two) and train to minimize the amount of movement during the shot and begin shooting targets with less follow-through.

Why less follow-through? Our targets are delivered in

pairs, and the target setter will pick your pocket in the transition between the first break point and the pickup point on the second target. Two things have to happen here. You must begin to learn to break the targets in specific break points (sweet, early and late) so you can strategically break the first bird and minimize the amount of eye and gun movement to the second target. As you implement this in your practice, you will see your move from the first break point to the second target become more efficient due to having less follow-through to stop and change directions. Your practice must move

▼ The next time you plateau, it's likely a sight picture problem.



to a higher level, with goals and routines on every shot. It is here where you must stop trying to take the shot when the gun touches your face and learn to accept the gun in the periphery, learning to control your gun speed at the end of the shot and begin-

ning to predict what it will look like when the trigger is pulled — before the gun is closed and you call pull. If you want to leave the mid-70s, you must stop closing the gun and then chasing the target down from behind, looking down the barrel.

▲ To move past it, burn the sight pictures into your mind through intentional practice and drills.

You must practice the sight pictures on targets from the left and from the right and know what it's going to look like before you close the gun. Once you learn the sight pictures and how to match gun speed to target speed, you will begin to learn how to self-correct — and correct after the first miss, not the third. To get into the low 80s, you must begin to self-correct to the point where all misses on your card must be only in the first pair! No more excuses — you must begin to own the result and take the responsibility of fixing your game on your own. It is here that learning to be honest with yourself and making a commitment to improve will play a big role in your goal setting and success.



**How to break out of the mid-70s plateau:** Set specific goals for your practice and work on sight pictures by doing the three-bullet drill and watching kill shot review videos, both found at [ospschool.com](http://ospschool.com).

## SCORE PLATEAU: 83

You are here because you have a perfect gun mount that happens consistently without thought. You have stopped looking at the gun in the setup and down the gun during the shot, and you've stopped cutting your eyes looking for the target.

It is here that the journey of learning how to score begins, and you practice pairs more now than ever before. You must be critical during practice, and if you smoke the targets but the move was all wrong, don't be satisfied. Because you have practiced everything from the muzzle to your toes and you know what it will look like before you close the gun, you can finally begin to concentrate on the target. It is here that you can really begin to see the target, because up until now your focus has been shared with all of the other mechanical parts of your game, keeping you from having enough focus to really see the target. Your mechanical game should be automatic now, so you don't have to focus on move, mount, gun speed, lead and follow-through — you have freed up all that focus that can now be used for the target.

It is here that your routines must be perfected, practiced and learned,

and everything you do on tournament day must be structured into a habitual routine. You've gotta get on the road and travel and put a number on your back and just go shoot, and while you are traveling, you must learn what, when and how much you need to eat; how to sleep well on the road; how far you can drive and still shoot well in a one-day shoot. You must begin getting eight good hours of deep sleep every day at least two weeks prior to a big competition and learn what it takes for you to get in bed and get good restful sleep during the tournament. You

will become new habits that will serve you well going forward.

**How to break out of the mid-80s plateau:** Allow yourself to devote your full focus to the target, and hit the road and start figuring out the non-shooting parts of your routine that keep you in peak condition.

## SCORE PLATEAU: 93 AND ABOVE

It's hard to call 93 a plateau, and most shooters would love to be able to say they had plateaued at 93. The truth is that few shooters

manent memory, and when they look at the show birds, they instantly see the movie of how the shot is going to come together. Every time they call pull, they have given their brain a clear picture from the library of sight pictures they have specifically put in there from hundreds of practice sessions.

One day they are shooting in a tournament and realize they are on the cusp of winning it, and they pull from their experiences of the past and realize they can't get careful or become hesitant and check the lead, because every time they've tried that in the past, it has not worked. It is this memory that gives them the courage to let it go and trust themselves enough to really finish on top for the first time. After they get that one under their belt, they know how they got there and what it feels like to win one, and they then feed on that as they reach to higher and higher levels of performance.

**How to break out of the low-90s plateau:** This plateau is all mental. Stay the course, knuckle up and just trust in the memory bank you've built up through experience. Don't falter, hesitate or change what's working because you're afraid to lose. Power through and go get that championship!

And that, children, is how you get to the top, and only in fairy tales and fiction novels will shooters win their club championship and the next week win the Open or Nationals. To do that takes a lot of hard work, and the dictionary is the only place where success comes before work! **CTN**



▲ Plateaus in the mid-80s and 90s are about routines, non-shooting preparation for big events, and the mental game.

will find that you will need to eat and be in bed early, because the last two hours of the eight-hour sleep cycle are the most important — that is when what you have learned the day before is committed to permanent memory. You have to enter a tournament with extra sleep in the bank when you get there, and it is here that a commitment to go to the gym and learn to eat right

have the commitment to do what it takes to even get here. They never put in the time to practice consistency, and as a result, they never become consistent.

We have coached hundreds of shooters to this level, and without exception, they all have flawless moves and mounts and never check the gun in the setup or the shot. They have burned the sight pictures into their per-