

# Cut It OFF

The angle at which your barrels approach the target line can vary based on the target.

BY CLAYTON M. RUE, NSCA LEVEL III INSTRUCTOR

**H**ave you ever watched a defensive back chase down a wide receiver who has just broken loose? The tackler does not try to catch the runner from behind, but rather selects an approach angle that will allow him to intercept the runner in the least number of steps. This vectored approach is the most efficient way for the defender to cut off the runner and minimize the yardage gained. As sporting clays shooters, we can utilize this same highly efficient approach to our targets and cut them off in a similar manner.

We know that our barrels should always travel in a straight line from our selected hold point to our selected break point. We also know that our selected hold point must be below the target line to prevent an occlusion of the target as it traverses the sky. This is target shooting 101 and is illustrated in Figure A. Target shooters should always integrate these two rules into their shooting. What is optional within these boundary conditions is the selection of





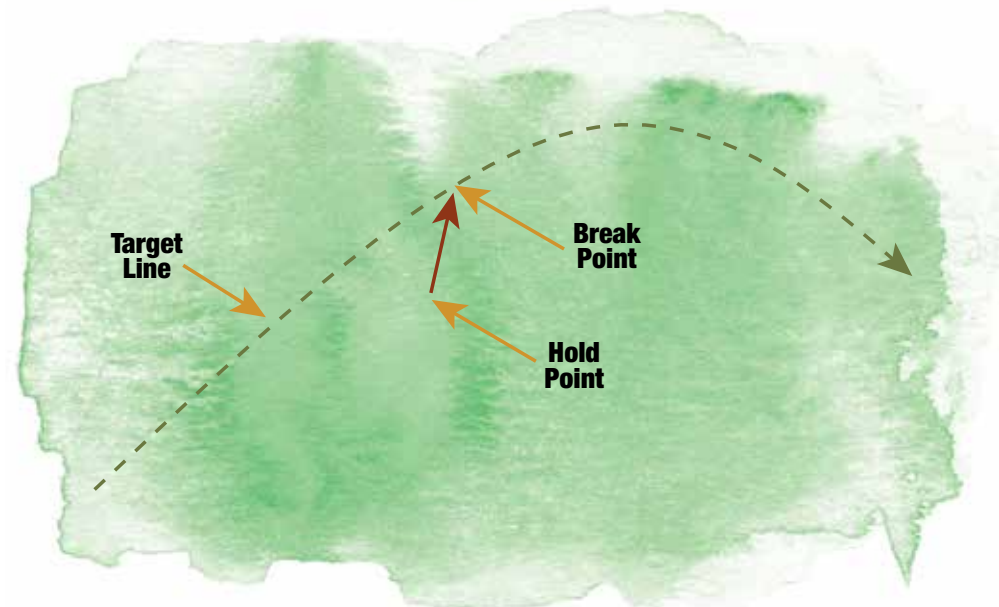
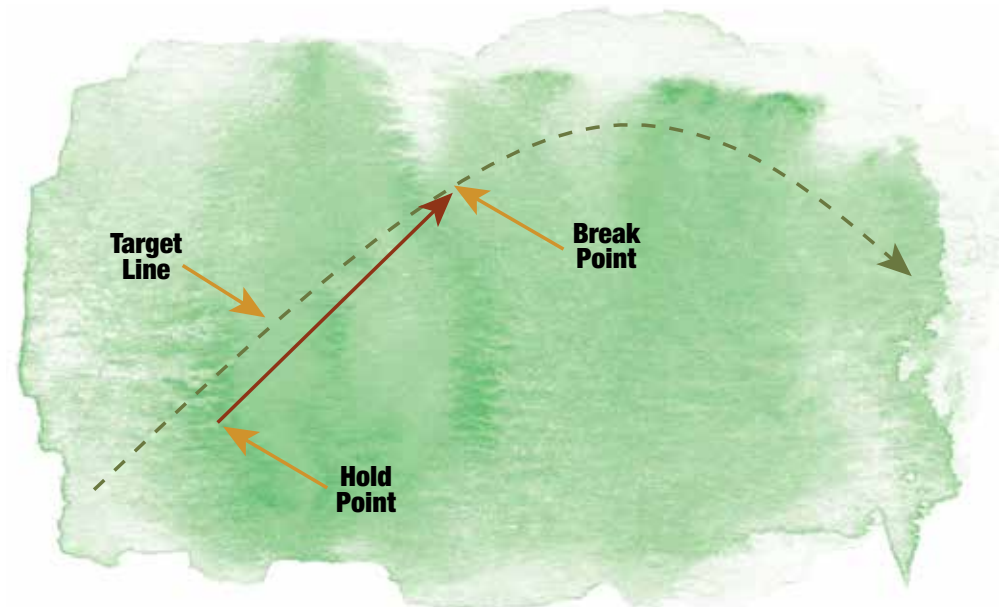
the specific hold and break points. Therefore, the shooter has the option to vary the approach angle taken by the barrels to the target line by varying the hold point, break point, or both.

One of the biggest myths in the game of shooting is

that the line drawn by the muzzles should trace the target line. This is not true. In fact, doing so will guarantee a lot of missed targets. The line drawn by the muzzles must merge with the target line from beneath in order to prevent the muzzles from

blocking out the target at just the wrong time. That means there is always an “approach angle” to the target line. You, the shooter, have the option to vary this approach angle as you see fit, and that is where the cut-off move comes into discussion.

▼ Figure A: The first rule of shooting any target is that the muzzle must travel from the hold point to the break point in a straight line, and should never cross or go above the target line.



▲ Figure B: A classic “cut-off” shot, where the shooter uses a steep approach angle from hold point to break point. Note, the muzzle does *not* have to trace the target line for a correct shot.

Figure B illustrates this, as the shooter has lowered his hold point and moved it closer to the break point. This strategy respects the basic rules of target shooting while steepening the approach angle to the target. This is what is commonly referred to as a “cut-off” shot. Trap shooters have been using this technique forever, and it is one of the most common styles of shooting used by wing shooters. One of the advantages of this approach is it is very efficient, as the distance traveled by the muzzles is very short.

Another advantage to this approach is that the steep approach angle ensures the muzzles will never cross the target line, which can result in a visual disconnect with the target. In this regard, the steeper the approach angle, the better. The only reason we don’t shoot every target this way is it is impossible to establish the sufficient rhythm required to break most targets using this approach.

So, the basic cut-off shot is simply defined by a steeper-than-normal approach angle to the target. Most shooters combine this with a hold point that is much closer to the break point, which results in less muzzle movement. When applied on the right targets, the combination of these two changes can provide us a very efficient way to execute a lot of shots.

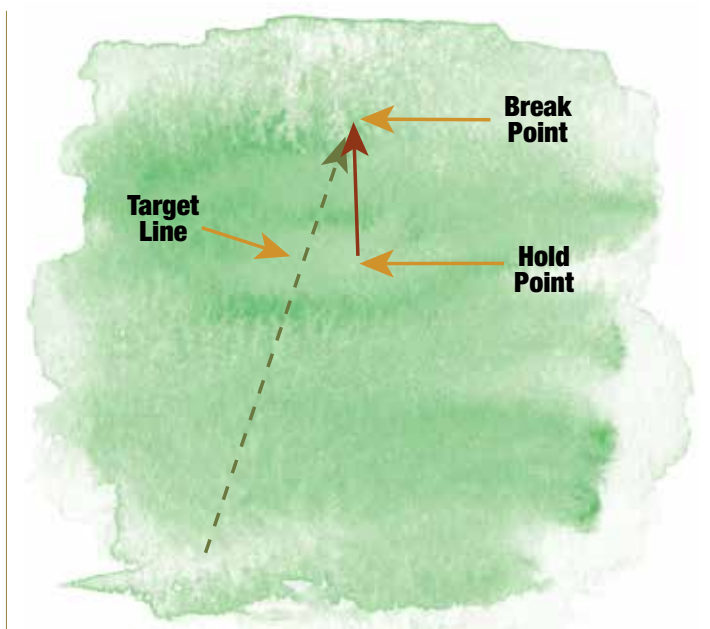
A classic cut-off move is defined by an approach angle of 30 to 60 degrees. Any steeper than this and the timing of the shot becomes extremely critical. Any less than this and you probably aren’t shooting a cut-off. The target speed will determine the optimal

approach angle for each presentation, and you will need to experiment with this shot a little to learn what works best for you.

One of the best applications for the cut-off method, and one of the easiest applications to learn, is on a shallow quartering-away target. In Figure C, the target line represents a basic left-to-right quartering-away target. This presentation screams to be shot with a cut-off approach. All that’s required is for the shooter to select a break point (just before the target apex), lower his muzzles straight down a few inches, and call for the target. When the target is released, all the shooter does is raise his barrels straight up in front of the target and shoot. Dead target every time. There is no need to worry about the target line and no chance of ever spoiling the target line. Believe me, once you shoot a quartering-away target this way, you will wonder why you ever tried to chase the line in the past.

Another great application for the cut-off method is when shooting a true pair of targets. In Figure D, after the shooter breaks the first target, the quickest way to dispatch the second target is to move his muzzles in a straight line from his first break point to the second break point. In other words, the break point for the first target becomes the hold point for the second target. This results in a vectored approach to the second target with a relatively steep approach angle. This is a classic cut-off move on the second target, and it will work well on pairs when the second target has average or below-average speed and distance.

Another use of the cut-off method on a true pair is to cut off the first target as shown in Figure E. This results in minimal over-swing on the first target and the easy reversal of muzzle direction required for the second target. This comes in handy when the second target has a



▲ Figure C: On a left-to-right quartering target, pick a break point just before the target apex, lower your muzzle a few inches, and call pull. Then just raise the barrel straight up in front of the target and shoot.

lot of speed on it. By sacrificing a little rhythm with the first target, you make the second target in the pair much easier. A good place to try these strategies is on a pair of skeet doubles.

I have found myself using the cut-off method almost

exclusively for battues, high arcing chandelles and crow targets. Since these targets all have a strongly defined apex, they are easily broken just before the peak with a short, straight move to the target at a steep approach angle.

I simply position my muzzles just below and ahead of the point where the target approaches its apex, I raise my barrels almost straight up and release the shot. If I have a hard focus on the leading edge of the target, this technique almost always produces breaks for me. Just remember, you need to raise your muzzles up in front of the target and not directly at it.

One of the best times to use the cut-off method is when the target you are given has a really nasty target line. Imagine, if you will, a target thrown off a tower at a downward angle and curling away

▼ If you’re watching a very good shooter and noticing that his barrel has barely moved, chances are good that he’s shooting that particular target with the cut-off method.





from you. That is about as ugly as it gets. Trying to correctly read this ever-changing target line and establish the proper bird/barrel relationship is a real challenge. So why not try something radically different? Try selecting a break point somewhere along the line and simply position your barrels slightly below

and upstream of that point. When the target is launched, you simply move your muzzles in a straight line up to the selected break point and release the shot just as the target and muzzles merge. You will be surprised at how often, and how easy, targets will break for you when you do this. The reasons are you

are 1) working within the boundary conditions previously stated and 2) wholly trusting your hand-eye coordination. Sometimes the best thing we can do is to just get out of our own way.

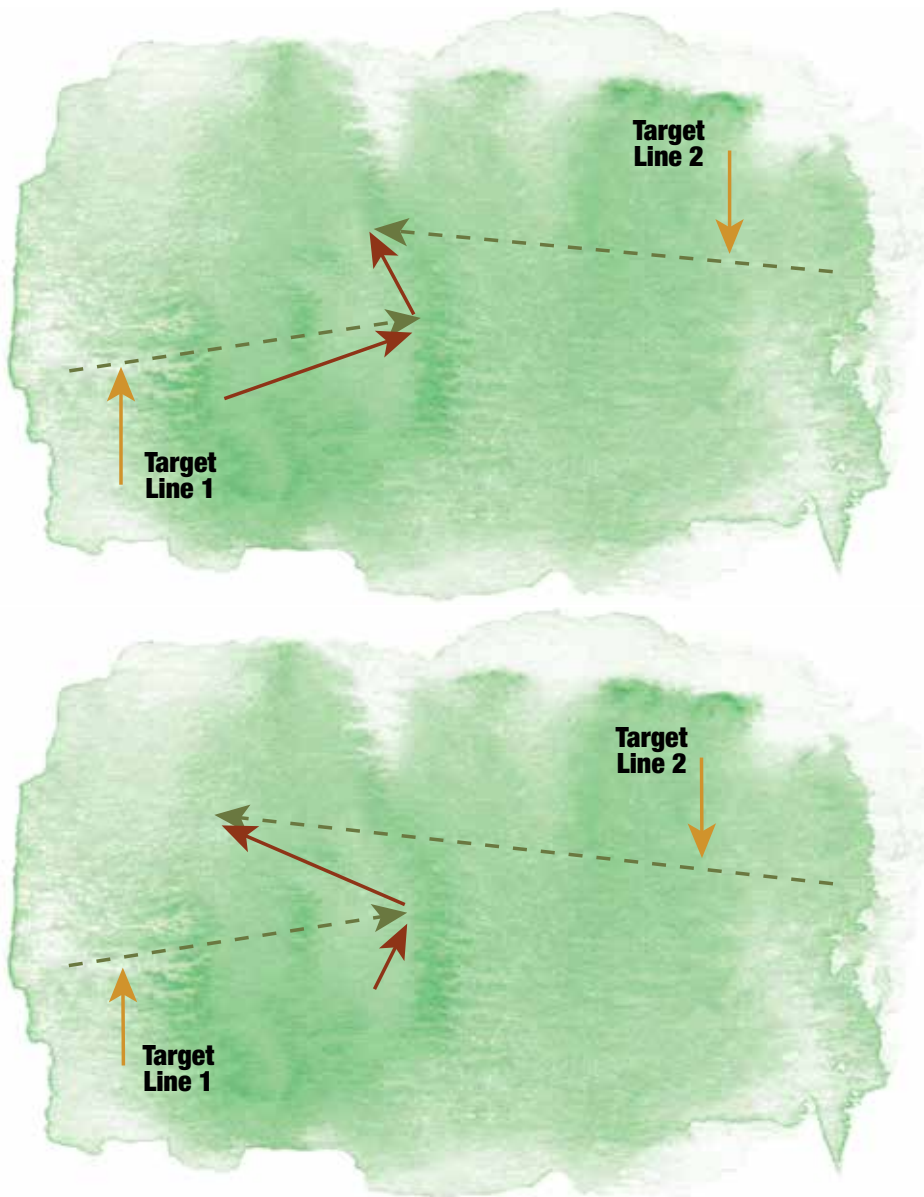
Have you ever watched a very good shooter and noticed how little their muzzles seem to move on some

of their targets? Chances are they are shooting that target with a cut-off move. Their selected hold and break points are close together, which ensures they have absolutely no wasted movement in their shot execution. And when the hold and break points are that close together, they know it is critical not to crowd the target line, so they intentionally drop their hold point a little lower than required. By definition, they are shooting that target with a cut-off move.

The cut-off move is not the best solution for every target. However, when judiciously and appropriately applied, it can significantly simplify your move to a target. It will minimize the possibility of spoiling a target line and can reduce total muzzle movement. It can also pay big dividends when shooting a pair of targets by eliminating over-swing on the first target and/or simplifying the move between the two targets. I encourage you to get with an instructor and learn this shooting technique and when to use it. Then you can tackle more targets before they have a chance to score on you! **CTN**

► Clayton Rue is an NSCA Level III instructor and the Chief Shooting Instructor for Grouse Ridge Shooting Grounds in Wasilla, Alaska. He has been a professional instructor since 2000 and is heavily involved in youth shooting programs in Alaska. He has hunted birds on four continents and is addicted to side-by-side shotguns. He can be reached at [clayton.rue@gmail.com](mailto:clayton.rue@gmail.com).

▼ Figure D: On a true pair of crossers, the break point for the first target becomes the hold point for the second target. This usually results in a steep approach angle on the second target, a classic cut-off move.



▲ Figure E: You can also try cutting off the first target of a true crossing pair (like skeet doubles). This leaves you with little overswing on the first target and an easy transition to the second.