



Centering VISUAL FOCUS And TRACKING

If you try to pick up the target with your eyes too quickly, your peripheral vision can't do its job.

BY JOHN D. SHIMA

During a recent skeet clinic, my friend Tracey Ashton from the Gold Coast in Australia asked me to explain when to hard focus on the target. In the clay target sports, the term "hard focus" means to center visual focus on a specific piece of the clay target so you can track its flight. I use driver's education as an analogy to explain the concept of centering your visual focus.

During the first driving lesson, the new student's visual focus will jump from the speedometer to the center line on the road, to one side mirror, then the edge of the road, then the rearview mirror, back to the road. It is as if the new driver's eyes hyper-focus his or her central vision on every visual aspect of driving. It is very intense and tiring to drive this way.

After gaining experience and confidence, the student driver will relax his or her eyes while looking farther down the road and use peripheral vision to check the edge of the road, oncoming cars, the mirrors and other visual aspects of driving. The eyes hardly move in the eye sockets. When the peripheral vision detects movement, the eyes will naturally center visual focus on the moving object. The feet and hands will automatically react

and respond to decelerate, brake or turn the car.

Similarly, centering the primary focus zone on an incoming clay target occurs naturally if the shooter watches the target continuously. According to Dr. Wayne Martin, centering visual focus on an outgoing target is an unnatural process and requires more intense visual concentration. The process of hard focusing (centering) the primary focus zone on a moving target can be increased to a state of hyper focus if the shooter's conscious mind directs the shooting eye to look intensely at a specific piece of the target. I often define this process by telling a shooter to "burn a hole in the target."

My answer to Tracey's question about when to hard focus is more technical and relates to how vision and the conscious mind work together to create visual perception.

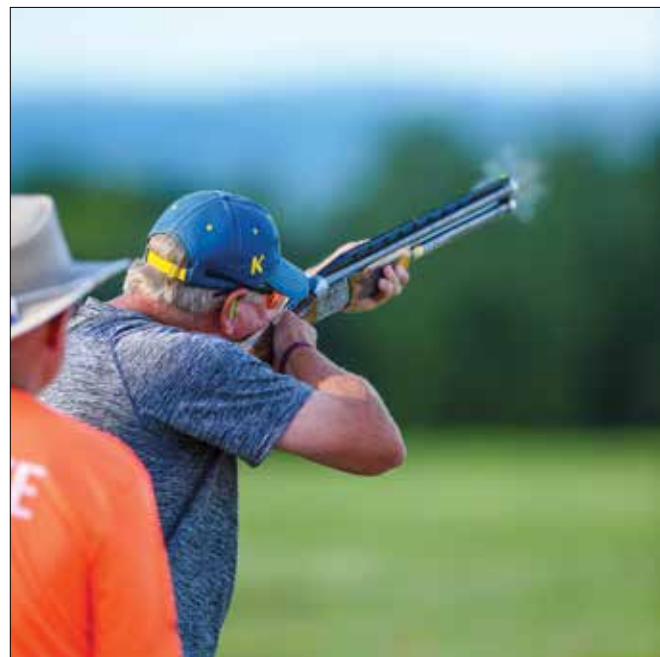
PURSUIING THE TARGET

Dr. Martin explained in his book, *An Insight to Sports*, that precise centering of the visual focus on a specific part of any moving target is defined as completing the visual act. The shooter must center his or her focus with "pinpoint accuracy on the primary area" where the shot will impact the target. The human eye employs primary and secondary visual zones to identify an object.

The primary visual zone is an area on the target, such as the second ring from the bottom at the leading edge, in which the focus intensifies to

see a clearer image. The secondary visual zone includes the whole target, objects in the background or the end of the barrel of the gun. Lack of trust in the pre-planned move, or a lack of visual discipline prior to or during the shot, switches the shooter's attention from the primary to the secondary visual zone. This defocusing alters gun

▼ If you watch the target continuously, centering the primary focus zone happens naturally.



speed and induces sudden gun movements.

Dr. Martin emphasized that "saccade movements (peripheral) cannot center; pursuit movements (central) cannot locate." When shooters attempt to hard focus on the target too soon, it impedes the ability of the peripheral vision to detect saccade movement. The shooting eye fails to acquire the target at the eye hold and pursue it.

Saccade and pursuit movements are separate but equal



▲ Lack of visual discipline will cause your focus to shift, which changes gun speed.

THE POWER OF INTENTION

I believe the shooter's intention is the primary cause of premature centering of visual focus. Whenever I think about intention, I am reminded of Dr. Wayne Dyer's revolutionary book on the topic: *The Power of Intention*. For most of his professional career, Dr. Dyer ascribed to the common definition of intention as "a strong purpose or aim, accompanied by a determination to produce a desired result." In this context, whenever a shooter "wants to see the target sooner," his or her intention will induce premature centering of visual focus.

In my book *The Moment of Truth*, I explained duality as the separation of the human mind into the conscious and unconscious (subconscious) components. The conscious mind is where the ego resides. According to Dr. Dyer, the "ego is merely an idea we construct about who and what we are." He went on

components of vision. Each component must be trained and allowed to function correctly. I combined these two complex functions into a single term: the Watching Reflex. Watching the target until it breaks is a function of the conscious mind. Since the Shooting Reflex is managed by the unconscious (subconscious) mind, it is essential that a shooter keep the conscious mind preoccupied with the sole job of watching the target continuously.

to explain that when our ego lacks discipline, it dictates our intentions.

In Chapter 16 of my book I advise shooters to make the right effort to do the right things the right way. Merely allowing the ego to dictate an intention to try harder to break the next target doesn't work. This is why I believe the intention to watch the target must override the ego's desire to break the target.

WATCH THE TARGET BREAK

The ability of a shooter to discipline his or her ego to watch the target until it breaks has more to do with managing emotional issues than developing mechanical or visual skills. What a shooter needs to do to break targets consistently isn't usually what his or her ego wants to do. Merely watching the target until it breaks is not very exciting for the ego. Yet, physiologically, continuous visual focus on the target is the only way the visual cortex can transmit the location, speed and direction of the target to the brain stem to create the appropriate pre-planned move to engage the target correctly. When transmission of visual data from the shooting eye to the visual cortex is inconsistent, it affects the shooter's reaction and response to the target.

CENTERING VISUAL FOCUS

Dr. Martin explained that the career of most great athletes ends prematurely due to problems with their visual

perception. They take their vision for granted. He wrote, "Their visual centering, concentration and control begin to slow. Their eye reflexes, which tell them the what, why, where and when, begin to stutter."

How we look determines what we see was selected as the subtitle to my first book because, as Dr. Martin stated, "Vision is the process of reacting to what we see. It can be

for the shooting eye to transition from saccade movement to pursuit movement. This visual process creates the perception of a larger, slower and clearer target, which allows the shooting eye to center (hard) focus on a specific point on the target.

The magic of the Shooting Reflex is such that target engagement occurs naturally if the shooter manages the process of centering visual focus

correctly. When shooters hard focus too soon, the high 2 and low 6 targets usually beat them. Yet, to their amazement, when they just settle their vision into expanded soft focus at the correct eye hold, these targets seem to slow down and appear much larger. This is the hallmark of proper target detection, acquisition, centering of visual focus and tracking. **CTN**



► Settle into expanded soft focus at your eye hold.

controlled. Controlling vision controls centering. Controlling centering improves concentration. Improving concentration provides consistency and increases scoring."

Centering visual focus must be controlled. The target must be acquired and lateral gun speed must be synchronized with the target speed before the shooter attempts to hard focus on the target.

Target acquisition allows the saccade movement to complete the job of locating the target and determining its speed and direction. Synchronization of gun speed to target speed with the gun below the target path provides time



► John Shima is a former five-time World Skeet Champion. For more information about the Shima Shooting MethodSM or to arrange a private consultation, contact John via email at john@johnshima.com. To view previous articles or order John's books, go to www.johnshima.com.

◄ Center your visual focus correctly and target engagement will be natural.