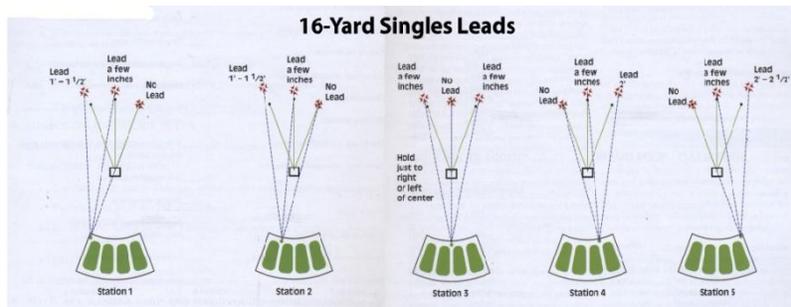




To lead or not to lead, that is the question for shotgun shooters.

Whether it is on the trap or skeet field, the sporting clays course or sitting in a blind calling ducks in, we are using our shotguns to fire at moving targets. That is the gun's intended purpose, after all. But even with great mechanics and a payload of hundreds of pellets, sometimes we just miss and we often scratch our heads wondering why. Quite often the lead, or lack of it, is at the center of things.

How much or how little to lead is one of the questions we, as instructors, hear most often. There are any number of potential answers because everyone has their own perception of what they see. What may look like inches in one shooter's eyes may be many feet in another's. We're all pretty familiar with the diagram pictured at right. It is a basic guideline for leads at all five stations on the trap field from 16 yards. Just point the gun where the dot is in the picture and you'll break them all.



Well, not so fast. There are variables to be considered; how do I perceive the lead, how fast is the target moving, how quickly is my shot going to get there, and where does my gun shoot are what we'll focus on in this article. Perception of the lead is the first and most important key. It will be driven by how you reference distance in your life. If you sit at a keyboard all day long you will likely perceive variances between points in small bites, as your frame of reference is largely within the computer screen. If an instructor tries to guide you in terms of yards it likely won't gel for you so it's just as important for a good instructor to understand your frame of reference. Learn your references and visualize those to help you find the proper lead and recognize the lead in terms you understand.

At our club the targets are leaving the house around 45 MPH. If you are shooting shells at 1200 feet per second, the target is going to travel seven feet or so between the time you pull the trigger and the time the shot gets there. If you haven't established your lead, when it's needed, you'll miss behind every time.

Finally there is the notion of how your gun patterns. I cannot stress enough the need to pattern your gun with the load you shoot to understand where the shot is going to go. Some guns, and specialized trap guns in particular, are often configured to shoot above the point of hold. A gun intended for hunting will often shoot much closer to, and sometimes even below, the point of hold. Different guns can also pattern more pellets to the right or the left, above or below the point of hold. You won't know any of that until you shoot your gun at a pattern board. Fortunately we have one at the club near trap seven.

When taken all together; perception, target speed and flight pattern, speed of shot and regulation of where the gun shoots, we are left with doing an exercise in geometry in our heads in the few seconds between saying pull and firing the shot. But since there isn't enough

time to work through the problem logically, the only real answer is that the lead, and the shot, **must become instinctive** . Trust the gun and your perception of the target to put your shot where it needs to be. If you have to think about how to make the shot, you're over thinking. Once you establish what your lead looks like to you you're on your way to higher scores.

Remember, that there are NRA Certified Instructors at trap six and seven on every public day who can help you improve your skills and help you discover your personal solution.



See you again soon with another shooting tip, but in the meantime, remember to keep those muzzles pointed to the ground when not on the firing line, and keep those actions open whenever you are not actually shooting.

Safety first, foremost and always! -- Frank

