

Stay on Target with John Shima

A review of a new DVD

By Marty Froebel

John Shima has been a significant part of the skeet shooting world for the last 30 years. A member of the Hall of Fame, he has established himself as an outstanding shooter and instructor. I got to know him quite well about five years ago when I starting to cover the World Shoot for the SSR. His free clinic was the first venue I attended

to interview first-time shooters at the World Shoot.

My first impression of his teaching was based upon more than 30 years of my own teaching experience. I not only taught academic subjects, but motor skill sports such as bowling, rifle and pistol target shooting in the military, and equestrian show jumping. I quickly knew this man was an outstanding teacher and his students that I have interviewed agree with me.

John asked me more than a

year ago to review the DVD he was making. He is of course still with his teaching partner, Todd Bender. I was honored and very proud to do this for a man who has given so much to the sport I have come to love.

I got my copy of *Stay on Target with John Shima* in January. I have seen several other tapes and DVDs in trying to improve my competitive skeet skills, including those of his partner, Todd Bender. John's DVD is unique in several ways and is a real winner. It is not about John and his accomplishments and how he shoots each station in skeet. It's filled with a lot of good information, tips and drills on how to improve a dedicated competitive shooter's skills.

Some view instructional DVDs and believe that if they copy the stance, gun mount and other techniques they see great shooters use, they can possibly cure all their problems, shoot higher scores and be more consistent. That is a perfect solution if all of us were cloned the exact same way physically and our brains processed information in the same way. But we are not all the same in physical stature or brain function and age also has an effect



John Shima with one of his students.

on shooting. So just copying a great shooter's techniques and trying to think like they do will not work for the vast majority.

John's main goal is to make a skeet shooter more competitive by improving the viewer's shooting skills and not by having them mimicking his technique. He states, "We age differently, gain weight and why would you think you could shoot the same way you have for years. Things

The Heads Up method allows the shooter to see the target better with no gun barrel in their vision.

do change as we go along and performance can drop off. Some shooters get frustrated with the sport and

quit. Let's find your strong points and work at improving them."

Some of Shima's ideas are quite different from accepted concepts in the sport but they are backed up by successful experiences. You will hear from others who have trained with him and appear on the DVD. His challenging questions to the viewer are, "How good do you want to be?" and "How willing are you to change what you have been doing?"

Anyone who has taught individual motor skill sports has come across people who believe they cannot get any better than their current performance. In thinking that way, they have a self-fulfilling prophecy. It takes a serious and dedicated effort to change the way they have been doing things—quietly possibly for a long time.

Aging can affect your skills; I can testify to that, but there are ways to compensate for aging and continue to compete at a high level. The dedicated willingness to change is a very important learning aspect of John's information on the DVD.

How the Eyes Work

The first topic John covers in great detail is "The Eye Game." He states, "The game is too simple not to be eye related. Your eyes control your shooting reality. Your eyes can focus on only one thing at a time. You focus on the end of the gun or you see the target." He explains thoroughly how eyes work in the skeet game.

He gets into one-eyed shooting as well as using both eyes and how they affect the skeet game in particular. Two-eyed shooters cannot really see the lead on a target but they know or feel when the picture is right so they pull the trigger. He explains in a one-eyed reality the lead can be seen.

Also John deals with the dominant eye effect on the game, and the uses of the patch over the eye and what that accomplishes. The patch lets the shooter see a lead and can compensate for a change in the eyes due to aging. It also solves an eye dominance problem.

He also describes the different effect between a frosted and a black eye patch. John explains fully about using the patch to meet different circumstances. He recommends using qualified instructors to determine when and how long to use the patch. You are playing with your shooting reality so experienced help is recommended.

An Unusual Concept

A topic that some experienced shooters will find radical and different from the more accepted methods that are taught is "Heads Up Shooting." This departs from the usual concept of keeping the head down hard on the stock.

Heads Up results in a more fluid motion created by not having to fight

STAY ON TARGET with JOHN SHIMA

Five-time World Champion John Shima offers solutions to shooters who are having difficulties progressing in their game, or have been unsuccessful with traditional training tactics.



John's DVD is filled with tips on how to improve a dedicated competitive shooter's skills.

a pronounced downward pressure from the face placed on the stock. The stock touches the face in Heads Up and gives the shooter an anchor point on the stock.

Using this technique, the eyes are more likely to stay on the target whereas a lot of downward pressure on the stock might cause the shooter to shoot over the target. The Heads Up method allows the shooter to see the target better with no gun barrel in their vision.

Correct pointing of the shotgun is essential and the Heads Up method makes that easier. It stops "measuring the target" and the patch, if used, solves the cross firing problem as well. John explains the difference between pointing and aiming the shotgun.

This method may not be for everyone but for those of us who have hit the wall in our attempts to shoot more consistent scores while declining in performance, it could be a very right answer.

Those who use this technique have testified of amazing results, improving their skeet skills at all ages. They praise this method highly on the DVD and it obviously really works well for them. It takes some getting used to if you have been using a traditional method for some time.

John's basic fundamentals for Heads Up Shooting are:

- consistent gun mount
- pointing
- understanding the difference between aiming and pointing
- understanding the value of feel
- focus on the target
- mental shooting

Compartmentalize

What follows are a compilation of John's ideas and philosophy that I found reviewing his DVD. John states that trying harder to get better has a bad result. "The harder you try the more you miss."

He said this about missing targets and shooting in the moment. "Shooting in the moment is about being able to compartmentalize, think about the next target and expect to break it. Focus on what is not what was or might be."

On long runs he has had his major thought, "See the target; hit the target. I do not think about winning, just hit the next target."

His thoughts on controlling emotions are very important. If you cannot control your external emotions, you cannot control them internally and they control you. "You have no long term focus if emotions get a hold on you. Misses, hits and runs should never let others know how you feel. Treat them all the same.

"Intensity is important. Like a radio, if you are not tuned in to the station all you get is static. If you are tuned in to the station you do not need as much focus to keep your mind on doing what you want to do."

Finding your "tell" is very important. If something is bothering you, like people talking on your squad as you shoot and it disrupts your focus and concentration, this is a tell. You should practice with your tells, whatever they might be, until they no longer bother you and disrupt your focus on the task at hand.

"When you practice, don't confuse it with play. Shooting at the gun club with you friends and not competitive practice is play. Change things that you do when you play, even using another gun that is not your competition gun. Do things you do not normally do when you practice.

"The more you focus on why you miss, the more it becomes a problem. Changing your shooting style and introducing and learning a new technique in your shooting is psychologically harder than you think. The reason for the difficulty in trying to effect a change is your muscle memory thinks it knows what you want it to do and you have made the move and call for the bird in many practice sessions trying to perfect it, even if it's an incorrect move."

To effect a change in shooting technique, John recommends, "Use a call for the bird other than what you normally use. If you use your normal call, your brain is used to it and will give you the same result that you are trying to change."

Most flinching at 20 yards or closer, John believes, is eye induced. John also believes it's very important to practice how to handle unusual things in skeet competition, such as the bird does not fly as it should possibly due to weather conditions. You should practice "Shooting Out of the Box." Shoot practice targets further out than you normally do and

shoot crossing targets in different places. This will help you deal with the unexpected in target flight during competition.

"Competitors practice until they can't get it wrong; that is opposite from the idea that they practice to get it right."

John states, "Goal setting, and they can be small ones, are important and they will narrow what you want to accomplish. Without goals the mind is not focused and it may

think about too many things."

"In shooting you can get so caught up in thinking about too many things you want to do or not do." John says, "Just see it and shoot it—which is the task at hand. Turn the brain off on any other thoughts."

These Shima hints and philosophy can be found in shooter testimonials on the DVD. Many students have benefited in very big ways from his instruction. This counsel has helped make competitive skeet shooting more fun for them as they have improved their skills. The operable word is "improved" in their skeet shooting in competition. John's ideas and philosophy can be summed up with two words in all the testimonials—IT WORKS!

The Added Edge

Todd Bender has also weighed in on this DVD's value. "This is an informational DVD, produced as a compliment to the proven physical mechanics of shotgun shooting. John offers solutions to shooters who are having difficulties progressing in their game, and or have been unsuccessful utilizing traditional or mainstream solutions. John integrates his unique coaching qualities with proven solutions for any and all shooters. This DVD is a great addition to any

Use a call for the bird other than what you normally use.

shooting video library, and is a must for shooters who need an edge or alternative approach to better their shooting abilities”

As a shooter who is 76 years young, with ten years in the game, my long term goals are to be selected for another All-American Team and add more medallions from the World Shoot. I have been sliding down in performance and consistency for five years and took no lessons in that time to stop the decrease in performance.

The DVD really got my attention as I do want to get better and be more consistent in my shooting. After more than five years without lessons on a regular basis, I took a lesson from John and found many detrimental things have crept into my game over the last few years causing the decline in my scores.

I gave Heads Up Shooting a try and it worked pretty well for me. I am going to keep practicing it because I really see the target and lead better than I ever have. It has changed my eyes’ and brain’s conception as to where the target lead is. As others have said, it does take some getting used to.

John Shima really knows what he is talking about and his unique teaching methods and insights into the game are outstanding because they work. There is no doubt in my mind that when you are having recurring problems you can’t seem to solve nor even have a clue about and you are not shooting like you want to, seeing a qualified instructor is a step in the right skeet shooting direction. John thinks this is a good idea also.

If you are not afraid to change your style and want to move up, I strongly suggest you get a copy of this unique, information packed and motivational DVD and see how it can make you a better skeet compet-

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itor. If breaking more birds than you have been doing and winning can't make you enjoy the sport more, what does? I think this DVD can answer that.

Look for John's ad in this issue and it will tell you how to get your

copy of *Stay on Target With John Shima*, you will also find them on Amazon.com and you can also go to John's web site www.johnshima.com to order them.