


# Shotgun practice pays off

A new column by Nick Sisley



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While fly tying, lure modifications and tackle tending might be high on the list of outdoorsmen these cold days, winter is also a good time for the wingshooter to tune up his skills with his scattergun — right in the warmth of his own home. I consider handling a shotgun to be an art form, and practice helps one become a better artist.

The idea is to pull your shotgun or shotguns from their place on the wall

pegs often. Slam them to your shoulder after double checking to make certain they're empty. One can never be too careful when gun handling. I like to focus on a wall object, then throw the gun to it. Holding the smoothbore in place, make certain you're shouldering the piece properly. Are you seeing too much barrel or rib, or too little, or is the alignment off to one side or the other? If you can't mount the gun comfortable and naturally, time after time, looking "straight" down the rib, and seeing just the right amount of rib, you may need a stock adjustment.

Once you have the proper fit, and know what it feels like, the idea is to pull that piece off the wall often, maybe even every day. Get the feel of slamming it quickly to the shoulder. Get the feel of what exact mounting feels like — on the shoulder, on the cheek, between and in the hands. Repetition is the way to accomplish this.

Those who do it all winter long will do it naturally when the chips are down next fall.

Practice swinging often, too. Try to make the barrel swing in a smooth, straight plane, not a curved arc that looks like a rainbow. Be aware of foot work. Learn how to aim them toward the target. Make exaggerated swings from left to right and vice versa. While doing so be cognizant of how your hips are moving. They should pivot, as should the shoulders, with minimal movement of the hips and shoulders to the left or right — or up or down.

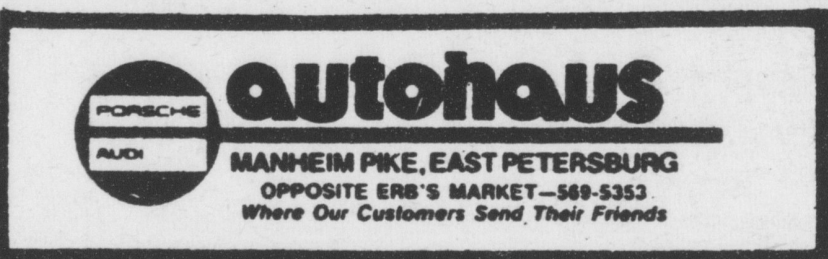
Try walking through the living room, then suddenly imagine a grouse has flushed off to your right. While throwing your shotgun up, do the required footwork that will put your entire body in the most advantageous shooting position. Walk through a room and make believe grouse are flushing from every imaginable angle — one at a time, of course.



Think this type of practice is useless? Not so. It pays off. Ted Williams, one of baseball's greatest hitters, practiced daily with his bat in front of a mirror. The baseball swing is also an art form, but Ted, through constant practice, put as much science into the art as possible. You can infinitely increase your skills with a scattergun the same way — right in your

own home.

There's no question that experience in cover and on clay targets is the ultimate teacher — just as facing opposing pitchers was for Ted. But by taking the time to carefully think out all the intricacies of the shotgun game, by practicing at home when you can't be in the woods or on the clay target field, any shooter can increase his effectiveness appreciably.



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