

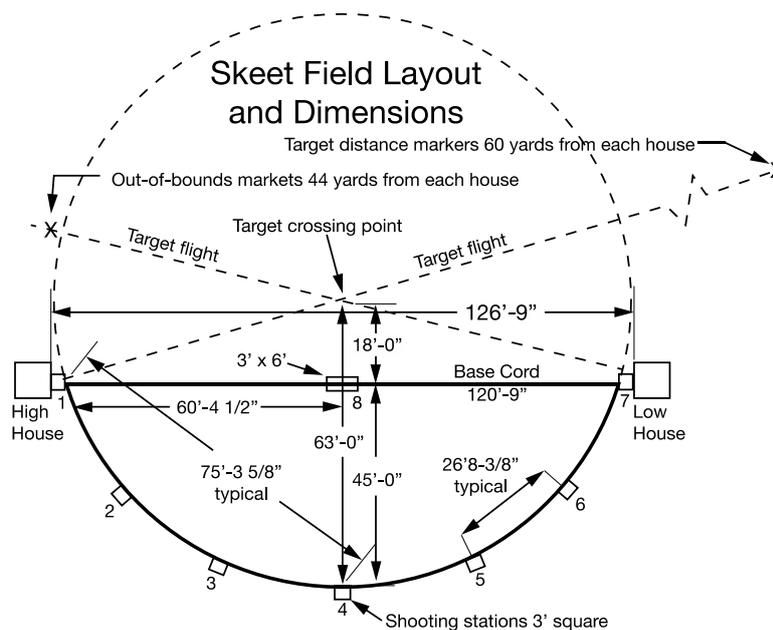
# Introduction to Skeet Shooting

By John Tonkin

A round of American skeet consists of shooting at 25 targets from eight different stations on the skeet field. Measurements are imperial. Conversion: 1 foot = 305 mm. 1 yard = 915 mm.



Targets emerge from the high and low houses. The elevation of the high house trap is 10 feet and the low house trap 3 feet. Targets are launched at approximately 55 mph and fly 60 yards. Targets must be shot at within the first 44 yards of flight (indicated by the shooting boundary marker) but may break beyond this mark before they land at the target distance marker. Only one shot is fired at each target. The first missed target of a round is repeated.



## **Shooting sequence**

### **Station 1**

4 targets 4 shots

First a single high target followed by a single low target.

Next follows doubles (targets released simultaneously from each house) shooting the high house target first and then the low house target.

### **Station 2**

Repeat sequence as for station 1

### **Stations 3, 4 and 5.**

2 targets 2 shots on each station.

A single high followed by a single low.

### **Stations 6 and 7**

The same as station 1 except that the doubles are shot low house first.

### **Station 8**

2 or 3 targets

A single high followed by a single low which is repeated if no target has been missed.

## **Equipment**

Most skeet shooters use a 12 gauge under and over shotgun.

Traditionally a skeet gun had the same dimensions as a sporting gun. Increasingly skeet shooters are choosing a trap gun configuration. There are two reasons for this. Firstly a competition gun needs to be relatively heavy to minimise felt recoil and secondly the trap gun stock has a parallel comb so wherever you place your head on the stock it is the same height with respect to the gun rib.

An adjustable comb offers the ability to set your right eye at the correct vertical height and horizontal position with respect to the gun rib. This is very important as the right eye is the rear sight on a shotgun (assuming you are right handed).

Gun barrel length varies from 28 inches to 32 inches.

A typical skeet gun



PG. 46 J682E30 682 Gold Trp Cbo

If your gun has interchangeable chokes you can shoot trap, sporting and skeet with the same gun. Most skeet shooters use a skeet choke which has .005 inch constriction. This gives a pattern of around 25 to 30 inches at 20 yards which is the distance at which most skeet targets are shot.

Skeet is most commonly shot with 28 grams of number 9 shot.

Eye protection is mandatory. Specialised shooting glasses which are impact resistant are used. The most common colour is orange which highlights orange targets or blue which highlights targets on a green background.

Hearing protection is also mandatory. Shooting muffs are popular but make sure they do not impact on the gun stock. Custom made ear plugs are the most popular.

### **Technique**

The sustained lead technique rather than the swing through technique has become the preferred method. In sustained lead the gun is always ahead of the target. The concept is to start the gun at a predetermined hold point. When the target is identified the gun should swing ahead of the target so that gun speed matches the target speed. Then having the correct lead the shot is taken.

It is fundamental that the gun is moved horizontally with a lower body, one piece move. The arms simply hold the gun in front of the chest while the lower body turns like a tank turret turns on the tank body. If the shot is made with the arms moving independent of the body the correct relationship between the head and the stock cannot be maintained throughout the shot.

Vertical gun movement is made by elevating the arms not by leaning backwards.

At all times most weight (around 80%) remains on the front foot. This avoids the deadly and undesirable shoulder roll in which the shooter moves weight to the rear foot during the shot. The latter move is accompanied by the left shoulder rising and the right shoulder falling. As a consequence the gun rises requiring a compensatory downward correction. Also if this move is made while shooting doubles the second shot will require the reverse manoeuvre.

The shot stream or swarm takes about 0.1 of a second to travel 20 yards. In that time the target will have travelled approximately 3.5 feet. Therefore for crossing shots such as at stations 3, 4 and 5, lead or forward allowance of a similar amount is necessary for the shot to collide with the target and break it. The same time and distance relationship applies to all targets but due to flight path angle of the target less lead is required for targets which are approaching or departing at quartering angles.

A rough rule of thumb guide to lead is

Station 1. Low house, one foot of lead.

Station 2. Two feet of lead.

Station 3. Three feet of lead.

Station 4. Four feet of lead.

Station 5. Same as 3

Station 6. Same as 2

Station 7. High house one foot.

Station 8. At the front edge of the target.

## Stance

The right handed shooter should stand with feet parallel shoulder width apart. The body faces the low house window (belly button in the low house window) on all stations except station 7 and 8 high. For these two the body faces straight out at 90 degrees to a line between the trap houses. This stance position optimises body position for when the shot is taken. The shooter should assume the “combat position” with 80% of weight on the left foot.

### Foot positions belly button in the Low House window except station 7 and high 8 and weighting 70-80% of weight on RED arrow

Stand with your weighted foot on the front edge of the pad

Station 2 and 6 stand as far from the window as possible

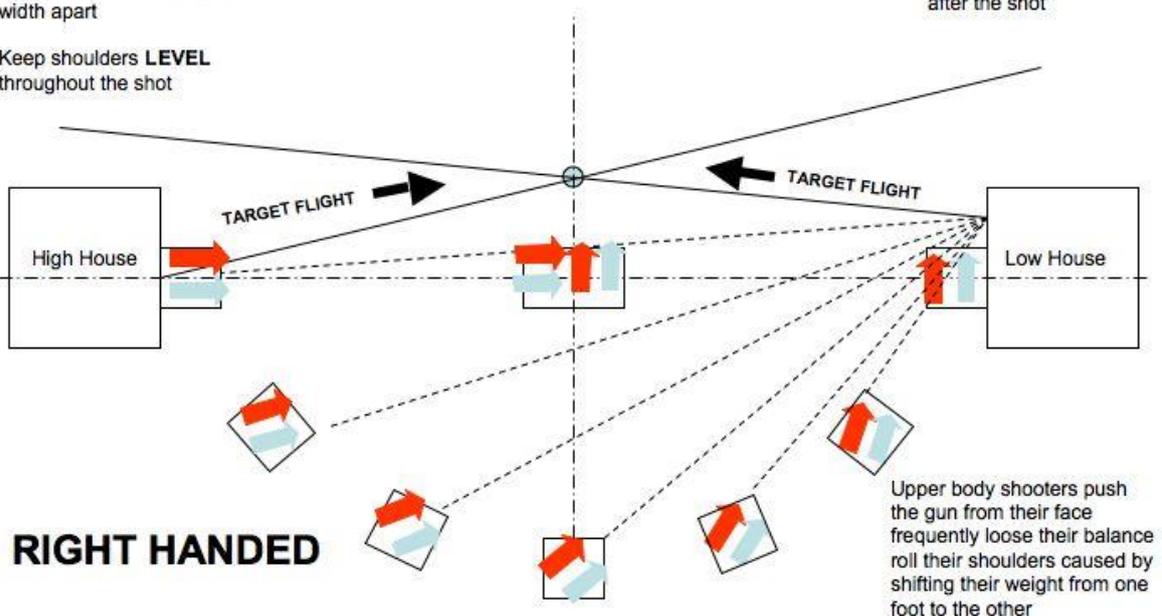
Feet **PARALLEL**...shoulder width apart

Keep shoulders **LEVEL** throughout the shot

When you finished the shot was your weight still on the proper foot

Use downward pressure from your hip to your foot then PIVOT

Stay in the gun before, during, and after the shot



## **Gun mount**

The gun butt should be placed in the natural pocket formed where the shoulder joins the chest not over the shoulder joint. The top of the butt should be level with the top of the shoulder. The butt should meet the collar bone at the junction of the upper and middle thirds of the butt.

The gun should be brought up to the cheek rather than lowering the side of the head onto the stock. This is so the head remains relatively vertical, the so called heads up position. If the head is tilted forward or to the side vision is impaired. The comb should be pressed firmly under the cheek bone and stay there during the shot. This keeps the rear sight (right eye) fixed during the shot. With the gun mounted the shooter should be looking directly down the midline of the rib. If the gun has a bead at the muzzle and a mid rib bead, the beads should form a figure 8. This sight picture should give a pattern at 21 yards which has 60-70% of the pattern above the aim point. Sporting guns traditionally shoot only 50% above. The pattern point of impact can be raised by elevating the comb. As a rough guide a 1mm elevation of the comb gives a point of impact rise of 20mm at 20 meters.

To determine where your shotgun is actually shooting use the pattern board.

Shooting from 13 yards with a gun rest will give a good idea of where the gun shoots. Shooting freehand will tell you where you shoot the gun. Use three shots per group. Move back to 20 yards to approximate the skeet shooting distance.

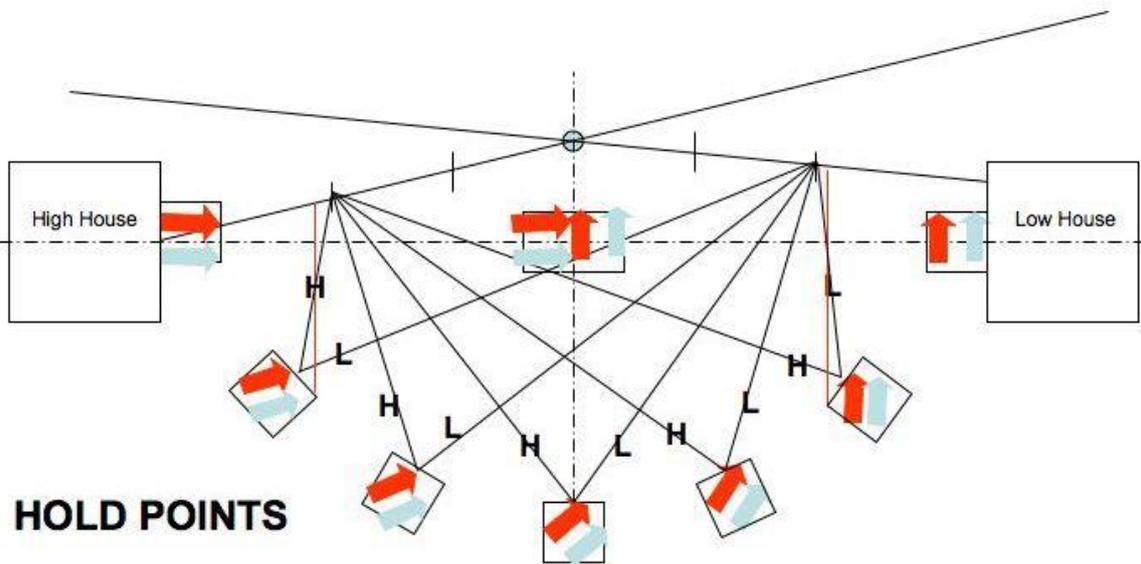
Todd Bender showing the correct head position



### **Gun Hold Point**

The hold point is one third of the way from the house from which the target will emerge to the centre stake except for station 8 where the hold point is 4 feet out from the window.

The gun hold point height is level with the bottom of the window. On station 5 and 6 you may hold level with the top of the window. It is important not to hold the gun too high because it will obscure the emerging target.



### **Vision and target acquisition**

Target acquisition is the single most important step in skeet shooting. The concept is to use peripheral vision to pick up target movement as the target exits the trap house. Once the eye has detected this initial movement it will lock onto the target with central vision. To use peripheral vision look into the distance. Some call this a soft focus.

The precise optimal look point for each individual will require trial and error. Initially try looking on the target flight path about half way back to the trap house from the gun hold point. This is about 10 feet out from the trap.

Before calling for the target set the eyes, let the eyes settle, wait 1-2 seconds prior to calling pull.

Peripheral vision detects movement. Central vision allows the brain to track the target and calculate speed distance and direction like military radar.

Once you have initially seen the target do not take your eyes off it. When watching the target fly across the sky it is paramount the eyes are focused only on the target especially when the shot is taken. The barrel should only be seen in peripheral vision. Do not check your lead by looking at the barrel just prior to making the shot. If you do your gun movement will stop, resulting in a miss behind.

It is important not to move your eyes until you see the target emerge from the trap. If you move your eyes before the target is sighted your gun will follow your eyes and you will be caught out way in front of the target. It is difficult to lock on to the target if your eyes are moving before you see the target. This is called leaving early or moving on your call. Also if you move your gun before the target emerges your eyes may well lock onto the barrel reducing the chance of acquiring the target.

It is important to match gun speed with target speed. After seeing the initial streak of the target, do not cast your eyes, and hence your gun, out near the centre stake and try to ambush the target there. This is called streaking.

### **Target break point**

To begin the novice skeet shooter should aim to break the target at or around the centre stake. Later on the break point moves a little closer to the trap house, about two thirds the distance from the trap house to the centre stake, in order to shoot doubles efficiently.

### **Mental preparation**

There are three phases to any action

Before, during and after.

The before phase involves conscious thought. This is the preshot routine. The shooter imagines how he/she will set up on the station and visualises the hold point and look point. The shooter imagines calling for the target, seeing the first flash of the target, locking onto the target, matching gun speed with target speed and having the correct lead taking the shot. The shooter watches the target break. This sequence is repeated as often as necessary. Any additional thoughts or prompts are reviewed in this phase.

In the during phase the shooter simply walks onto the station and carries out the prearranged sequence. This is the subconscious phase when we let the subconscious mind take over. If we let the conscious mind take over during the shot the correct balance of timing is likely to be disrupted. This is definitely not the time to reflect on why you missed this target on the last round and try to remedy a mistake. Such thoughts belong in the before phase.

The after phase is the time to reinforce the self image or confidence. If the shot was good pat yourself on the back and move on. If the shot was poor then don't get angry as this will depress your self image resulting in deteriorating performance. Instead imagine a perfect shot, put this image in your memory bank and move on. "Spitting the dummy" is very harmful to self image and will have a negative effect on your shooting. Your squad will not appreciate it either.

### **Summary of shot sequence step by step**

The preshot routine involves consciously imagining stepping onto the station with correct foot, gun and eye placement. Next imagine calling pull then matching gun speed to target speed and pulling the trigger with the correct lead. Then imagine seeing the target break.

Then step onto the station load the gun and apply the preshot routine of foot, gun and eye placement. Pause to allow the eyes to settle. Call pull, pick up the target movement with peripheral vision and lock onto the target with central vision. When the target is first seen start turning your body. Match gun speed to target speed and with the correct lead take the shot. Remember to focus only on the target.

These ideas and concepts are reflections of Todd Bender's and Lanny Basham's teachings.

For more information go to <http://toddbenderintl.com/>