

## **June 2003 - Shooting in bad weather**

I am always envious of pistol shooters when the weather turns ugly. In the shotgun disciplines we don't have the luxury of indoor firing stations sheltering you from the elements. Bad weather is a part of the sport. A shooter's preparation for the uncertainty of the four seasons, both mentally and physically, can often determine who wins and loses. This month we will look at ways to combat the forces of nature.

I did all of my shooting in my younger days in and around Ballarat in western Victoria, one of the coldest and wettest places in the country. A lot of the clay target events were held at night, often in sub-zero temperatures. One of the biggest problems in shooting in the rain and cold is coping with the extra layers of clothing that are needed to stay comfortable. To be consistent in your gun mount you will need to have a constant stock length.

Therefore, it is absolutely essential to invest in some thin thermal underwear and some good quality waterproof rain clothes to make the stock's length feel the same no matter what you are wearing. 'Showerproof' rain gear is good for just that, showers and keeping the wind out. It is well worth spending the extra few dollars for the 100 per cent waterproof garments. Golf shops probably offer the best range and if you can get your hands on some waterproof gear with collarless tops you will be better served again, as the collar often impedes gun mount. Thermal underwear and socks can be purchased anywhere, but camping and outdoor shops tend to offer the best variety and quality.

Just being dressed for bad weather doesn't necessarily mean you will shoot better in it. Being warm and dry will help, but it is often the mental approach to the adverse conditions that separates the 'men from the boys', so to speak. It is very hard to train for inclement conditions. I have never met anyone whose scores actually improve in wet and windy weather, but the better shooters' scores don't vary much. The reason for this is that the more experienced competitors don't change any technical parts of their routine and style because of the weather.

Under pressure there is no way you can successfully try things that you never practice on a regular basis, simply because the wind is blowing harder than it was the day before. Your brain builds up a blueprint, like a computer program, on how to shoot, but it is not flexible enough to change the data on a regular basis based on the climatic conditions. The secret is to be mentally strong enough to appreciate that the scores will be lower for everyone. All you can do in any competition is to hit as many as you can. Winning takes care of itself. Most competitions tend to be lost by shooters who were in a winning position and won by shooters who just kept holding things together when the chips were down. This process is accelerated in bad conditions.

I have always been a little sceptical about doing too much training in windy and wet conditions. It is obviously essential to try out any new wet-weather gear before a competition simply to know how it feels, but after that I never feel as though I have achieved anything else when training scores are lowered due to bad weather. The only

time to experiment with any technical change is in practice. To effectively know if any change has been worthwhile you need to practice in consistent weather conditions.

Shooters that try and compete for a score instead of just trying to win are often the biggest losers in poor weather. Setting goals to try and reach a certain level or maintain a particular average can unfortunately be unrealistic when the wind starts to blow. I would rather win a gold medal any day averaging 95 per cent than win a silver medal with 99 per cent. I will never forget going to the 1990 Commonwealth Games in Auckland. In very windy conditions I missed five targets on the first day and felt devastated, even though I was one of the top scores for the day. I thought I would just change a few things the next day to try and compensate for the wind. I missed 15 targets. The gold medallist missed eight each day. I learned my lesson the hard way.

I would recommend that any shooter wear glasses during training or competition. A good majority need prescription lenses anyway. I have always thought that wearing lenses in the wind is an advantage, as they stop your eyes from watering. Wearing glasses in the driving rain can be a different story altogether though. There isn't much you can do to combat the rain if you have to wear glasses, except take a dry towel and have plenty of patience. Side screen blinkers are always an advantage and even more so in the rain.

I have never really liked wearing glasses when the light starts to deteriorate before a storm. Many shooters automatically pull out yellow lenses in failing light. I don't actually think that this helps in any way, other than giving the perception that things are brighter. Most opticians will tell you that any color over your eye will restrict the amount of light entering into it and therefore won't enhance the intensity. However, many argue that if something helps you mentally then it is worth doing.

The temptation to change your technique when things aren't going well is great at the best of times. When inclement weather hits while you are shooting, the temptation gets stronger. I would suggest you try and develop your technical skills in perfect, controlled conditions and then when the wind and rain comes, work on your mental skills to try and resist changing anything. You may not shoot perfect scores, but they may just be winning ones.

Until next month, hope you get some good weather.