



AN EYE ON THE FUTURE

Richard Atkins takes a close look at an enigmatic new device to assist shooters: the SP



Richard Atkins has decades of experience testing guns, cartridges and accessories, and is our expert on all aspects of ballistics, shotgun performance and technical analysis

A

s the numbers taking up shooting sports, and clay target shooting in particular, continue to increase, so the incidence of one of the most common bugbears to set back new shooters' progress rises too. Anyone

who belongs to a few shooting related websites and forums will be aware that vision problems crop up very regularly indeed. That's not really surprising, as they affect a measurable proportion of individuals, and problems which may not have a noticeable impact upon daily life most certainly can and do affect how well we shoot.

There are, of course, many conditions affecting vision that regular eye tests will have picked up along the way. Corrective spectacles – as we all are likely to require at some point – will suffice for most things, but shooting a shotgun can bring to the fore one of the eye issues that won't affect, say, driving a car, despite its profound effect on your ability to aim at and connect with a moving clay. That issue is eye dominance.

Having one eye dominant over the other is quite normal, and indeed it is desirable as far as shooting is concerned. That's because the whole process of connecting with any target relies upon the shotgun pointing where the shooter is looking. Gun fit plays an important role here and, although many of us can happily get a sufficiently good fit off the peg (especially now many guns have adjustable stocks) the fit remains

important. However, gun fit alone probably will not be sufficient if a shooter has cross-eye dominance. There are various degrees of dominance, with central vision dominance fairly common, but full cross-eye dominance is also common and can be hard to deal with.

Most shooters will have checked their eye dominance at some stage, if only by the simple act pointing a finger at a fixed point and closing each eye in turn. The eye that aligns with the finger and aiming mark is the dominant eye; closing that eye and opening the other will cause the finger to appear to move some way from the mark. This is the simple, time-honoured check. There are other methods and any good coach will employ at least one of them to assess your eye dominance.

When you find you are right handed but left eye dominant, or vice versa, the first option to explore is to try shooting from the other shoulder. This works for some people but feels very alien to others.

Solutions

The simplest way of address cross-dominance is to partially close one eye. This works for some, but may not prove ideal; we use binocular vision in our natural hand-eye co-ordination process, so partially or completely closing an eye sacrifices some of the information used to make speed and distance calculations.

ABOVE Without the SP, Dave was missing some incomers to the left



ABOVE **The SP device unobtrusively fitted to an O-U**

Other potential solutions have been tried over the years. A scan through some shooting magazines will turn up several devices aimed at solving the problem. Some rely on blocking out, or dimming the influence of, the dominant eye with a 'blinder' added to the gun barrel. Others involve material stuck on the dominant eye lens of shooting spectacles to obscure the view. These methods basically prevent the 'wrong' eye from getting a clear view and so allow the weaker eye to become the 'master' eye for the purposes of mounting the gun. Plenty of shooters have tried these and they do work well for some.

Likewise fibre optic beads within a long tube, so that only the aiming eye can see the bright bead (like the Easy Hit bead) have met with some approval.

As yet there is no Holy Grail that can lay claim to the honour of being the single reliable solution to the eye dominance issue. It was therefore an interesting opportunity when *Clay Shooting* asked me to meet up with the inventor of a new device to help shooters overcome this problem.

I had no prior knowledge of this device and the day ahead was to prove revealing, if a little perplexing! I met with the Shoot SP designer, Steven Randles, at Dave Brown's DBC Leisure shooting ground near Lydney, Gloucestershire. Steve is a professional aerospace design engineer and shoots to AAA Class standard; he also has central vision. He has learned to cope with this, but it has left him needing something extra to reach his full potential. He therefore went to work with a professor of optometry, specialising in sports related dominance issues.

Over a two year long development period Steve made various prototypes and discussed what was

happening with the professor. He discovered the principles upon which the SP device operates while experimenting in the field of binocular rivalry. These have been developed into the small, light and easily fitted device that is the SP.

The way the SP works cannot be easily explained and is hence likely to create an air of mystery about it. It does not work by any of the methods I have ever encountered before, and when the small device is first revealed you wonder how it could have the profound impact that is claimed. As I was to discover, it certainly can produce some stunning results, but the questions of how and why are not readily answered.

What is the SP?

Simply described, the SP is a small, black, moulded device in the shape of a raised 'bump' that is securely fixed onto the side of a shotgun barrel, near the muzzle. The key to it working is that it is fitted on the side of the gun that you wish to mount your gun from, so that the eye that you wish to prevent being dominant does not see the SP device during the pre-mount or mounting process. This means that when shooting right-shouldered it goes on the right side of the gun (and vice versa if the opposite effect is required).

My immediate thoughts were 'how can a device so small and inconspicuous (remember it is black and fitted to black barrels) have any strong influence on gun mounting?' I was about to find out!

Dave Brown is a successful qualified clay coach who has suffered from cross eye dominance all his shooting life. He much prefers shooting from his right shoulder, but his left eye takes over and he has learned to shoot from the left shoulder to make coaching more »



ABOVE The Shoot SP is a tiny gadget that can make a huge difference

effective. Hearing of the SP he was keen to try it out and we went through some stages together.

Dave uses a coaching mirror to check the gun mount and eye dominance of pupils he coaches. During a most revealing session using the mirror, Dave tested two Browning shotguns, one with the SP fitted and the other without. Time and again when he mounted the gun without the SP the muzzles pulled over to the left. Then, with the SP fitted, he repeated the test multiple times and he was lined up each time.

That is all very well in a static test, but what about on the clays? Incoming and outgoing clays often pose the greatest problems for those with eye dominance issues; they have a tendency to shoot up the side of such targets. So out to a modest height incomer we went. Dave took plenty of shots here. Although he has taught himself to cope with his eye dominance problem, without the SP Dave still shot to the left side of several birds. Some were narrowly clipped by the edge of the pattern, while others escaped. Then he took some shots with the SP fitted. Standing behind him it was easy to see that Dave now came directly up onto the line of the incomers instead of initially mounting to the left and then making a gradual attempt to compensate by moving his aim over by the amount he has learned he must do to connect.

I then tried the same targets and guns. Although my eyes are not what they once were I don't have a dominance issue as such (maybe a touch when I'm over-tired). I quickly settled in to breaking them without the SP fitted. Then I tried the SP. Note that you do not look at the SP; it does its work from your peripheral vision all the way through the mounting process. It seems the device provides a stimulus that persuades your aiming eye to take control and act as the master eye during your shot preparation.

I shot well with the SP fitted and was getting regular, central 'star burst' breaks. What I was not aware of, until it was commented upon, was how much earlier I was now taking the targets! Taking a few more shots it was clear I was actually picking the clay up sooner; I cannot explain it, but it happened – that is the perplexing part!

Two things were obvious from this: firstly that Dave's pick up line was much more accurate with the SP fitted and secondly that he was able to shoot the target noticeably quicker because he was confident of his line. I found this too. These two effects combined to produce a clear benefit and Dave is now a convert. He now gets any student he has with dominance issues to try the SP device and several have found it helps them. You can literally try before you buy.

“You do not look at the SP; it does its work from your peripheral vision”

Endorsements

A visit to www.shootsp.co.uk will show that a number of leading shooters and experienced coaches have tried the SP for themselves. The list is growing quite fast, and it already includes some well known names, including leading shooter and coach Becky

McKenzie. Shooting grounds Mickley Hall, Honesberrie and Mid Wales Shooting Centre are just three places that have SP samples for shooters to try. It is a positive thing to be able to check if something works for you, and in my book the widespread availability of SPs to try shows the makers' confidence in their product.

The feedback from those who have used the SP device for several months is of improved accuracy, more consistent target acquisition and improved results. This spans the gamut of clay disciplines from DTL to Fitasc. From club level to serious competitors, you can read the endorsements showing how shooters with eye dominance issues have progressed having thoroughly trialled the SP.



SHOOTER IN FOCUS: CHARLIE MONAHAN

The Laporte CPC sponsorship has been running since 2015 until the present supporting the careers of over 25 athletes in a variety of ages, abilities and locations all over the UK. We asked a few of our shooters for their tips.



Name: Charlie Monahan
Discipline: Fitasc
Laporte shooter: 2015

What is the most important thing you have learnt this year?

I've learnt not to get upset when a shoot doesn't go to plan and to try and take a positive each time I compete. Whether I shoot a good score or not there are always lessons to be learnt and new things to try and improve on.

Who is the most influential person you met this year and why?

This is a hard question as I have met and competed with so many great shots this year. I met Guy Franklin last winter when we competed together in a Fitasc shoot. Since then I have had several coaching sessions with Guy who has helped me a lot with the technical side of shooting. His continued support has also given me greater confidence and belief in myself.

Have you any top tips for other shooters?

I would advise anyone not to stress out too much about averages and personal bests. Try and shoot as many different grounds as possible and see as many different types of targets as you can. In my first year of competing I shot at 21 different grounds!

It is not possible to say that everyone will improve by an equal amount, but it is clear that improved results are often a reality for those who try an SP. One lady shooter has already notched up a DTL Winter Series with the SP helping her, while others have taken county titles and Clubman wins.

For the price of less than 75 clays and cartridges (and the chance to test one first) the SP is certainly well worth a closer look.

I will leave the final word here with Dave Brown, who was a great help on the day. He commented:

"Being a right-handed shooter with left eye dominance, I have been experimenting with the SP. I have two Browning B725s and have fitted one to mine. I can honestly say that the difference has been amazing. With both eyes open, the B725 with SP fitted instinctively and consistently aligns with my right eye, whereas the one without aligns with my left. It's going to take considerable practice to become fully accustomed to the new sight picture after more than 50 years, but I believe this could be an important breakthrough for those with cross eye dominance." 📷

BELOW Richard (left) and Dave Brown rest on their laurels after a successful shoot

