

The Muscle Memory System of Robert Louis

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When it comes to shooting clays, muscle memory is one of those things that can be either a blessing or a curse.

It's a blessing when you imprint the proper way to mount and swing a shotgun into your motor skills so that they become "second nature." It's a curse if you've developed an awful swing or mount that has already turned into a so-called "bad habit" that becomes difficult to break. Either way, you can see the subconscious power of muscle memory at work every time you step up to shoot a clay target.

In a nutshell muscle memory implies the benefits of ongoing repetition to develop a motor skill that requires less and less conscious thought to execute. Shotgun instructors and other experts in the field would argue that muscle memory is associated with the notion of instinct shooting, where you are able to immediately identify a target break point, pull the trigger and score the hit. Regardless, developing good muscle memory that ensures top performance can be a challenge.

While muscle memory may not be considered part of the core curriculum for clays shooting, you'll read about it in material from leading coaches.



The author shooting skeet.

In their book “The Coaching Hour Chronicles: Conversations in the Pursuit of Sporting Clays Excellence – Volume 1” Gil and Vicki Ash write: “You create muscle memory through slow, repetitive movements that you can feel, not see. You don’t create muscle memory visually. You create it through feel. I will be very blunt and honest with you. If you will spend fifteen to twenty minutes a day, by yourself, in a room with a gun, (not loaded of course) with your eyes closed and shoot five stations, six pairs in a row, with the gun, with a routine, with your eyes closed, you will begin to feel your swing.”

Tom Deck, author of the book “The Orvis Guide to Gunfitting,” says in the book: “First you commit the fundamentals to muscle memory.”

Bruce Bowlen’s book “The Orvis Wing-Shooting Handbook” advises: “To be a successful shooter, you must understand the basic technique involved and practice enough to maintain muscle memory and timing.”

And leading instructor Chris Batha has written: “Learning and constantly reinforcing the muscle memory of planning, implementing a plan and problem-solving will help hone your mental toughness in the stress of a competition or in a shoot-off.”

The obvious way to develop muscle memory is to shoot a lot of targets. The caveat here is that you had better make sure your shotgunning basics are good or you risk embedding poorly learned skills that can hurt your game long term. That means you should have taken lessons from a trusted, qualified instructor to get down the fundamentals of foot position, gun mount, focus, stance, swing and so on. Once you feel comfortable that you have mastered the fundamentals then the rest is practice, practice, practice.

Getting out to actually shoot, however, can present some familiar obstacles. There’s that thing called a job, which dominates most of our time. We all have family obligations that take precedence. There’s those long, dreary winters for many shooters who can find their favorite clays course buried under snow for several weeks at a stretch. And what about money? Some of us fret over the price of gas, ammunition and target fees.

In a perfect world, all of us would be able to practice our clays shooting as often as possible with little concern for time, weather or money.

With that in mind, what I discovered is that the Robert Louis Company has an arsenal of products that can help clays shooters develop muscle memory at home.



From the Robert Louis Company, the Basic Ultimate Practice Shooting System, which includes the All-Gauge Red LaserShooter, All-Gauge Green LaserShooter, LaserPro and Pro-Kit case. The company bundles products for savings over individual purchases.

For decades, clays shooters have turned to either books or instructional DVDs when it came to improving their skills from the comfort of their favorite sofa. I think of those products as passive learning tools. They convey vital information while you're sitting there munching popcorn. Robert Louis, meanwhile, provides products for safe, indoor practice with the primary intent of actively developing muscle memory.

Bob Foege, owner of the Robert Louis Company, packages these hands-on devices under the umbrella of Indoor Shotgun Training Products. In his suite of offerings, laser beams, as we typically see on laser pointers, serve two purposes: they either substitute as flying clay targets or they are inserted into the muzzle of the shotgun to indicate point of impact (where they can also serve double-duty for determining proper gun fit).



The All-Gauge UltraBrite Red LaserShooter
from the Robert Louis Company.

The battery-powered LaserShooter concentrates on gun swing and mount – shotgunning techniques where good muscle memory is critical. You drop the rocket-shaped LaserShooter into the muzzles, where it projects a red or green laser beam. Mount the gun and swing it so that the beam follows the seam of where a wall meets the ceiling. See where the laser is pointing. Surprised? You may very well be once you see the laser beam in action.

The company calls this process Dry Mounting. Think of the seam as the line of the target. From the perspective of enhancing your muscle memory, the LaserShooter turns the art of a gun mount into a science with quantifiable results that you can measure and improve upon.

Now some instructors would say that a small flashlight inserted into the muzzle could serve the same purpose. But does it really? If you're looking for precision control, the laser offers a sharper image of your swing compared with the diffused light pattern of a flashlight. Remember, an inch at the muzzle can translate into several inches or feet at the point of impact. Do you want to risk it?

In addition to letting you practice your mount and swing, the LaserShooter can serve as the first step toward determining whether or not your shotgun actually fits. When you look down the rib of your shotgun, you may think the comb and point of impact are properly aligned; but when you mount the gun to that seam, the laser could show you that the muzzles are pointing in a different direction that you had anticipated. The next step would be a pattern board or perhaps a proper gun fitting.

The Standard LaserShooter fits 12 gauge and 12/20 gauge shotguns. The All-Gauge LaserShooter comes in four gauge sizes (12, 20, 28 and 410). The LaserShooter is available in two different beams: The basic Ultra Brite Red and a Super Brite Green. Mr. Foege says that the Super Brite Green is considerably more visible than the Ultra Brite Red. The red and green also lets two shooters practice together. The basic LaserShooter in red costs between \$150 to \$250 depending on the number of gauges you select. The green version ranges in price from \$230 to \$330.

You can purchase a \$29 Trigger Switch for the LaserShooter. The Trigger Switch simulates firing the shotgun. One end of the Trigger Switch has a metal band, the other a wire that connects to the LaserShooter. You slip the metal band around your trigger finger. When the band touches the metal trigger it closes a circuit that actuates the laser beam. Among other things, the Trigger Switch can be helpful in diagnosing flinches. The Trigger Switch works on any shotgun that have non-conductive coatings (such as Benelli, Franchi and Blaser) on their internals, thus avoiding the necessity of a grounding wire.

When it comes to developing muscle memory, the company's other helpful product is the LaserPro White Lightning Moving Target Projector. It's actually quite ingenious. The technology is encased in a box that's 7½ inches long, 3¾ inches wide and 1½ inches tall. An adjustable table-top tripod is included.

The system projects one or two moving laser targets. Using two lasers you can designate the lead beam as the theoretical target lead while the trailing beam becomes the target. The other alternative is to use both beams as a doubles shot.

There are three control knobs that afford near infinite variety of targets within the parameters of two beams. You can adjust speed and lateral movement – the same motions pertaining to overhead targets that run along the ceiling by turning the box on its side.

Now you have presentations that enable you to monitor your lead (determine if you're stopping the gun), mount and line of target. The LaserPro gives you the constant repetition needed to hone your shooting skills – emulating the practice that you might use at a troublesome station. It costs \$385.

The Robert Louis Company will sell you banner for \$370 that depicts a skeet and trap range on which you throw the beams. It's 9 feet wide by 4½ feet tall.



The LaserPro Moving Target Projector
mounted on the
Wobbler Olympic Gold True Target Oscillator.

The next component of the LaserPro White Lightning Moving Target Projector is the Wobbler. Like its name suggests, the Wobbler mimics wobble trap. The Wobbler is a brick-size box. You attach the LaserPro to it and the wobble oscillates side to side. Again, if you mount the LaserPro sideways on the wobbler you'll achieve the same effect for overhead targets. Dialing in the various modes, you can use the Wobbler to reproduce dropping targets, chandelles, fast quartering outgoers and birds that curl away.

For beginners, the Wobbler can expand the library of targets that shooters will experience in the field. For the rest of us, practice makes perfect. The Wobbler is priced at \$179.

Overall, the Robert Louis Company has a full system that addresses higher performance through muscle memory. Mr. Foege offers various product bundles that lower the costs of individual products. In making a cost comparison with course time, there are a few things that you should take into account. First, you're saving money on shells, course fees and gas. Second, you could conceivably cut back on a lesson or two with your instructor. And third, there's less wear and tear on your body: no recoil or extreme weather.

Like other clays shooting enthusiasts, the more I practice, the better my game. My sporting clays scores have definitely improved lately on the order of 10 percent. And I credit that to a better swing and smoother mount, which enable faster target acquisition – all the attributes of improved muscle memory.

If you're looking for an inexpensive and convenient way to practice your clays shooting, the muscle memory system of the Robert Louis Company is worth investigating.

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