

Master Eye Dominance – An eye opening experience.

I was introduced to shooting at a tender age 'beating' for my father on Pheasant shoots near Watership Down in Hampshire and St Neots in Cambridgeshire in the late 60's and early 70's. I then had a long break before taking up clay shooting in Surrey and Sussex in the early nineties.

With a newly acquired, but second hand, Silma Supreme I set about trying to get decent scores but was frustrated by mediocre results. In the mid 90's I acquired a second hand Beretta 682 with an amazing track record but I was still inconsistent and luck rather than skill was still the watchword.

It wasn't until I was qualifying as a Clay Shooting Coach in 2002 that the real problems were identified during one of the gun fitting diagnosis sessions.

It was found that the gun didn't fit me. I was shooting low and despite being a right-handed shooter I had a totally dominant left master eye.

Shooting low was rectified very quickly with a temporary comb raiser however the eye dominance was not so simple.

My experience and research have now identified several well-known, proven and accepted methods of dealing with the varying degrees of cross-eye dominance. These 'cures' vary from the drastic to the very simple. However, you need to establish whether or not you actually have a problem then understand what the effects can be, why you have it and then choose the cure that suits you and hopefully will remedy the problem.

To identify that you may have that problem simply take your left hand (if you shoot from the right shoulder) and imagine you are gripping the neck of a milk bottle. You should now have your index (fore) finger and thumb meeting in the shape of a circle.

Forget the milk bottle but keep the circle you have made and extend your arm up in front of you and with both eyes open view an object e.g. a light bulb, mark on a wall etc through that circle made by your finger and thumb. Alternatively you can view the object through the hole in the centre of a CD. The effect will be the same.

Now close or cover your left eye.

If the object you were originally looking at is not now in the circle you have some degree of cross-dominant (master) eye problem. It could vary between complete cross-eye dominance and 'middle vision' where there is only a slight dominance.

Conversely if you shoot from the left shoulder then extend your right hand to view the object and close or cover your right eye.

Assuming we have now established that you have a problem we need to understand what it will do to your shooting and why you have the problem. Even if you don't have a problem read on, as it is very likely that you will be shooting with someone who does have a problem but doesn't know it and this information may help them.

If, for example, you shoot from the right shoulder and have any amount of cross-eye domination (left master eye) you will be giving too much forward allowance (lead) to targets travelling from right to left. Conversely, if you are shooting at targets travelling left to right to will not have enough forward allowance.

If you shoot from the left shoulder and have a degree of right eye cross dominance the opposite is true. Too much forward allowance on right to left targets and too little on left to right targets.

In respect of Teal or driven targets and irrespective of which shoulder you shoot from you will be shooting to the left (right shouldered shooters) and to the right (left shouldered shooters).

As it is generally agreed the degree of cross eye dominance can vary especially when a shooter is tired. By logically applying trigonometry it follows that the effect on forward allowance will vary depending on the degree of cross eye dominance present at that time.

Sadly unless you are told, or you ask, or more importantly, you have a lesson from a qualified Coach you will probably never know why, despite your love of the sport, you are not achieving your full potential by breaking more targets and giving Richard Faulds or Charlotte Kerwood a run for their money.

It is accepted that there is no link between being left or right handed and having particular master eye dominance.

Over 50 years ago it was discovered that the ability to see stereoscopic images necessitates visual information passing through the corpus callosum, a huge band of fibres that connects the two cerebral hemispheres of the brain.

In short, stereopsis is a whole brain activity. To see a stereoscopic image you must be using both brain hemispheres, there is no other way. Therefore it must follow that a stereoscopic image is seen with the mind not the eyes, and in fact such an image exists only in the mind.

What we see with our left eye is a true picture of the world as is the picture we see with our right eye. However when we use both eyes what we see therefore is a 'virtual' image that is determined by the brain based on the information formed from combining the right and left eye images.

This may explain why master eye dominance can change with tiredness.

Research also indicates that the brain can apparently be simply tricked or trained to perform in certain ways and with this in mind we can now explore some of the common and not so common methods of addressing cross eye dominance:

1. Change your shooting shoulder so that the cross-dominant (master) eye now becomes the 'shooting' eye and is correctly aligned with the target.
2. When wearing glasses place a piece of tape (opaque or otherwise) on the cross-dominant (master) eye so that only the 'shooting' eye can clearly see the target.
3. When wearing glasses smear Vaseline or hair gel on the lens of the cross-dominant eye so that again the 'shooting' eye has dominance.
4. Close the cross-dominant (master) eye so that again the 'shooting' eye is the only option.
5. Using the cross-dominant eye as the shooting eye.
6. Train the brain to ignore the cross-dominant (master) eye so that the 'shooting' eye is always aligned with the target and both eyes can be kept open to maintain the best peripheral vision.

Keeping both eyes open and trying to compensate for the increased or reduced forward allowance (lead) caused by cross-eye dominance is not in my mind a cure. I believe the target variables are too great to help achieve consistency. However, I am sure that there will probably be someone out there somewhere who has achieved that feat.

Changing shoulder is an option in all cases but more especially an option for young shots or shooters of either gender who are new to shooting and hence have not yet acquired the 'muscle memory' linked to mounting and shooting a shotgun.

Using this method enables both eyes to be used to gain the peripheral vision accepted as preferable when clay shooting.

Placing tape on glasses is a common cure but one that I personally found onerous. It attracts attention and can make new shooters very conscious of themselves. I have found this cure to be unpopular in anything other than the short term and I believe this view is confirmed by the fact that you seldom see any shooter walking around with a piece of tape on the glasses.

This method results in the loss of a considerable amount of peripheral vision. There is also a risk that the glue from the tape may affect the lens material of the pupil's glasses.

The smearing of Vaseline on glasses sounds a good idea but can cause problems when you try to remove it. Hair gel that becomes opaque when dry is unobtrusive and washes off easily and is therefore easier to use. There is no doubt that this is a credible alternative to tape. This method however can again result in the loss of a degree of peripheral vision.

Closing the cross-dominant eye is the most common cure for a 'master eye' problem. However informed comment indicates that the closing of the cross-dominant eye can induce tiredness and pupil dilation in the shooting eye. Again this method results in the loss of a considerable amount of peripheral vision.

Using the cross-dominant eye as the 'shooting' eye is rare but there are a number of extremely good DTL shooters who use this method to overcome the problem. There is often no need for a 'cross-over' stock with extra 'cast'. It does look a little awkward during sporting shooting and is best suited to Trap disciplines.

The brain can be trained to use the 'shooting' eye and ignore the cross-dominant eye. This may sound incredible and radical but it is possible. The key to this technique is a simple fibre optic device called the "Easy Hit".

The 'Easy-Hit' fibre optic foresight comes in a variety of widths and lengths that all do the same job. The longer sight works very well in very low light so wildfowlers need not lose out.



After cleaning the rib with the cleaning pad supplied or metholated spirit the device simply sticks, using a very effective self-adhesive strip, to the rib behind the existing foresight.

Whilst looking down the rib with the 'shooting' eye the foresight appears as a red bead. However, it is designed so that the fine retaining bars and shroud are so placed that when the cross-dominant eye tries to take over and look down the side of the barrels none of the red of the foresight is seen at all.

The Easy-Hit red bead in effect becomes invisible to the cross-dominant eye.

Pre-mounting on the 'break zone' before moving the barrels back to the 'hold point' before calling for the target naturally reinforces the red dot message to the brain.

The 'red dot' may sound disconcerting but in fact after a short period of use it goes unnoticed whilst shooting and appears to subliminally do its job on the brain.

It takes a very short period of time before the brain appears to realise that the red dot is the preferred option and you can concentrate on the target again happy that whatever your degree of cross eye dominance you can use both eyes to best advantage for peripheral vision and need not worry about tiredness affecting your newly acquired corrected eye-dominance.

Experience proves that this method only works when the specially designed fibre optic sight is in place. Remove it and the cross eye dominance reverts back to what it was originally as the brain has no dominant reference point.

A combination of having had my gun fitted correctly and curing my cross-eye dominance has raised my scores by over 30%.

Having tried all the other methods to solve my master eye problem I settled on the Easy-Hit foresight as it proved to be an absolute cure for my personal cross-dominant (master) eye problem and allowed full use of my peripheral vision. It may also be the cure for yours! Good luck!

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