

SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS



Meet the instructor

Brad's background as a professional stalker, both for private estates and for Forestry Commission Scotland, and his training as a sniper in the Marines, has given him the knowledge, experience and skills to take us through these first six steps of achieving accurate, consistent results from your rifle, whether you have been stalking for decades or are interested in taking it up for the first time.

Bradley Bourner of Professional Sporting Solutions teams up with Blaser and Mauser to demonstrate the basic principles of rifle shooting. This week he shows us how to set up your rifle for top results

The average stalker or fox shooter doesn't get out to practise much — and while we may read about sub-1in group sizes at 200 yards on Internet forums, many of us don't know the mechanics behind achieving this. There's not a huge amount of teaching during these days, and too many stalkers don't "waste" ammunition or time on the range.

But if game Shots hone their skills at clay grounds, shouldn't we be doing the same?

In this new series of six articles on improving your rifle skills, we'll show you how to set up your scope and rifle for success, how to zero it correctly and the basics of a prone shooting position, as well as looking at the principles of marksmanship and shooting from other positions.

Tailor your rifle

Before you start setting up your rifle, think about the type of shooting you will be doing: are you more likely to be taking your shots while prone, kneeling, standing or sitting?

Will you be sitting in a high seat, or will you be using sticks?

Set up your rifle to suit your shooting style, rather than adapt your shooting style to your rifle set up. •

SETTING UP YOUR SCOPE

If you've spent good money on your rifle and scope, don't scrimp on the scope mounts — a good, solid set of mounts is important to your set-up. Keep the space from your objective lens to your barrel to a minimum, without the two actually touching. And place the rings as far apart as possible for maximum stability and to distribute evenly the weight of the scope. Single piece mounts limit this ability.

1 Once you have your scope in the rings, don't tighten the rings completely. Leave them loose so that you can adjust the scope's cant or its

movement back and forth to achieve the correct eye relief.

2 Take up your position — whether this is prone or from a sitting position at bench. Bring the rifle to your shoulder and close your eyes, then adopt a relaxed position with your cheek to the stock.

3 Open your eyes to look through the lens — at this stage, you are only checking that you can see through the whole lens. What you want to avoid is shadow or rings appearing in your view. Adjust the scope — you may need to do one of two things or both: adjust the scope backwards



HAVING YOUR RIFLE CORRECTLY SET UP WILL HELP YOU TO ACHIEVE CONSISTENT ACCURACY

or forwards, and/or raise the cheekpiece on the stock so that you are looking through the centre of the scope's tube rather than along the rifle's receiver/barrel. Repeat steps 2 and 3. Do this a few times once you have what you think is the correct eye relief.

4 To adjust cant, you can use a spirit level on the elevation turret. If the turret cap is bevelled, remove the cap and place the spirit level on the turret itself. Not everyone is built the same, so you might want your scope slightly canted. If this is the case, try to find a landmark, such as a bench or fence, that is horizontal and adjust the cant by eye.

5 Tighten the scope. The best way to do this is by tightening opposing screws with the Allen key provided. For

example, start with the back rings and tighten the rear right screw, then tighten the top left screw. Then move on to the opposite screws on the front ring (right). Tighten in increments to avoid pulling the scope off position.

6 Don't over-tighten the screws, because you can damage your scope, and use the correct key, otherwise you may damage the thread of the screws.



ENSURE THAT YOUR SCOPE IS AS CLOSE TO THE BARREL AS POSSIBLE WITHOUT TOUCHING IT



Place the rings as far apart as possible for stability and to distribute the weight of the scope



LEAVE THE SCREWS OF YOUR SCOPE MOUNT LOOSE UNTIL YOU FIND THE CORRECT EYE RELIEF



EYE ALIGNMENT AND YOUR CHEEKPIECE

When you are shooting, it's important not to be straining any muscles — in fact, the fewer muscles you employ, the more consistent and accurate you will be. Using muscles leads to fatigue and can cause spasms, which can mean a less consistent performance. To avoid this, it's useful to ensure that your head is naturally aligned with the scope. This will also help you to achieve your "spot weld" position — in other words, the position that you return to every time you bring the rifle to your shoulder. (We will cover spot welding properly later in the series.)

Ensuring that your eye is naturally aligned is straightforward:

1

Take up a prone position, or whatever position you are most likely to be using on a regular basis. Bring the rifle to your shoulder and relax your neck, allowing your cheek to come to rest naturally on the stock. Close your eyes. Don't press your cheek down, and don't raise your head — in fact, you should feel totally relaxed as though you could go to sleep in that position!



Raise the rifle to your shoulder and relax your neck

2

Open your eyes. Do not move your head, but look along the barrel. Most likely, you will be looking along the receiver and the barrel, but not through the scope. If you now try to lift your head, you will be straining the muscles in the back of your neck, and you won't have the most stable position on the stock.



Using a cheekpiece, follow steps 1 and 2 again

3

Take a cheekpiece, or closed cell foam taped down and place it on the stock. Follow steps 1 and 2 again, and adjust the cheekpiece accordingly. As with every procedure, it is worth doing this a few times so that you get more comfortable and are sure that you've achieved your "spot weld" position.

WATCH THIS VIDEO
of how to set up your rifle:
GO TO WWW.SHOOTINGUK.CO.UK/VIDEOS



ADJUSTING YOUR OCULAR FOCUS

■ The ocular focus should be adjusted to ensure that you are seeing the cross-hairs absolutely sharp and the target may be slightly blurred. In effect you want to have the cross-hairs "burned" into your retina, so that you can then focus on the target. Once you've got your ocular focus set up, don't change it — no matter what the light, weather or conditions, there is no need to, and in fact you'll only achieve a negative impact on your shooting.

■ As with adjusting the scope and the cheekpiece, take up a prone or sitting position. To adjust the ocular focus, the best thing is to have a target or piece of paper with letters or an image that have a strong contrast to the background set-up where your target would normally be.



Once you've found the correct setting for your ocular focus, you should not change it

■ Look through the scope, and adjust the ocular focus until the cross-hairs are crisp and sharp, and the background, or the "target" is slightly fuzzy. Look away, to rest your eye.

■ Repeat the exercise — don't be afraid to make bold adjustments, and go back and forth to find the optimum setting, but keep looking away in between adjustments.

■ Once you've found the correct setting, look away or close your eyes and then come back to the picture a few times. The cross-hairs should always be as sharp as possible, while the "target" or background, should be slightly out of focus. Don't change this once you've got it set up correctly! **ST**

NEXT TIME: BRADLEY LOOKS AT BORE SIGHTING AND ZEROING