

PUSHING IT

Long range expert and custom rifle builder Chris Blackburn gives us his essential basics for reaching way out there

As a discipline, long range shooting – whether at targets or for pest control – continues to grow. Modern equipment gives us more opportunity than ever before to push our shooting limits. Here we take a look at some of the basics.

APPLICATION

Being able to shoot at extended ranges has a place in field shooting. In this article we will be discussing vermin control in this context;

controlling deer is another very good use of the art, but to save raised blood pressure and sentences taken out of context, vermin is the 'target' here, not deer.

Using a centre fire rifle to reach out and 'touch' those long range crows at lambing time, or that lamp shy fox that sits just out of reach at night, or problem geese in numbers can be, and indeed is, a very good option.

BUT, the correct tools and the know-how to put

them to good use is essential.

CALIBRES and AMMUNITION

For the one rifle man, the .243 Winchester has got to be a serious contender for the number one spot. Fast, flat shooting 58gr ammo for foxing, all the way through to 100gr soft points for deer, it is truly a 'jack of all trades, master of most' choice.

If you are solely chasing vermin, then the .22-250 is up there for vermin duties: again with a good choice of ammo off the shelf and every gun shop worth its salt carrying ammo for it. The .223 Remington is another good calibre, which can do double duty as a vermin tool and earn its keep on the range paper punching with just a change of ammo from expanding to non-expanding for the targets.

If you are a hand loader/reloader then some of the sub .22 cal's are worth a look, also .20 Br (awesome round), .20 Tac, .204 Ruger, .17 Rem, .17 Fireball to name just a few.

All the above should also be a fairly painless request with most police forces in the UK for addition to your certificate.



Modern guns and ammunition have huge potential

Long range shooting has applications in the hunting field as well as for targets



PICTURES: DOM HOLTAM

“THE ABILITY TO BELIEVE IN YOUR SCOPE AND RIFLE GIVES YOU SUCH AN ADVANTAGE”

RIFLES

With modern engineering techniques and global gunmaking, trade rifles are far better than their cousins of just 10 to 15 years ago.

There aren't many rifles you can buy that don't shoot around an inch or so at 100 yards (1 MOA) with good factory ammo and better with hand-crafted fodder. If you go with any of the main manufacturers you won't go far wrong. Tikka/Sako, Howa, Remington, Winchester, Blaser and Sauer all produce very good products – it's really just a matter of budget and personal choice.

There is a common misconception that a rifle needs a heavy barrel to be accurate. Well, this just isn't the case. The heavy barrel will let you fire a longer string of shots before it overheats, but this is only of real importance when paper-punching. It also takes longer to cool down once it does get hot. That said, the thicker tube helps in managing muzzle lift and gun movement upon firing, which is probably of more interest to shooters.



Modern sporting scopes frequently have rapid adjustment turrets for 'dialling' in longer ranges

SCOPES

Optics are without doubt a very important part of the shooting system. Often clients will budget sensible money for their new pride and joy rifle but try to scrimp on optics. You need clear (to your eyes) glass, reliable and durable construction, and magnification suitable for the intended use.

Nightforce are my own personal choice, which is purely down to being able hold zero over the course of the season, negating the need to continually correct zero because of shift.

Case in point, all my own rifles are fitted with Nightforce scopes mounted on our own UK Gunworks mounts. My rifles go to all the game fairs and shows we attend, are handled by many, transported the length of the country in drag bags

and I just never have to correct zero. Yes, we do get the odd comedian on the stand that turns the elevation and windage knobs all the way out, but its just a simple matter of returning the turrets to their '0' mark and I know the rifle will be back on point of aim/zero.

The ability to believe in your scope, and for that matter your rifle, gives you such an advantage whilst out and about, enabling you to concentrate on the job at hand.

Clients in the past have asked why their zero will move ¼" here or there upon checking, the most simple and realistic reasons are wind, position and the shooter changing their hold and follow through. But in real terms, put the cross hair in the place you want the bullet to strike and >>



Training yourself to perform is key to exploiting the potential of your rifle

believe that's where it's going to go.

If you are seriously into long range shooting, 'dialling' target turrets are a big advantage. If you are more into sporting shooting, many of the scope manufacturers have introduced systems – such as the Zeiss ASV or Swarovski Ballistic Turret – which give dialable elevation adjustment.

BIPODS

Without a steady aim you just won't hit the mark. Some of the older generation frown on the use of bipods but, let's face it, we are trying to hit a small target at extended ranges. A bipod combined with a rear bag for support and fine adjustment makes for a repeatable platform to shoot from.

"THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF RIFLE SHOOTING IS CONSISTENCY"

There are many bipods on the market but for use on a dry stone dyke, bonnet of a truck or laying in long grass, the Harris offering is a great choice. It comes in three different lengths to cover all scenarios but the most often overlooked model is the 13"- 23" version.

RANGE FINDING

Over the past few years the cost of owning a rangefinder has plummeted, with prices

ranging from around £100 through to the German manufacturers top-draw offerings built into binoculars and costing in excess of £2,000.

Being able to measure the target is really a must for vermin shooting where the small size of the target makes it impractical to bracket with the scope reticle to estimate the range.

Knowledge is everything and with an exact distance to the target you can start to extend your accurate range with some readily available ballistic programs from the internet or a downloadable 'app' for the smart phone user.

WIND METERS & WEATHER STATIONS

For knowing your altitude, temperatures, pressures and wind speed at the firing point. Kestrel are the market leaders in the hand-held weather station market, with basic models starting from £145 through to the Horus and Applied Ballistics versions for around £500.

The top end models have the benefit of a built-in ballistic calculator which, once configured to match your calibre and chosen load specification, can and do adjust the ballistic info according to weather parameters as they change.

This is the device I used for calculating and making my 'mile shot' last year with my stalking rifle in 6.5 x 55 and for field conditions, without wind flags and such like, it can be invaluable.

THE NUT BEHIND THE BUTT

The single most important aspect of rifle shooting is consistency – practise can't be over done. Practising regularly at the range will bring surprising results but if there's time practise can also be done at home by dry firing to maintain a constant and familiar trigger control.



Devices such as the Kestrel Horus help you to calculate your shot



Knowing the exact distance is crucial so rangefinding bins are a good idea

Some people may cringe at the thought of dry firing but in reality we very, very rarely see broken firing pins due to this.

Experience in field conditions is also something that cannot be overstated. Reading wind and topography, and understanding how these environmental factors affect your bullet trajectory, are key skills.

The equipment is there to help, but the rifle shooter is the only one who can exploit them successfully. ■

YOU CAN DO THIS!

As well as the ranges (out to 1,000 yards) at Bisley for NRA members to enjoy, there are a couple of specialist training destinations in the UK. Orion Firearms Training has over 5,000 acres in the Welsh Cambrian mountains offering fieldshooting, incline shooting and the ability to push out to enormous distance. With covered shooting positions and the chance to retreat to the blazing fire in the 'Shackleton Hut' it is a superb place to hone your skills.

We recently attended the Jack Jeyes-Blackburn Memorial shoot at the venue and sampled everything from running boar, to 'anti-pirate' shooting over water, to simulated stalking in woodland, as well as long range steel plate shooting to 800 yards.

For more information visit:
www.orionfirearmstraining.co.uk



Whether for pest control or just for fun, long range shooting is increasing in popularity