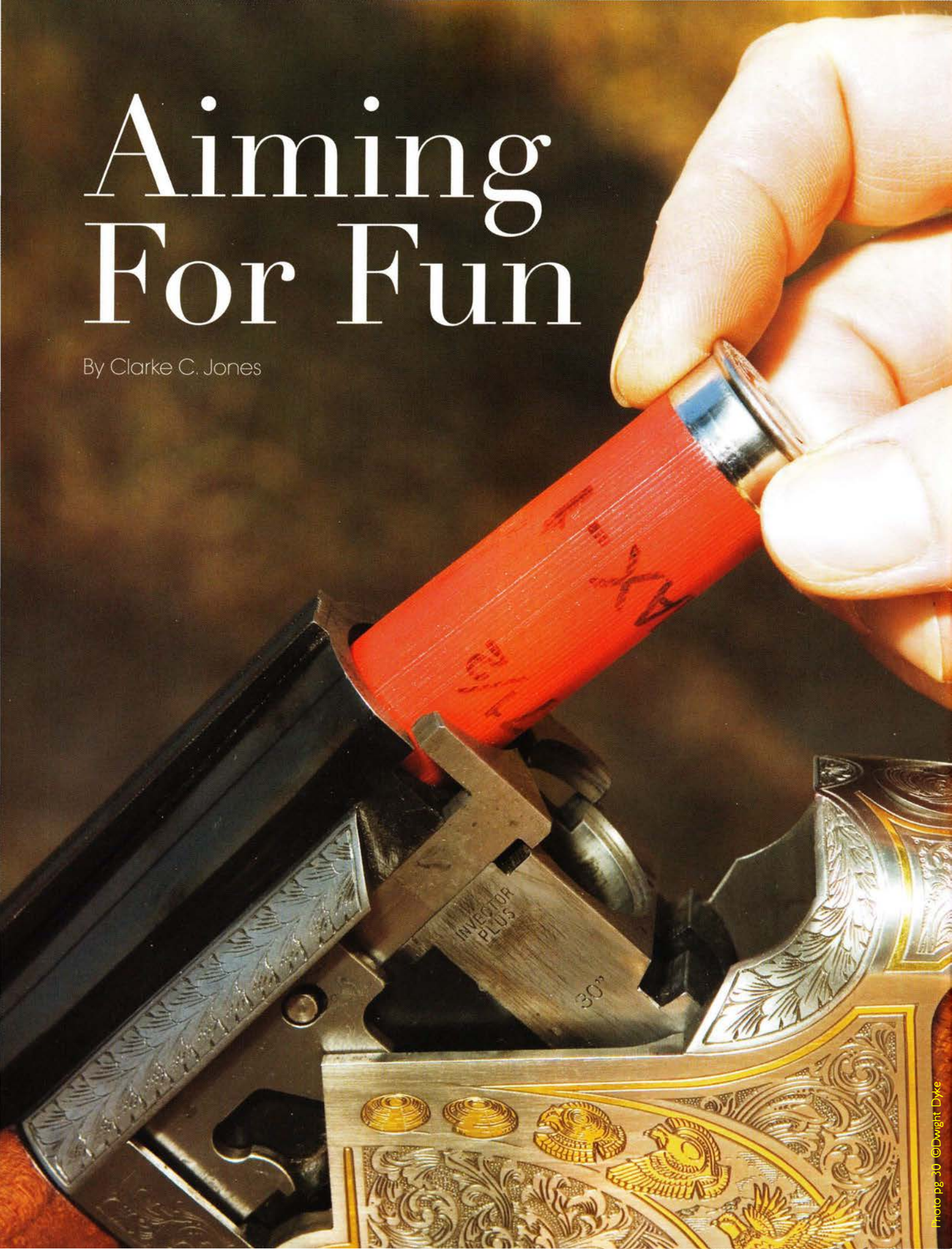


# Aiming For Fun

By Clarke C. Jones



The wife of a friend of mine announced recently, “Shooting shotguns saved our vacation!” Her family had just begun a well-deserved respite near a beach town north of Charleston, South Carolina. “The first two days the weather was overcast and looked like rain. Spending time at the ocean was out and our teenagers were bored, so my husband checked the internet and found a shooting range about 35 minutes away. Neither the kids nor I had ever shot a gun but they were anxious to do anything, so we decided to give it a try.”

She went on to describe how the instructor took her and their two sons to a skeet field, gave them instructions on gun safety, and taught them about lead time at different stations. “With the instructor’s coaching, I broke the first two targets,” she

said proudly. “I was hooked and the boys enjoyed themselves—especially when they saw girls from the local 4-H club shooting on the next skeet field!”

Originally developed to improve one’s ability to shoot wild game, shotgun shooting sports have evolved with the technological advancement of the shotgun, shells, targets, and target apparatus. Clay target shooting requires neither great speed nor strength, but rather, a bit of instruction, a safety-conscious mindset, and the ability to concentrate. This makes any shooting game appealing and open to families, hunters and non-hunters, and young and old. For those looking to try something new or wondering about how such clay target games are played, a brief synopsis follows.

from a machine that causes the disc to fly from the house into the air away from the shooter. The machine can throw the disc at various angles, which will not be known to you, simulating the unknown flight path of a flushed game bird. Normally there are five stations facing the trap house, with shooters at each station. Each will shoot five times. When all shooters have shot their five shots and all shotguns are opened to prevent any discharge, each shooter will move to the station to his right, thus presenting a slightly different target angle for each for his next five shots.

According to Terry Heeg, editor-in-chief of *Trap & Field* magazine, participation in trap shooting is growing. “More women are coming into the sport because it is more fashionable these days and (sic) because they want to join their



©Trischa Jones



©Trischa Jones



©Trischa Jones

## Trap

Considered by many the shotgun game from which all other clay target sports developed, trap got its name from the practice of shooting released pigeons and other birds from cages or box traps. Glass balls began to replace live birds in the middle 1800s, and the clay target was invented in 1880.

To shoot this game you usually stand on a long concrete pad with a trap house positioned 16 yards in front of you. Inside the trap house, clay discs 4.25 inches in diameter are thrown upon your command

husband or boyfriend on the shooting line.”

Heeg also pointed out that Virginia’s 13-year-old Camden Newlin of Winchester is one of the best trap shooters in the United States, having won the 2015 Virginia Handicap Trap title. Shooting handicapped means that you must shoot from a distance farther back from the trap house, thus making it more difficult to hit the clay target. Camden was a member of a youth team that competed in the National Championship in Sparta, Illinois, in 2015—which goes to show shooting sports are not limited to adults.



©Trischa Jones

It is not necessary to purchase a new trap gun if you just want to give trap shooting a try. Any twelve-gauge field gun will work. However, a properly fitted gun designed for trap shooting certainly should improve your scores.

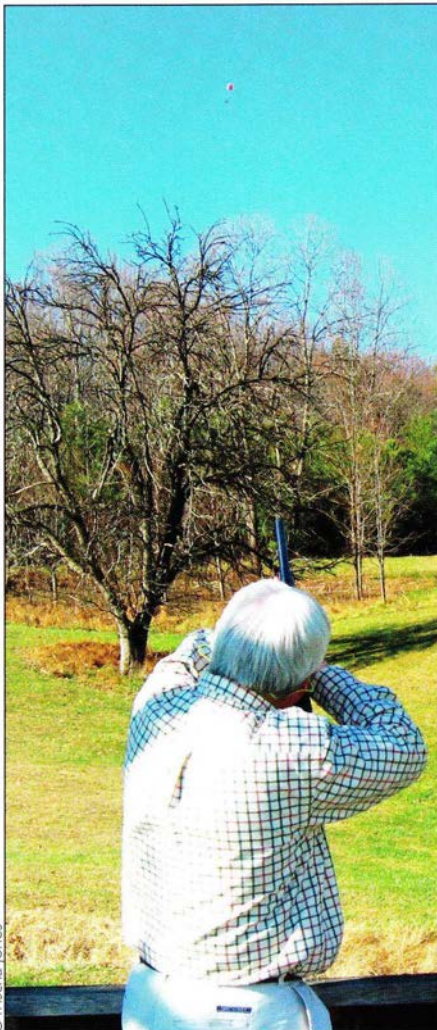
## Skeet

The National Skeet Shooting Association gives Charles Davis of Andover, Massachusetts, credit for developing skeet shooting in 1920. Originally, there were 12 shooting stations situated in the shape of a circle, just as you would see hours marked on a clock. The informal name for this game was shooting “around the clock.” However, in the mid-1920s due to space considerations, the game was changed to a semi-circle with a trap thrower at each end. Foster felt he needed a name for this new game and offered a cash prize to whoever came up with the winning idea. Mrs. Gertrude Hurlbutt of Montana won the prize for her suggestion of the word, “skeet,” which is a form of the Scandinavian word for “shoot.”

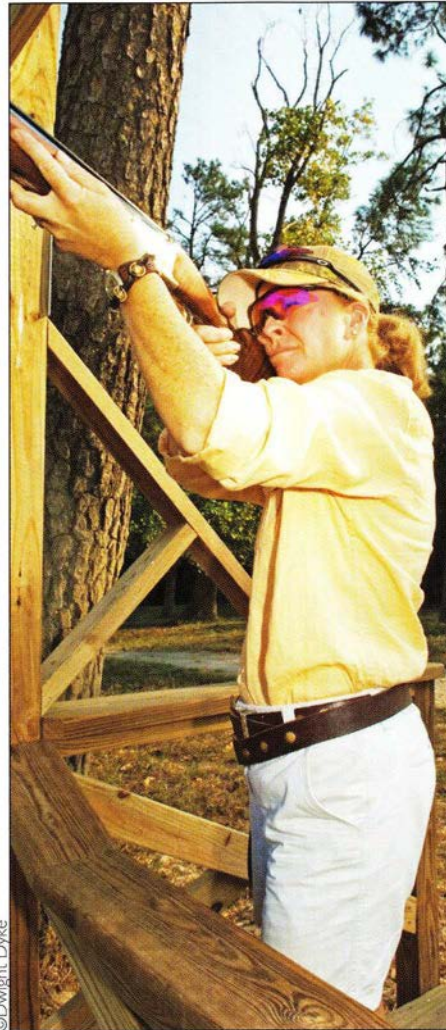
There are two trap “houses” which hold the trap-throwing machines. On the left side of the semi-circle is the “high house,” meaning the clay target is thrown from a height of 10 feet above ground and rises to approximately 15 feet as it crosses toward the opposite end of the field. The “low house” skeet machine throws its target from a height of 3-½ feet off the ground, rising to 15 feet as it crosses to the other end of the field.

The shooter begins by standing at the first of eight stations, located under where the target leaves the high house opening, and shoots at targets moving away from him. He then shoots at a clay target coming toward him, passing on his left from the low house. He then moves to another station to his right and repeats the same shots. The shift in location again simulates real bird hunting in that, with each position change, a different shooting angle is involved. There are 25 shots per shooter to a round of skeet.

Mike Dowling, a director of the National Skeet Shooting Association, reported that the membership roster of his orga-



©Trischa Jones



©Dwight Dyke

nization is growing at well over 10 percent a year. “Growth in our female membership is outpacing males at nearly a 10:1 ratio. The reasons are many and it comes down to the fact the sport of skeet shooting is a tremendous amount of fun, it doesn’t take a great deal of time, and both women and men can compete head-to-head on an ‘even playing field.’” Mike believes one of the amazing things about skeet shooting is the great people who are drawn to it: “They are arguably among the nicest and best people to be found anywhere.”

## Sporting Clays

Originating in England and brought to this country in the early 1980s, “Sporting clays is the fastest growing shooting sport in the world,” says NSCA Director Brett Moyes. Sporting clays is also referred to as “golf with a shotgun” because, unlike trap and skeet where you stay near one and two trap houses, you walk or ride a golf cart around an area that may consist of 10 to 15 stations situated over a number of acres.

Each station is designed to capture different hunting situations. Clay targets may simulate a goose or duck landing in front of you, a woodcock flushing straight up in front of you, a rabbit running along the ground, a grouse flying in between trees, or any number of other hunting scenarios. As with golf courses, no two sporting clay ranges are exactly the same—which makes this sport both interesting and challenging. On one range you may be faced with shooting a clay launched from a 30-foot-high tower imitating pheasants in flight; on another, you may sit in a row boat with clays mimicking ducks landing nearby. Brett points out something else I learned when I first became involved in shooting sports and that is, “No matter where you shoot in the country, there are always a group of folks willing to help you with your shooting.”

## Helice, aka “ZZ”

This shooting sport simulates the old sport of live pigeon ring shooting and trap shooting by using high-tech plastics and technology. Instead of aiming at a round



The target used in Helice spins and zips in various directions, much like a Frisbee, adding to the challenge of the sport.

clay disc as your target, the Helice target is a round plastic disc attached to plastic propellers which are spun by an oscillating motor. The shooter’s voice activates the release of the spinning target from one of the boxes in front of the shooter. The shooter has no idea which one of the boxes will release the target into the air. The spinning propellers make accuracy even more difficult, because the disc will zip in any direction like a Frisbee in a wind storm. The object of this game is to hit the disc, which separates it from the propeller, then have the disc fall on the shooter’s side of a two-foot-high semi-circular fence located 21 meters from the target launchers.

Helice is a fun and obviously challenging sport; locating a gun club that offers this game may be challenging as well. Nevertheless, Americans have done quite well in competitions. Michael Higgins, who at this writing is President of the United States Helice Association, recently led a team of 13 American Helice shooters to the 2015 World Championship in Venice, Italy. According to Higgins, “The men’s and the women’s and the junior’s teams took the gold medal and the veteran team [55+ age group] took home the bronze. Every U.S. participant brought home at least one medal!”

Fortunately, you don’t have to travel

to far-away locations to enjoy shooting sports. There are a number of shooting clubs and venues in Virginia where you and your family can safely learn clay target shooting. 🦋

---

*Clarke C. Jones spends his spare time with his black Labrador retriever, Luke, hunting up good stories. You can visit Clarke and Luke on their website at: [www.clarkecjones.com](http://www.clarkecjones.com).*

## RESOURCES

### To locate shooting ranges across the state, go to:

- ◆ Virginia Shooting Sports Association  
[www.myvssa.org/content/where-shoot-virginia](http://www.myvssa.org/content/where-shoot-virginia)

### For more information on:

- ◆ Amateur Trapshooting Association  
[www.shootata.com](http://www.shootata.com)
- ◆ National Skeet Shooting Association/  
National Sporting Clays Association  
[www.nssa-nsca.org](http://www.nssa-nsca.org)
- ◆ United States Helice Association  
<http://ushelice.com/index.htm>
- ◆ Kiper Farms  
[www.kiperfarms.com/about.php](http://www.kiperfarms.com/about.php)