Dear Colleagues

**Diagnoses and remedies for shooters with technique difficulties**

**Problem:**all shooters periodically experience a technique difficulty which results in scores far below one’s potential. This occurs particularly for new shooters and also for those who have many years of experience. In both situations, independent assistance is required to identify the cause of an unwanted group, then to prescribe the cure. When such assistance is effective the shooter is able to master the technique and gain the desired score.

The most discouraging situation can result when a shooter has not been able to obtain help and continues to experience unwanted groups and scores. It is common for such shooters to suffer from a technique difficulty for weeks, months or longer. Most shooters are keen to help a fellow shooter overcome a technique difficulty and as a result, recommend a course of action, although this might not result in an immediate cure. Some shooters have progressed from one difficulty to another, a result of having not received the right help.

Likewise, some clubs have had a history where some members have never progressed beyond the learner phase. There is clearly a need for inter-club discussion, which can immediately lift the performances of learner members and finally, everyone in a club.

An experienced club manager advised the writer of the work involved in attracting members following a period of downturn, in which 90 percent had drifted away from the sport. Such a club would benefit from a policy to continue teaching members upon having passed beyond the beginners’ stage. If the majority of members reach middle level and still cannot see how to progress further, then the club may return to the cycle of losing members. Such a club should consider a program whereby members have their groups diagnosed, the difficulties identified and cured, so that all may continue progressing instead of standing still.

**Discussion:**technique difficulties and cures have been well-known since 1859, when Queen Victoria challenged the Nations of the Empire to take up rifle shooting as a sport. Hence, much of what is written here was being taught to rifle club members before 1900. Indications of the success of a club of rifle shooters include an understanding of:

* the need for an effective learning organization, at club, district and state level
* how learning occurs and can be most effectively brought to shooters
* the process which needs to occur, so that shooters may immediately overcome each difficulty in order to progress to the top of the sport
* the availability of information on shooting techniques
* the end result which can occur depending upon receiving help in diagnosis and learning.

**Practical:**at a Queen’s Prize meeting a leading shooter who walks along behind the mound cannot help but observe shooters as they experience difficulties. From 80 to 90 percent will exhibit clear indications that their scores are being handicapped. The experienced shooter may observe competitors with:

* a body position that does not enable the rifle to be held dead still [a wide group] (TR)
* slight movements of the pelvic girdle and abdomen occurring during a shoot [change of the natural point of aim] (TR)
* an absence prior to each shot of testing and correction of the natural point of aim (splitting of a group into sub-groups) (TR and F)
* an absence prior to a shoot of testing and confirmation of the effectiveness of sling tension [cause of shots above and below the bullseye] (TR)
* an absence of confirmation of whether shot release generates a nervous system tremor [shot release from a moving muzzle] (TR and F)
* the forward hand slipping along the stock with each shot, indicated by the shooter moving the hand back to the same position [inadequate sling arrangement and insufficient absorption of recoil at the shoulder] (TR)
* inadequate tensions and positions of fingers of the hand on the pistol grip [splitting and holes in a group due to unwanted tensions at the pistol grip] (TR and F)
* a practice of leaning the rifle over to the right (RH shooter) to reload at the shoulder, in the mistaken belief of the need to support the rifle on both elbows [indication of movement of the left elbow with each shot and changes of the natural point of aim] (TR)
* absence of a strategy to maximize release of the number of accurate shots while flags remain the same [shots released regardless of the desirability to only do this when wind remains the same] (TR and F)
* absence of strategy to release shots within a pre-calculated percentage of the range of varying wind force (e.g. 30 percent) (shots released when wind corrections are made for both weak and higher velocities, incurring both smaller and larger errors] (TR and F).

It will be apparent when several members of one club have been selected in a State Rifle Team, that encouragement exists at the club for shooters to learn techniques. Likewise, a club that demonstrates prowess in team shooting, suggests that members have been learning and mastering techniques.

Sadly, the high percentage of shooters who demonstrate limited skills in their practise of techniques, is an indication that there exists little or no state-wide policy to enhance learning. Perhaps the clearest indicator of the lack of organised learning about techniques can be seen from the decreasing numbers of rifle shooters who presently attend a Queen’s Prize meeting. Some shooters are able to remember the years when a particular state Queen’s Prize meeting would attract 500 or 800 (and even 1,000) competitors.

**Conclusion:** rifle shooters who belong to successful clubs, with greater numbers attending each week, are invariably confident in their mastery of shooting techniques. When shooters from such clubs experience difficulty, assistance is readily available to diagnose and suggest the cure. There are even some district rifle associations where clubs work together and share such resources.

It must be concluded that if a national rifle association wished to implement a remedy for the decreasing numbers of rifle shooters, then it would take predictable steps to establish a policy for the provision of an organisation for the learning of shooting techniques. It would as well, ensure that the policy included a professional level of understanding of effective learning in the context of a competent organisation to assist shooters

Best regards

Geoff.