

# Clay Shooter

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AUGUST 2020 ISSUE 87

## CHAT WITH A CHAMP!

MATT COWARD-HOLLEY  
ON TRAINING, TEAM GB  
AND BECOMING  
WORLD #1

### WIN!

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Beretta Team  
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Howes & Wayko  
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Lesson with  
Matt Coward-  
Holley



### SHOOT SAFE

CPSA guidance to stay  
Covid compliant at the club

### TECHNIQUE

A young shot transitions  
from .410 to 20-bore

### TRAINING

Exploring the benefits  
of simulated shooting



YILDIZ PRO SPORTER BLACK **GUN TEST**

# SIMULATION

Simulation is used in aviation, medicine and military training, so why not in sports shooting? Christian Schofield asks if shooters could also reap the benefits

If we are asked for a definition of simulation, we would probably say that it is about learning in a way that allows us to fail without hurting ourselves or others. Although it is true that simulators provide a way for safety critical industries to test ideas in a safe environment, the original idea for the Link Trainer, produced in 1929 by amateur pilot Edwin Link, was to provide himself with additional training opportunities. Although Link was convinced of the value of his simulator, aviation trainers including the US Army Air Force (USAAF) showed little interest in the idea. However, this

changed when Air Force commanders became worried by the number of pilots crashing in bad weather. Link demonstrated the value of simulation training when, in very poor weather conditions, he managed to fly himself to a meeting with the USAAF.

Since Edwin Link, simulation has grown to be an essential part of aviation training and has become a key element in training and development systems in the military, medicine and sport. In all these domains, simulation training is used to help people perform and thrive in pressured situations. If this type of

training is now used in so many different areas, surely we should examine the theory and explore the psychological benefits that simulation training may have for shooting?

### SIMULATING COMPETITION THROUGH TRAINING

Elite athletes often simulate competition in their training. This form of simulation requires us to do everything as we would in competition, the same as an actor would do in a dress rehearsal prior to a production. Although we are lucky in the shotgun disciplines to be able to gain competition experience on a weekly basis, there is a big difference between a registered event at our local ground and the final of the World Championships or even a shoot-off at the inter-county championships.

However, if we can mimic the unique conditions of these big competitions in our training it can help us to stay focused and become desensitised to potential distractions. As well as becoming more comfortable with performing under these conditions, it will also give us confidence that we can perform when it matters.

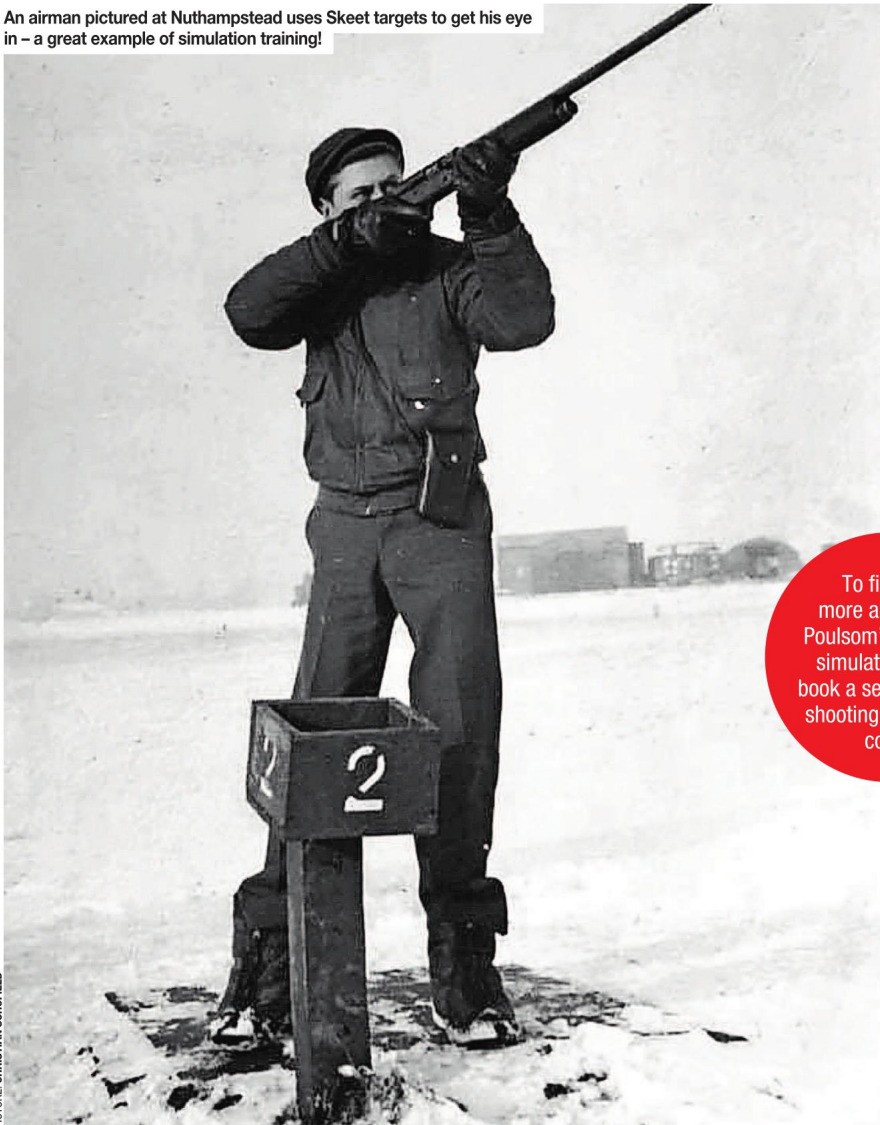
### THINK ABOUT IT

Simulation training can also be done passively by imagining scenarios. Passive forms of simulation training are useful when we want to identify factors that could shape our performance. These factors are things that could go wrong or things that we need to do in order to achieve a great performance.

A study of golfers by psychologists Melanie Gregg and Craig Hall found that it was the better performers who use imagery the most. Although imagery is a valuable tool for skill acquisition, especially if we model our imagery on the performance of an experienced athlete, many of us find it very difficult to get started.

Of course, we can rely solely on live training and competition but, without accurate feedback, our development is likely to be slow and unpredictable. Being able to reflect on accurate feedback is essential. This idea has been understood by trainers for many years and is the reason why Edwin Link created his simulator. Although the concept is easy to understand, it is difficult to achieve. An

An airman pictured at Nuthampstead uses Skeet targets to get his eye in – a great example of simulation training!



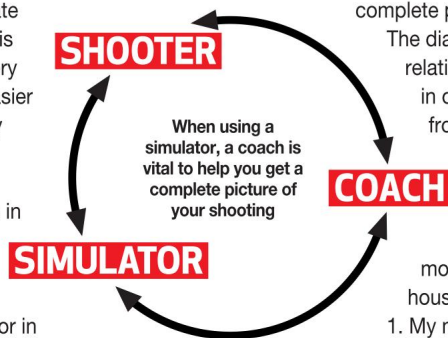
PICTURE: CHRISTIAN SCHOFIELD

To find out more about Katy Poulson's shooting simulator, and to book a session, visit: [shooting-simulator.co.uk](http://shooting-simulator.co.uk)

example from shooting is the use of Skeet, by the USAF and the RAF in WWII, as a way of training deflection shooting, or as we might say, applying lead. The Airman pictured at Nuthampstead is probably using the discipline to 'keep his eye in', as experts concluded that Skeet was not the best way to simulate deflection shooting from a moving platform. The reason for this is explained by the motor learning and performance expert Professor Richard Schmidt, who suggests that for simulation to be effective, the physical environment of the simulator must conform to the physical environment of the task, and the psychological processes and behaviours produced when using the simulator must be the same as those required by the task.

**WHY BOTHER?**

If it is so difficult to create a good simulator, yet it is quite easy to use imagery techniques and even easier to just go shooting, why should we consider simulation as a training option? The answer lies in feedback. Professors Dana Maslovat and Ian Franks suggest that the most important factor in learning, and subsequently in performing a skill well, is feedback. Intrinsic feedback, information from our own senses, is very powerful and may be readily available, but it will be of little use if we lack the experience to understand its meaning. Likewise, we may also find it difficult to understand augmented feedback delivered in the form of a coach's comments on our



performance. The proponents of simulation argue that a simulator can overcome or reduce these feedback issues because the system is able to produce accurate data and present it to the user in an easy to understand format.

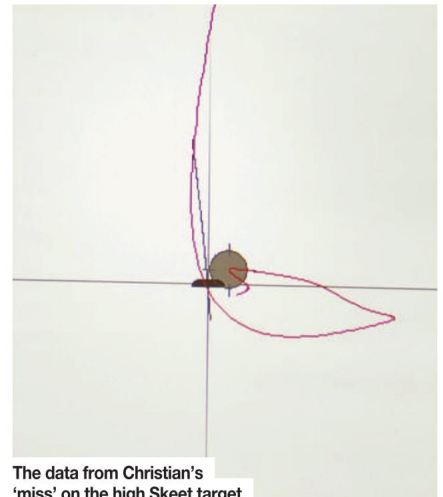
I wanted to find out more about simulation and to test these theories with someone who knows what they are talking about when it comes to shooting. I have come to admire Katy Poulsom not only for her tremendous knowledge and experience as a British Shooting Pathway coach but also because she has the ability to explain really difficult concepts in a way that anyone can understand. When I found out that she had installed a Marksman simulator, I immediately booked an appointment.

The first thing that became very obvious was the need for a coach to help you gain a complete picture of your shooting.

The diagram tries to capture the relationship we need to create in order to get the most from using a simulator. A brilliant example of this can be appreciated from the trace of my gun's movement to the high house Skeet target on station

1. My movement felt uncontrolled because I had been caught out by the speed of the target.

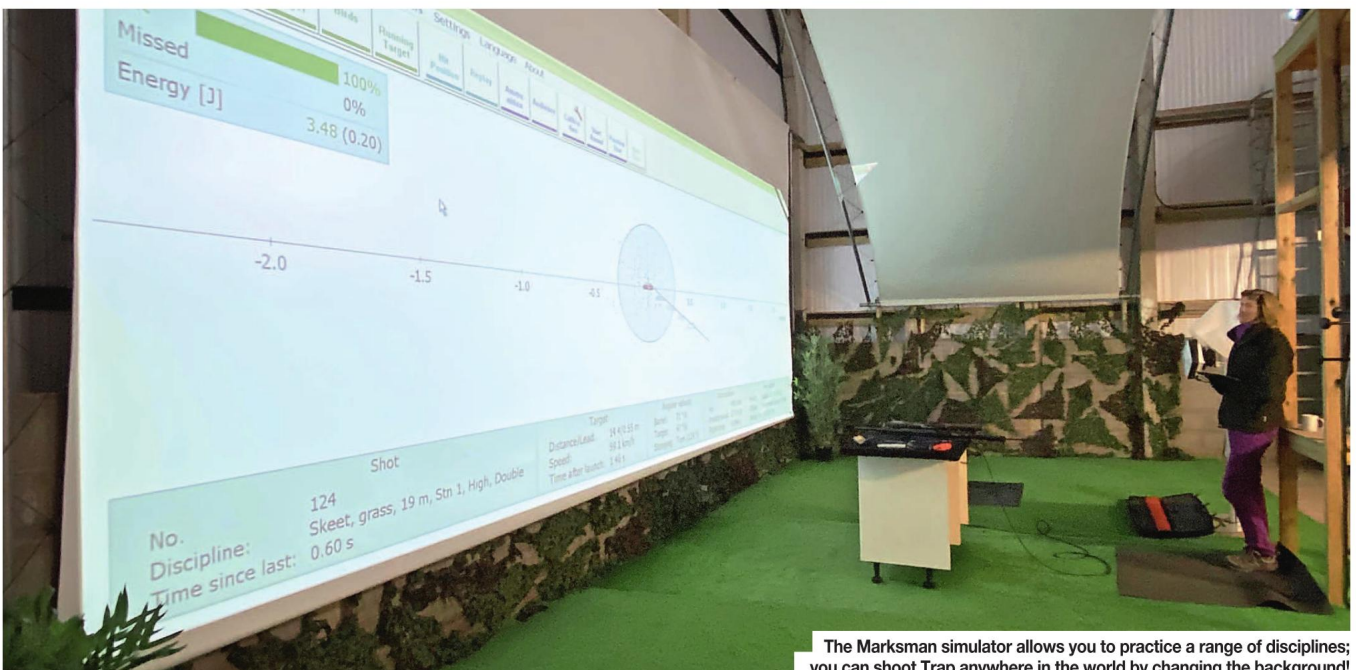
When Katy suggested that I altered where I was looking for the target my movement became smooth and I 'smoked' it. Professor Richard Schmidt suggested that good results will only be possible if the physical environment of the simulator conforms to the physical environment of the task. With this simulator we



The data from Christian's 'miss' on the high Skeet target

can use our own gun, and for Trap it is possible to choose the background we wish to shoot. This also helps meet the principle that the simulator should help us to create the same psychological processes and behaviours that we require in competition. This was absolutely the case – once I had adjusted my gun fit, I began to shoot quite well, but the moment I thought about this, I missed. It was really interesting to see what a distraction miss looked like. In my case, it showed that I failed to lock on to the Trap target.

My session with Katy proved to me that simulation training is an excellent way of improving technique, attentional focus and emotional control. Having used the simulator, I now understand Professor Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, which suggests that authentic experiences of performing well in conditions that mimic competition will improve our self-confidence. You should try it; you will learn a lot about yourself and your shooting. ■



The Marksman simulator allows you to practice a range of disciplines; you can shoot Trap anywhere in the world by changing the background!