

# Stand and Deliver

*While transcribing the latest of our interviews I was struck with how apt Franck Dumoulin's idea of stability is. He imagines himself to be strong, stable and rigid when in his shooting position, and linking that mental image with the Eiffel Tower, a national monument that any Frenchman is proud of, is a clever means of reinforcing in his mind a very important aspect of his shooting technique.*

Stance can be broken down into two parts. The physical placing of the body is what is generally considered to be stance. But equally important is a more abstract feeling of being balanced, steady and "right". More a state of mind, this is what is described in coaching manuals as the "inner stance". I'm not about to lecture on such a well-known principle, but I hope to give a shooter's insight into how it should feel and why it is so important.

## Physical Stance

If you ever have the misconception that there is a "perfect" stance for all, I suggest you take a walk down the firing line of a World Cup. You will see square on to side on body positions and everything in between. Maybe if we were all built the same it might be possible. But when you consider the many shapes and heights, damaged bone structures from past accidents, use of different eyes for sighting and even just plain bad habits – it's not so surprising to see such a variance.

The ideal stance should give you several things. The first, obviously, is stability – meaning a solid platform with a minimum of sway for confident release of a shot. It should also be in such a position to allow the arm to be raised naturally in line with the target. It should not induce any great amount of stress on the body. And it should be repeatable.

## The Feet

There is no one correct answer to feet placement. There are some generalities that will affect your overall stance, and they should be taken into account.

Spacing. The "norm", if there be such a thing, is placing your feet at about shoulder width. However, the big thing is to be comfortable. I once had a coach who insisted my feet were too far apart. He may well have been right, but I was comfortable with my stance, and it had all of the necessary qualifications as above. So the result of this was I lost confidence when I brought my feet closer together as it didn't "feel" as stable. Some months later I had gradually widened my stance to where it was originally.

Splayed feet or pigeon toed. As far as stability goes, having the feet parallel is technically best. BUT. It places a lot of stress on calf and thigh muscles, even joints, especially if you aren't as supple as you used to be. So bear this in mind for your long term comfort.

Weight distribution. I like to find the point where I have maximum contact area on the floor. This means having equal weight distribution on both the heels and the balls of the feet. This also means wearing flat shoes with sturdy soles. If you can't afford the purpose-built "clown shoes" I'd recommend skateboard shoes. Most gym or running shoes have way too much arch support and rubbery padding to allow a good solid foundation.

## The Platform

Meaning the rest of the body excluding the arms and head. When you are in position to start the lift, no part of your body should move except the arm. It's a common fault to rock the hips to bring the arm to the correct height on the target. But if you make a conscious effort to have everything rock solid except the shoulder that does the lifting, you will have a far more stable hold.

There is an ideal relationship for any shooter between himself and his gun. An ideal way to create a living, breathing and efficient bipod that rivals a shooting rest when it works as it should. The trick is to first discover every aspect of that position. How tense each muscle is, which joints are locked, how the head has to be positioned, all are important facets of the whole.

## Inner Stance - Using the Mind

The real key is to discover and remember what your stance feels like so it can be duplicated time after time. This is where some attention to detail is needed. Can you "feel" perfect balance? Can you use your muscle memory to duplicate the same pressure in your legs, the same pressure on the grip? Can you remember how each locked joint feels? Certainly top shooters make a good attempt, and reap the rewards of a consistent hold that builds their confidence and their scores.

Take the time as you take up your stance to go through a mental checklist of how every part of your body feels, and how it should feel. Many top shooters spend hours at a time familiarizing themselves with these finer details until they know their position so well it has become second nature.

### **Just a Word on Balance**

Most shooters will sway a little. If you have a bad tendency to do so, take a look at your shooting glasses and/or hat. If you have blinders or are blocking a lot of your peripheral vision, this can badly affect your balance.

### **Being Flexible**

But of course there is one difference between a mechanical and an organic bipod. As the match progresses some muscles will tire more quickly than others. So the position of the feet may change in order for the natural point of aim to remain the same. Meaning, don't be afraid to adjust the position of your stance in relation to the target – it's only natural that you will tire over the course of a match.

### **How Well Can We Hold?**

There are limits of course. I believe a world class Air Pistol shooter is holding (for the few seconds of his most steady hold) something very close to ten ring. Provided the shot breaks within an acceptable time and the trigger release has not upset the sight picture the shot will be a ten.

There really is no reason why most shooters cannot attain a hold that stays within the nine ring for the vast majority of the time. With training that hold will reduce in size. Many sessions with different shooters on the Rika electronic trainer have confirmed this. But even though it's an important part of shooting consistent tens, never lose sight of the fact that in pecking order, hold is a very distant third behind sights and trigger control.