

Perfect Timing for Shooting

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"Leading" or shooting ahead of moving game is usually thought of in connection with shotguns and wing shooting, but it is sometimes important with the rifle while shooting deer. There is always an interval between the time the bullet leaves the gun and the time it reaches the target, and this interval increases as the distance between gun and target increases, regardless of the bullet's speed. The combination of a fast-moving deer traveling across the line of sight and a gun with a slow-moving bullet, calls for a certain amount of lead. That amount depends on the speed of the deer and its distance from the gun.

The only time I was ever able to measure this lead on a deer with any degree of accuracy was on one I wounded superficially with my first shot. This wound caused the deer to put on an unnatural burst of speed in an effort to reach protective cover. I was unable to swing with the animal and keep the sights on it, so I aimed ahead and waited for him to run into the line of fire. I started my trigger pull as his head came into the line of sight and I am as sure as anyone can be that the cartridge exploded when the sights were lined on his shoulder. The bullet broke the deer's back, just ahead of the hips. Allowing for some error in calling the shot, the deer traveled about two feet while the bullet traveled the seventy-five yards that separated the gun and deer. Double the distance and anyone can see the possibility of missing fast-running deer with a slow-moving bullet similar to my .38/55 unless there is some attempt to lead the game.

On one of my hunts, I jumped a deer, which was minus a tail. This lack of a flag and the fact that the entire rear end of the animal was red instead of the expected white, delayed my identification of the animal until it was too late for a killing shot. Later in the day I met the hunter that had removed the tail. He had been using a twelve-gauge shotgun loaded with the regular ball load and had fired at this deer as it ran across a small field. I did not find out the distance at which the shot was made, but evidently lack of lead was the cause that resulted in a tailless deer instead of a dead one. Swinging with the target will reduce the amount of lead which is necessary and if the shooter can time his shots to coincide with the time when the deer has all four feet on the ground-between jumps-the amount of lead necessary is greatly reduced, for the animal is to a degree motionless for a short time. Judgment gained by personal experience should be used to determine the amount of lead which is necessary in each individual case.

One of the more important factors which affect the deer hunter's ability to shoot and one that he can do little to correct, is the condition of his nervous system. This varies with the individual and at different times in the same individual. The fact that a man does well in competition on the target range is no guarantee that he will do well in the woods where conditions are entirely different.

There is something about the sight of a deer that has an effect on the nervous system that manifests itself in different ways on different people. This is the cause of the "buck fever" which all hunters have experienced to a greater or lesser degree at some time in their hunting careers. After years of deer hunting, I still have occasional touches of buck fever and if the time ever comes when I become indifferent to the sight of a buck bursting unexpectedly from cover, I will know that a large part of the thrill of deer hunting has gone and that the time has come for me to hang up the gun and take up other sport.

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