

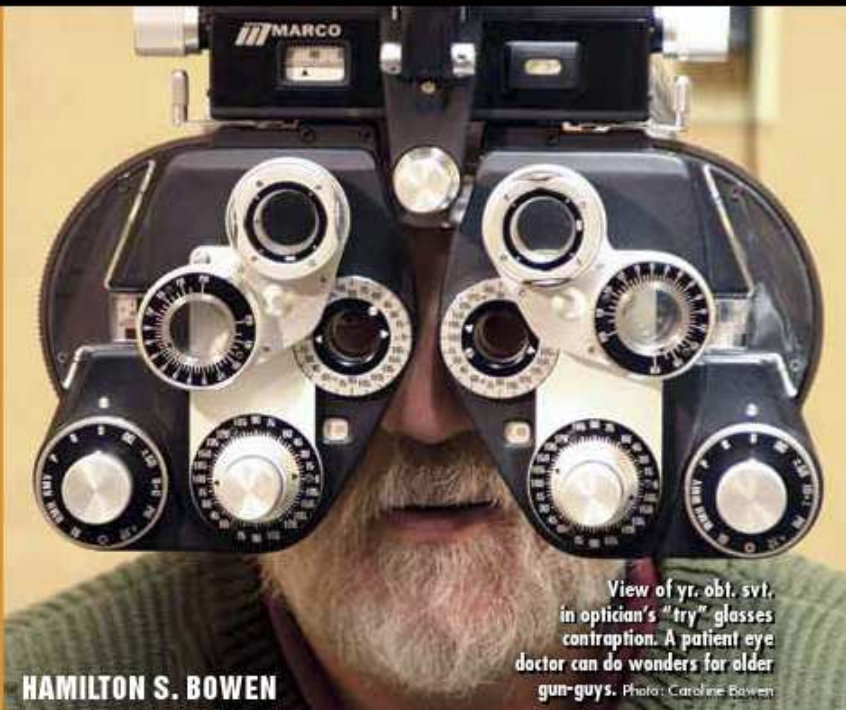


This pair of shooting glasses sports a Merit Eye Disc and a stick-on Clear To Target paper aperture. Both act like a "small aperture" for your eye.



Not the least of the many reasons to cherish this little Winchester is the Marble Yang peep sight, which makes this rifle unerringly deadly, even for guys with fuzzy vision.

BETTER EYES FOR THE COOTER CROWD



HAMILTON S. BOWEN

View of yr. obt. svl. in optician's "try" glasses contraption. A patient eye doctor can do wonders for older gun-guys. Photo: Caroline Bowen

STAYING IN THE GAME

When I was a 30 something, pretty full of it and a fairly able marksman, I heard mutterings from my senior shooting friends about "the change" that would come in my life in a few short years and then I wouldn't be so cocky. There were cryptic references to eye troubles that gave to me to believe I, like them, would soon be unable to hit the broad side of a barn. This didn't make a much sense to me; I was born blind as a bat and for a while was perceived to be a fairly simple-minded child given that I couldn't see the blackboard in school, let alone figure out why my teachers

spent a lot of time up in front of the class waving their arms about, bleating about imaginary letters, numbers and such. Somebody finally figured out I needed glasses.

Glasses opened up a whole new world. Blackboards had discernable hieroglyphics on them. Trees were not really green blobs but had individual leaves. You could identify people by sight rather than smell. End of problem — at least for a while. Well, now the old guy's secret is out. In my 40s, I noticed sights growing increasingly furry. Now I'm in my 50s; the express sights on my single-shot, double-barreled black powder rifles have largely

disappeared. Revolver sights were following close behind. Shooting ability was going to hell fast.

Simple?

The problem is simple. Your eyes can focus clearly on only one thing or distance at a time, no matter your age. In younger eyes, lenses can fit so quickly back and forth among a number of focal planes that your brain is tricked into thinking all are in focus simultaneously. This is why at 30 you can clearly see both front and rear sights and the target, even if you are plagued with the usual vision maladies such as myopia (near sightedness) or hyperopia (far-

Objects photo'd with large ap./short exposure show a blurred background but a crisp subject.

Object photo'd with small ap./long exposure shows by reducing the aperture size and lengthening the exposure time, the entire view is in apparent focus. Like we used to be able to do with our young eyes!



While scopes and other optical devices encumber revolvers, vintage shooters may have to suck it up and use them anyway.



The Superfocus adjustable glasses allow you to actually adjust the focus of your glasses using the slider on the bridge between the lenses. It's instant and allows immediate control over sight picture focus.

NOT ALL EYE DOCS ARE SHOOTERS, SO YOU MAY HAVE TO BRING YOURS UP TO SPEED ON THE PROBLEM.

sightedness), assuming you wear corrective lenses for these conditions.

However as one ages, the lenses in your eye become increasingly inelastic and slow (or even unable) to focus. When presbyopia sets in earnest around 40, the rear sight will get furry. By the time you are 50, chances are the rear sight will disappear, the front sight will get fuzzy and then game is over. So, what to do? While the various corrective eye surgeries give many a new lease on life, they do not cure the basic problem for shooters: inelastic lenses ... at least not yet. We have to wage war on this problem on other fronts. I haven't found the perfect solution yet but have kept in the game thanks to a couple of approaches. We'll start with one of the essentials in the form of glasses.

If you don't have glasses already and are having trouble shooting, man-up and get the peepers checked out, some-

thing you should do every year anyway lest you fall prey to some gawd-awful eye disease leaving you really blind and outfitted with a cane or seeing-eye dog. Not all eye docs are shooters, so you may have to bring yours up to speed on the problem. He will laugh when you tell him you need to be able to see three things at once, perfectly well. At best, you are probably going to get only one place in the rear sight/front sight/target hierarchy of a shooter's focal planes into proper focus.

In my opinion, the front sight is the most critical. You can align a Q-tip with a cotton ball but not the reverse. I went for the "visible rear sight/crisp front sight/visible-but-slightly-furry-target" combo prescription and have never looked back. The real trick here is to find an optometrist or ophthalmologist who is sympathetic enough to let you lug your rifle or handgun into his office.

I am singularly blessed to have one who did. The hour or so spent experimenting with various lens combinations checked against the sights secretly aligned through the window on the "O" in a stop sign down the street, resulted in a pair of dedicated shooting glasses that gave me a new lease on life. Not a perfect solution, but it put me back in the hunt.

Mysterious Things

The other angle of attack on vision problems is found in the laws of optical physics. If you are any sort of photographer, the Cliff Notes version here will make perfect sense. Depth of field is generally defined as the portion of a scene that appears to be in focus, bearing in mind only one plane at a time can be in perfect focus. The objects immediately before and beyond that plane will typically be acceptably focused to

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BETTER EYES

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a degree. This degree of focus can be controlled. A photograph of an object that shows the whole view in effective focus is made with a small aperture and long exposure time. Conversely, an arty photo with the subject in clear focus but distracting fore and backgrounds in blurred focus is attained with a large lens opening and short exposure times.

There are other factors governing focus and depth of field, but for our purposes, let's concentrate on the critical one: aperture diameter. Setting aside exposure time, light ray behavior and other realities of the physical world, you achieve relatively good focus over the whole depth of view by reducing the aperture through which you view it to as small a diameter as possible that admits light enough to maintain the view. For a simple and practical lesson in this phenomena, pick some familiar object — this magazine article is perfect — and position it where it is blurred and out of focus to you. Make a tiny hole with your thumbs and forefingers, getting this aperture close to your eye as possible, and look through it. You will be stunned at the amount of clarity it adds to your view.

Without my glasses, I simply cannot read the text before me on the computer screen. I can with my hand aperture. Armed with this useful intelligence, you can also take an extra measure of control over your sight picture. I need both hands to shoot so resort to a variety of apertures to aid in accurate shooting with iron sights. We'll touch on a few of them here.

If your vision is still relatively good and you use uncorrected shooting glasses, one of the simplest and most effective ways to bring your front sight and target into usable focus is with aperture sights. Before telescopic sights came into vogue, precision shooting got done with peep sights. Not every gun is amenable to peep sight installations, but the vast majority of American sporting arms are. While I have tinkered some with aperture sights on handguns, the jury is still out on this notion but I have at least a couple of customers who swear by them. Peep sights are my favorite approach where practicable, since they eliminate the need for auxiliary aids to vision which all have some drawbacks in the field.

The Vision Infirm

One of my long-time customers had over the years sent along numerous custom revolver projects, mostly vintage-style guns with fixed sights that had to be regulated for a specific load. Luckily, we had been very successful

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since we evidently had similar holds and similar interpretations of the sights. He was always very pleased with the results. Alas, as time wore on, his results with my handiwork became increasingly problematic. Eventually, Mark Dye, a 30-something pistolsmith in the shop took over shooting duties. His first effort at regulating our old customer's sights was disastrous through no fault of his own. His results were just different. Irate phone call followed and I did my best to explain the situation. Not long thereafter a small miracle in the form of a Merit Eye disc arrived in the mail with a directive for me to use this next time we regulated his sights.

I was stunned at how well I could shoot with revolvers again, though I did not threaten Mark's rank as head sighter-in-charge at Bowen Classic Arms. This little gadget has a small, adjustable leaf shutter in it ranging in size from about .040" to .140". By varying the diameter, you can usually settle on a diameter that is a good compromise of clarity and illumination. It's affixed to glasses with a small sticky cup and swings on an arm, which lets you move it out of view when not engaging a target. Effective as it is, the major drawback for me is now I have a fifth component of my sight picture to align after both sights, target and eyeball. If you are working on a shooting range in a particular shooting position, this isn't troublesome. In the field or in changing positions, it becomes a major nuisance. Still, it is a wondrous shooting aid for the vision infirm.

More Goodies

Similar to the Merit Eye disc in principle are the stick-on apertures from Clear2Target. These little stick-on plastic peep sights apply directly to your spectacles. Thanks to the little tab, they are easy to use. I do not find the fixed diameter any particular handicap though they are not quite as versatile as the Merit device with respect to local shooting conditions. As with the Merit Disc, they do require some getting used to since you have much to align simultaneously.

Scopes and dot sights are often the last resort for handgun shooters suffering from presbyopia since the optical lens packages do the work of a set of good eyes. A practicing Luddite, I have a hard time warming up to scopes and optical gadgets on handguns since these contraptions destroy the quick handling and general handiness of belt guns by adding weight and bulk. Still, if you can't see to shoot anymore, they are a small price to pay. In my experience, the head's up display contraptions are typically smaller and lighter and do the least amount of harm to the gun. I suppose if I were a serious handgun varmint hunter, a conventional scope would get the nod by virtue of precision. By using very low-power scopes,

such as the Leupold 2X EER, you don't add a great deal more weight and size by comparison to the red dot cans.


Rifle shooters have the better time of it since scopes detract relatively less from portability and handiness. Further, scopes have been on rifles now for more than 150 years now and do not offend delicate sensibilities as much. However, as with handguns, there are some rifles that simply cannot gracefully accommodate optics or even aperture sights so options to improve shooter performance may be limited to visual aids.

Super Focus

Here, I'll hand off to Editor Roy since he's the one who discovered these dandy glasses.

"Okay, these are cool," he told me. "Basically you have a pair of glasses ground to your distance prescription. The catch is there are two lenses on each side and the inner one (closest to your eye) is flexible. The space between the outside and inside lenses is filled with clear liquid. When you move the slider on the bridge above your nose, it changes the focus of the lenses, allowing you to go from close, to medium to distance, or anywhere in between, fast. The Superfocus glasses mimic what your eyes used to be able to do when they were young and flexible. The first time I used them I could suddenly see the sharp sight picture I remember from the old days — not that I'm as old as you, mind you."

Roy said with the Superfocus glasses he can actually get sharp sight pictures simply by sliding the focus bar and can favor the rear, front, target or get a nice blend of all three. Damndest thing if you ask me. Maybe there's hope for all of us. I have to be polite to him though, or I'd address the crack about our ages.

Short of spinning back the physical clock 20 or 30 years, there's no way you will ever recover the level of visual acuity you once had. Still, there are several ways to keep shooting effectively that are neither complicated nor overly expensive. You will have to do a little experimenting to find the course of action best for your optical circumstances, but don't give up. If my experience is any indicator, there is hope for most of us. They say growing old is not for sissies, but quitters finish last no matter what. 

Author's note: A particular thanks to Dr. Allyn Hildebrand of Campbell, Cunningham and Taylor, P. C. who let a gun-toting patient into his office, provided a life-changing prescription for my shooting glasses and who kindly read this article for technical accuracy.

For more info: www.americanhandgunner.com/product-index and click on the company name.