New Equipment Syndrome

Duncan Busby shares his advice on managing the adjustment process

Now that the madness of the holiday season is over and the new year has begun, you'll no doubt be back into your usual shooting pattern, most likely with a few new archery toys picked up over Christmas or in the sales. Integrating new pieces of equipment into your setup is exciting, but it can also be quite tricky and a little frustrating at times. In my experience, you may find the process easier and less stressful if you contain your enthusiasm and take a little time introducing your new equipment.

There is a little known phenomenon that some of you may have experienced at some point over the years which can occur after changing your setup; the politest name for it is 'new equipment syndrome.' This is when you find your scores increasing after using a new piece of equipment, sometimes quite substantially. This early boost in performance can be down to a number of factors. Firstly, changing anything on your setup can make your conscious mind much more aware of your actions. Things that your subconscious mind normally controls, such as shot timing or aiming, become more of a conscious process. In the short term this can make a positive difference to your performance – after all, this is how you learned to shoot in the first place – but once this initial learning period ends your subconscious mind will take over again, and at this point your shooting should return to more or less the level it was at before you made the changes.

Secondly, improvements can also come about by a change in attitude. Using a new piece of equipment marketed as 'the best available' and demonstrated to have winning potential by the pros, can create feelings of confidence in both the product and your own shooting. But this new sense of belief is fragile and eventually any drop in performance, even if it's due to outside influences such as the weather, can bring it crashing down along with your scores.

Although this encouraging increase in your scores can last from anything to few hours to a few weeks, the potential drop, even if it's only by a few points, can be devastating to your confidence and subsequently to your future performance.

I must emphasise at this point that the effect can work both ways, and alternatively archers can see a decline in their performance after trying new equipment, only returning to their usual standard once their subconscious mind has become accustomed to the change. Although this might not be the case for everyone, in my experience most archers will suffer from some form of performance variation after changing their setup.

Make careful notes on your current setup – such as stabiliser weights and angles – to chart what changes

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If a new piece of kit doesn't work for you, bear in mind your shot will change and evolve, and it may come to suit you later on

Along with the frustration this can cause, it can often lead the archer to continually change their equipment, perpetuating the cycle, but with a little foresight you can spot these symptoms quickly and act on them when making any changes. This should ensure that any improvement you make in your performance is sustainable.

To begin you'll need to make a note of your current set up: be aware of even small details such as the angle of your side rod or the tension of your trigger. It's vital you know exactly where you started before you make any changes. You then need to make a note of your scores with this setup; shoot some rounds or go over some previous results noting down your high, low and average scores (if you shoot a number of different rounds, turning your scores into an arrow average can be a huge help).

Now that you're ready to introduce your new equipment, try to change only one thing at a time as this will make it easier to identify the effect each modification is having. Unfortunately it's impossible to force your subconscious to learn any faster than it is capable during this process, but you can help it along a little. Try shooting blank boss the first time you use a new piece of equipment, as this will allow your mind to completely focus on the feel of the shot without the added distraction of aiming.

Once you're comfortable with the feel of your equipment you should move on to a target face and begin making a note of your scores, ensuring your new set up is well tuned first. As before, keep note of your high and low scores as well as your averages, and when you have shot enough rounds, compare them to your previous scores and note the differences. Whatever changes you make it's important you give your new equipment time to settle down, and this evaluation period should allow you the time and means to properly determine whether that new rod or release aid has made the difference to your scores that you were looking for.

Hopefully at this point you will be happy and comfortable with your new equipment and consistently achieving the scores you wanted. However if you are having difficulty in maintaining this level, it's time to assess your setup; compare your new product to the one it has replaced and fine-tune it to reproduce the fit and feel you're familiar with – you'd be amazed at the difference one tiny adjustment can make to your performance. Sometimes a drastic change from what you are used to may be less effective than a slight variation. If this applies to you try choosing equipment that has some similarities to what you're currently using.

But if after all this you find that the new piece of equipment still isn't working for you, revert to your previous set-up and note the differences. If you find your shooting returns to normal then you may already have the most suitable equipment, but don't rule out any future changes. Your shot is constantly evolving and adapting so what suits you now may change in the future.

Whether you've got a whole new bow or just a couple of extras, take the time to get to know what effect it's having

If you're still having issues the problem may lie in your form rather than your setup. They say a change is as good as a rest, but this can cause as much bad as it does good when changing your equipment. Though you can't always avoid having peaks and troughs in your scores, keeping careful notes of all your alterations should allow you to identify your shooting patterns and limit any unnecessary blame you might be tempted to put on your new equipment before you make further, potentially damaging changes.

Sometimes it takes a little experimentation to find your perfect setup so keeping clear records of your performance during each stage of adjustment should allow you to identify how much of a positive influence your equipment has had.

Trying something new is always exciting and it's important to help your archery grow, so whatever new products you choose to shoot this year, patience and insight should help you through any unexpected results no matter how long they last. Good shooting!

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It's important to tune new equipment to your bow carefully in order to get the best out of it

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