Open your mind

Jerry Moffatt dominated the elite climbing world in the 1980s and 1990s thanks to super human effort, an iron will to succeed and a passion for sports psychology. A fieldsportsman since his youth, Jerry is now passing on this knowledge to others, and explains to Martin Puddifer how the shooting community can benefit from his approach.

PHOTOGRAPHY: SCOTT WICKING | CLAUDIA ZIEGLER | MOFFATT COLLECTION

I have Scott Wicking to thank for introducing me to Jerry Moffatt, a former elite climber who has a boundless passion for shooting. And life. Scott, a native of Whitby who had met Jerry while they were both surfing there, can always be relied upon to throw some interesting pitches my way, and his email about Jerry's sporting background was intriguing.

Here we had a man who, I was soon to discover, has the same kind of legendary status in his field as any Ripon, Digweed or Walsingham has in shooting, even in retirement. After some extensive research, which involved examining photographs and watching films like *The Real Thing*, showing Jerry climbing, training and enjoying downtime across the world in the 1980s and 1990s, I quickly came to appreciate that I was going to meet a man who'd taken his body and mind to the absolute limit, sometimes with the risk of death starring him and his peers square in the face. This at times daunting footage, which is definitely not for those of a nervous disposition given the risks involved, also came to life on the pages of *Mastermind*, Jerry's latest book for climbers which seeks to help them improve their mental and psychical performance. So where does his love of shooting fit into ➤

this complex world full of global travel, danger and adrenaline? Jerry and I met up at his townhouse in the centre of Sheffield earlier this year, and while he might have retired back in 2002, the muddied Land Rover on the driveway, his fresh face and athletic frame were signs this 55-year-old is still an outdoorsman in the truest sense of the word. What followed was a lesson in shooting and indeed life unlike any other I had experienced before…

How did you get into shooting?
"I first started with a gat gun, one of those little air pistols, when I was 11 years old. I was brought up on a farm in Leicestershire, so my father shot. Then I got an air rifle, the best gun I ever had, which I kept for three years. I looked after it so well there wasn't a scratch on it. I spent a whole summer cleaning cars and gardening to save up for it, a BSA Super Meteor. I'd shoot crows and pigeons with it and do a little target shooting. When I was 14 years old I got a 12 bore and then started taking our Dalmatian for a walk and doing a bit of rough shooting on our land. I would just walk along hedges in the summer and hope that a pigeon would fly out. I'd get a few partridge and pheasant during the game season too. The Dalmatian was brilliant for everything except picking-up!"

Was your father instrumental in your shooting education?
"Not really, no. I only went out with him sometimes. I went to school in North Wales and my best friend there was into shooting, and his father had a shoot and so we'd spend summers there in Yorkshire, out with a rabbit catcher called George. We would shoot rabbits as George worked his ferrets. I even got invited on a couple of game days up in Yorkshire in my mid teens. A lot of my parents' friends shot too, and they very kindly invited me to join them on some of their days, this was back in the 1970s when there'd have only been 50 in the bag. I started climbing when I was 15 and once that happened I pretty stopped everything else, including shooting…"

> "I always kept my shotgun licence, so whenever I went home I could go out across the fields with the dog and walk-up a few hedges."

Jerry shooting pigeons in Thirsk with his labrador, Halle.

Was it hard to leave shooting and the countryside behind?
"I dropped everything to go climbing, I just got completely addicted to it. Climbing's not the kind of sport when you're a teenager that you can just take your shotgun out with you for when you have some downtime. If you're not shooting much it's not something you can easily get back into because you lose your permissions for pigeon shooting, your contacts, but I always kept my shotgun licence, so that whenever I went home to see my parents, I could walk out across the fields with the dog and walk-up a few hedges. It was never a case of 'oh I have to go shooting now', I just went and did it."

Did you miss shooting?
"I don't think I did miss it. Climbing and shooting are really different but what they have in common is you get outside and you spend the whole day in the countryside. Could I have stopped shooting and gone to be a swimmer, spending all my time in the middle of a town at an indoor pool? No way. I think that's one of the reasons I fell in love with climbing, it's biggest draw was because you spend all of your time on the moors, in beautiful areas amongst all the wildlife, so I couldn't have participated in something that didn't involve that."

When did shooting start to come back into your life after you retired from climbing and was it an easy transition?
"When you're a professional sportsman it's very difficult to dabble with other sports. When I was climbing that's all I did, there were no days off to do other ➤

things. Towards the end of my climbing career I started to wonder if I would only ever be involved in climbing. I had always wanted to get back into shooting, and other things like surfing, and I thought, wouldn't it be nice if I didn't have to climb, I could do something else. It's really, really hard to retire from a sport. It takes years. Not feeling guilty about not training in order to go shooting takes time to get used to because it's just ingrained in you. I shoot five days a week now. Pigeons over rape, rabbiting with dogs, skeet shooting, walked-up and driven game. Everything."

Are there any things you learnt in your climbing career that you have since adapted for shooting?

"Yes. When I started climbing there were no competitions. When competitions came along in the late 1990s I struggled mentally because it's a completely different environment to what I was used to. You're indoors, you're told when you're going to climb, there's an audience, there's prize money involved and there are people there you don't want to look foolish in front of. Things like that take their toll. Then I read a book called *With Winning in Mind* by the rifle shooter Lanny R. Bassham, who won gold at the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal. That book changed my life. It showed me how to compete, develop a mental strategy, goal setting…it's exactly the same in all sports and it's amazing to think that I learnt how I could climb more competitively and get my mind in a good place from a rifle shooter – which wouldn't be further from climbing. You just have to adapt it. It's the same with the messages I give to climbers in *Mastermind*, about developing your concentration, goal setting and building confidence etc.

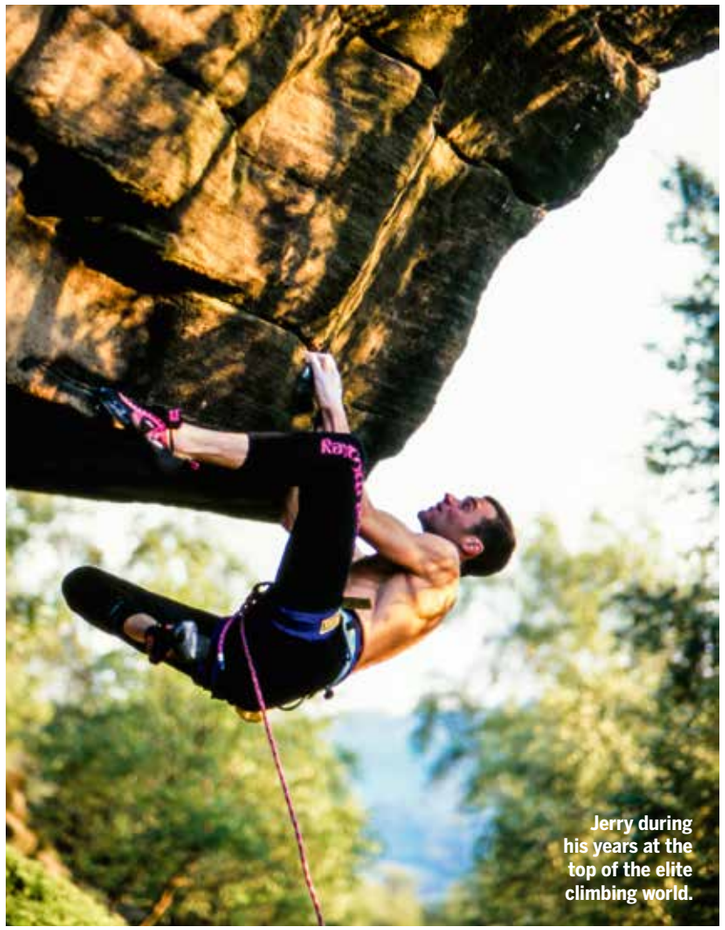
> "I don't want to be thinking about misses when I'm shooting, I want to be thinking about hitting things cleanly."

"With all sports, none of the psychology matters unless it's really important to you. So you could go out with your dog and shoot great, but you might be in the Olympics and you might be in the final shoot off and need your last pair to win, then it really, really bloody matters, and the whole learning about psychology just comes down to that. Similarly, you might have bought a day's game shooting and you find yourself in the hot seat on the best drive and these birds are coming over and you want to shoot them cleanly, and when you miss one, you want to know what you're going to be thinking. At certain points you want to be thinking, 'what's going wrong?'

"When friends of mine miss birds they'll talk endless about how they missed a bird and that they're a terrible shot. There's nothing worse you can do for your shooting than talk repeatedly about your misses. When you're talking about missing you are also visualising it, telling everyone else you can't do it… and then they most probably start thinking in that mindset too. I don't want to think about a miss, I want to think about hitting things cleanly.

"Confidence is built from repetition of success. Repeating a successful shot, visualising it or talking about it builds confidence. You want to talk about your successes though not in a boastful way. Self talk is good. When someone shoots well, they remember how they felt, and that's the feeling you should want. Imagine that feeling again as the drive begins. If you're the sort of person who talks their shooting down, maybe think about talking your shooting up – you might get down on yourself if you miss but you have to try and snap yourself out of it by remembering the best shots you've ever done."

Jerry is not one for dwelling on easy misses in the field.



Jerry during his years at the top of the elite climbing world.

Is it ever too late to learn all this?

"Definitely not. I read a lot on sports psychology when I was competing because I wanted to win. I didn't have anyone teaching me, I had to educate myself because I wanted to be the best, as I did with my diet and my training regime. By the time I finished climbing I felt that I wanted to pass on what I had learnt to others. When I was climbing I wouldn't have told anyone what I was doing! The main thing is to keep your mind occupied on what you should be thinking – if you're filling your mind with positives you can't be filling it with negatives. I shoot a lot of clays and go and see the England coach David Beardsmore once a month, and have done for the last three years. Unfortunately, I'm the kind of person who when I shoot I can't really have fun unless I feel I'm shooting well – I try and excel in things. I should say it's not happened in my shooting yet! When I was writing *Mastermind* I started shooting for me really well because I'd finish a chapter, go shooting and getting into the mindset of what I'd just been writing about really helped."

What makes a good coach?

"Lew Hardy, the research professor in elite sport psychology at Bangor University, told me that when you're coaching somebody, don't give them too much information. The fewer things the student has to think about the more they can concentrate on them. Ideally, you want to give them one thing to think about, a process goal, so that the other things they've learnt previously will be done unconsciously and they begin to trust their instincts. The problems comes when you're under pressure and you could start to think about things that happened when you were first learning to shoot and you try and re-enact it, which is called conscious processing. Here your conscious mind overrides the unconscious and you end up trying too hard. You have to trust your muscle memory and skills you've learnt. There are tricks that you can use to keep your mind occupied, ➤

Jerry Moffatt beginning a climb up Millstone Edge in the Peak District.

like concentrating on the one single most important thing that will enable you succeed the task your trying to achieve. In shooting that might be just trusting your sight picture or where the optimum kill point might be. When you are standing in your peg before a drive begins these are things to visualise.

"Guns who struggle with their confidence need to be aware, early on, of the external things that will put pressure on them. What I learnt from *Mastermind* was it's not always best to be an optimistic person, it's probably better to be a pessimist.

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Trusting your ability is key to both shooting and climbing.

"For example, say you haven't shot for a long time. If you're an optimist you might say, 'OK I haven't shot for a while but I'm going to go out and shoot brilliantly'. Then you start to miss and wonder why it's happened. Perhaps it's better to be a pessimist and be aware of your limitations as well as your strengths (things like your gun mount or swing) and not let a miss get to you. If you miss ask yourself, is anyone going really going to be that bothered? No, they probably want you to shoot well. So you think of all the negatives well in advance, analyse how you're going to tackle thoughts that will put you off and then you're in a much better frame of mind. One of your goals for the day has to be to enjoy yourself, that alone will take some pressure of it."

Mastermind by Jerry Moffatt (£29.95) is out now.