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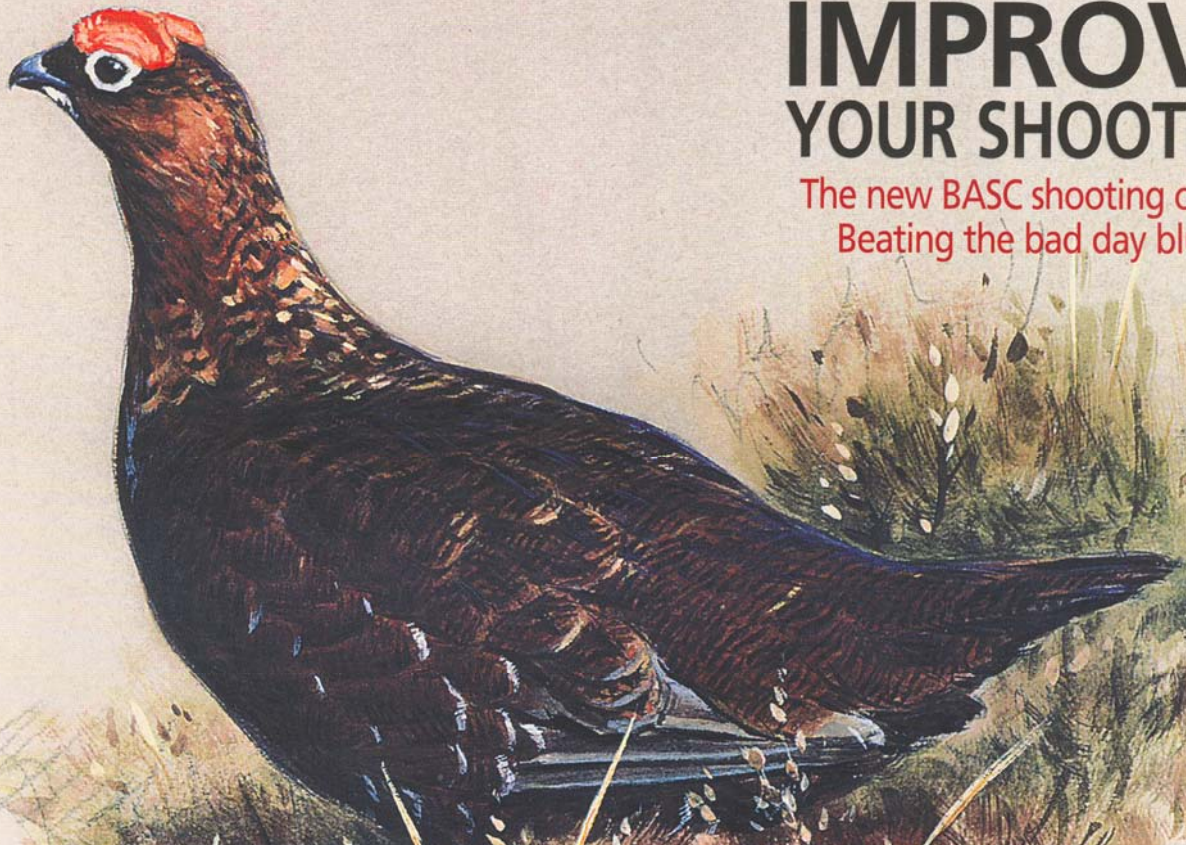
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A work of art or a working tool? For **EDDIE KERSHAW** decoys are both.

For the MARSH or the MANTLEPIECE

A keen wildfowler, Eddie is by trade a cabinet maker so it was natural that his two interests should come together, although his wildfowling career actually began in a previous occupation. Eleven years in the army took him to Colchester where the Byfleet Channel provided many a happy flight. On leaving the army he returned to his native Lancashire and swapped the Essex marshes for Morecambe Bay.

Decoy carving began as a hobby but now that he's retired Eddie has turned his more-or-less full-time attention to decoys. I say more or less because he is also building a punt in his garage, but that's another story.

Although he read a few books, Eddie is basically self-taught as a carver but his natural feeling for wood meant that he took to the art, well, like a duck to water. His gun provided the models for the duck he carves, with tracings taken from the carcasses to ensure the correct shape and proportions.

The decoys are made from four pieces - head, two body halves and a keel. Eddie uses pine because it is good to work with and light - these are working decoys and weight

is an important issue and the decoys are hollow to reduce the weight to a minimum. But the amount of weight in the keel is critical, Eddie explains; "For a decoy to use on a flight pond I use very little lead, but if it is going to be used where there's a heavy tide it needs much more to give stability." And each decoy is tested in water to achieve exactly the right amount of ballast in exactly the right place.

How much work goes into producing such lifelike decoys? "How long is a piece of string? I'm constantly trying to improve things - to do them that bit better," is Eddie's response. A teal can take four or five days, but it all depends on the amount of detail; for instance, whether feathers are painted or carved.

Every one of Eddie's ducks is made to order and they are genuinely working decoys, but there is little doubt that the majority will end up on the mantlepiece rather than the marsh.

● You can contact Eddie on 0161 282 7582 or e-mail working_decoys@yahoo.co.uk

LEFT
A perfect decoy, but would you want to use it on the marsh?

BELOW
1. Four pieces of pine are shaped to form the body
2. Extra detail such as feathers is then carved.
3. The final decoy is then finished with several coats of paint.

