

PARTING SHOTS FROM TOP SHOOTERS

I asked several top shooters to describe the most important things they focus on for Cowboy Action Shooting. For some of them, it's a straightforward and simple exercise. For others, it's very involved.

On a personal note, I found this section to be the most interesting to compile. Most of the information provided is written by the shooter. I tried to do as little editing as possible in order to make sure the information is presented as the shooter intended. This chapter could have been titled "In Their Own Words." I also believe that this is the most important section in this book. I hope that you find it as interesting and helpful as I do.

BLACK BARTH, STEVE BARTH

I practice very little. I try to practice once or twice right before a big match but do not always succeed. I also try to shoot 1 or 2 local matches a month. But when I do practice, I will work on transitions more than shooting. I might fire many 1- or 2-shot strings and move from gun to gun trying to eliminate as much unnecessary movement as possible. I work on a lot of 1st shot sequences, as this is usually one of my weaknesses. I always use a timer. I have also found that a video camera is a great training tool.

I think that the most difficult part of the game is getting your brain out of the way when shooting.

I believe in having a set routine that should be followed before every stage in order to mentally prepare. This does not mean you have to go into some weird trance and visualize yourself in the land of Zen. But coming up with a checklist to ensure that you have prepared yourself and your guns allows you to discard those concerns and concentrate on getting through the stage.

And the single most important thing is FRONT SIGHT, FRONT SIGHT, and FRONT SIGHT. As a wise man once told me "The bullet always goes where the front sight is when the hammer falls."

CHUCKWALLA KID, SCOTT STEPHENSON, SASS #56565

Your head-game is an essential part of your shooting performance. Before you shoot a stage you must make sure your head is clear and focused and you know exactly what you are going to do on the stage. But, at the same time, don't over think the stage and worry about minutia. Keep it simple but know what you are going to do. It is a tough combination, but I just try to remember the shooting sequence, where and how I'm going to move and restage the guns. I do not think about manipulating my guns fast. Most of the time that can be saved on a stage is usually between guns, not between shots.

I always get set before telling the Timer Operator “Ready” and shooting the stage. I look and make sure I can see all the targets, make sure my shirt is tucked in and check all my gear, such as making sure my pistol hammer thongs are off. (It is amazing how many people, including myself, have accidentally left their hammer thongs on and started a stage).

It is very important to inspect your guns each day before you shoot at a big match. Make sure your guns eject, have a firing pin and that all screws are tight and the guns function properly. A number of times I and my Dad (Palo Verde) have saved ourselves from having gun problems in the middle of a stage or match by finding broken parts the morning of a big shoot.

Practice is the most important. Practice builds muscle memory, minimizing your screw-ups, and helps build speed. With enough practice, you will not need to think about levering your rifle, drawing and thumbing your pistols or loading your shotgun. Your muscle memory will do that automatically and you will only have to think about which target to shoot and how to move. You need to establish a practice routine. Practice fast, but always end your practice with controlled shooting, hitting all the targets. The best thing practice helps with is minimizing your screw-ups such as dropping shotgun shells, grabbing (gripping) your pistol wrong and so on.

Like most people, I have a very busy schedule. Dry firing is about the most efficient practice you can do. You have no drive time and you don’t burn up any ammo. You can actually get in 20 minutes of practice in just 20 minutes. As a college student away from home and living in a Dorm, my practice opportunities are limited. But, for at least two weeks before a big match like End of Trail, I make special effort to practice dry firing 20-30 minutes every day, live fire practice twice a week, and shoot any weekend matches that are available. Practice as much as your schedule and life’s demands allow.

Cowboy Action Shooting has been a great father-son activity. We are fortunate that we have also been able to involve my mother and sister as cheer leaders and supporters. We do this for fun and it’s more fun when your family is involved.

DANG IT DAN, DAN L. BEALE

I have noticed that in shooting, as in most things in life, the better you perform, the more enjoyment you get out of it. However, this means you will have to make a personal commitment to improving your shooting game. It may also mean practicing (cleaning guns, reloading ammo, etc.) when you really don’t feel like it.

It is with this in mind that I want to offer this admonition: Remember we do this for enjoyment, don’t turn it into a job. When you feel that you “have” to do something even



though you are tired or distracted or just feel like relaxing, then you risk losing the most important aspect of the this sport; the fun!

Now having said that, let me share that I personally fired over thirty thousand (yes, that's 30,000) rounds in the past twelve months. You will find that a lot of top shooters in this sport also consumed an equally large amount of ammo during the same period of time. I say this not to impress or intimidate you, but in an effort to re-enforce the idea that most "winners" really like what they do. They practice and compete for the sheer enjoyment of performing well.

Personally, there are few experiences in my life that rival the exhilaration of shooting a stage to my personal outer limit. Notice that I didn't say, "faster than anybody else", but instead, I want to shoot every stage at my personal best. I only measure my performance against what I know I can do, not against other competitors. This outlook keeps me from creating rivalries with other shooters and it also keeps a positive light on shooting. For example, in 2001, I lost the Nationals (Winter Range) by missing one target. One. However, instead of walking away disappointed, I walked away with a feeling of accomplishment because I shot that match to the best of my ability, AND I recognized that pushing any harder would have resulted in even more penalties. So effectively, I had the physical ability to shoot with the best in the world, and I had the mental toughness to control my emotions and work within my limits for a positive outcome. So maybe I didn't go home with the trophy, but I did go home a winner.

Try to stay focused on why we do this (for the fun) and learn to enjoy your personal accomplishments. Use those feelings to build your confidence.

[Editor's Note: I received the following addition to Dan's section in October of 2007 as I was prepping this book for online distribution.]

That was then, this is now.

First, I would like to thank Doc for letting me expand on my thoughts from his previous book. Second, I would like to thank my wife for putting up with all of my lunatic ranting.

From my original writing I would like to start by underscoring the relationship about improving and the personal commitment required to markedly improve. Lenny Bassham, an Olympic World Champion in Small-Bore, wrote; "Nothing is going to change unless you change yourself first." It's not enough to think about it, you must be willing to get off the couch and go do it.

The Wisdom of Yoda.

Below is a collection of thoughts that I have either collected or constructed over the past eighteen years of competitive shooting. Everyone who shoots competitively has certain thoughts they use to keep themselves in control. Whether the idea is to keep one's focus,

maintain a high attention level, or to calm-down and relax, we all either consciously or subconsciously have certain words or ideas we use to rationalize what we are doing and why we are doing it. My hope is that you find something here that you can use.

“Try not. Do, or do not”. – *Yoda*. When you hear someone say “I’ll try” what they are really saying is that they are leaving the possibility open for failure. This is unacceptable from a competition standpoint. Self-talk is a technique used by many professional athletes when they want to reinforce an idea or strategy. Never use negative self talk when you are at the range. Always say “I will”!

“All we have to fear is fear itself”. – *Franklin D. Roosevelt*. Fear is a product of the unknown. If we know what the outcome of an event (stage of fire) is before it happens, then there is no need to fear it. You can achieve this by learning to visualize and there are many good books out there that can teach you this technique. Learn it, practice it, use it!

“Ultimately, it is you against yourself. It always comes down to how well you know yourself, your ability, your limitations, and the confidence you have in your ability to execute under pressure that is mostly self-created.” – *Tiger Woods*. All pressure is self-generated. If the next stage does not go well, you will not lose your job, car, house or anything else of tangible value. Remind yourself of that from time to time.

“It is more important to improve, than to win.” - Kenneth Baum, *The Mental Edge*. You will never hear me say that I want to shoot my best. I learned that by trying to shoot “my best”, all I was doing was putting undue pressure on myself and setting unrealistic goals. You will know when you are ready for a match, so the only goal you should have is to shoot a little better than your *average*

“A race-horse wants to run” – Unknown. When something at a match makes me nervous, or fearful it makes it hard to remember why I was there in the first place- because I like it! I have always liked shooting and I like the feeling I get from competing, so I remind myself that *I want* to be here.

If you want to shoot faster, well then go out and do it.

There are only two components of “action” shooting; Accuracy and Speed. Just as accuracy is a learned skill, so is the skill of speed. When I started shooting I was told to work on my accuracy first and the speed would come later. The question in my head was always, “Yeah, when?”

Accuracy needs to be learned with 100% consistency because you can’t miss fast enough to win, BUT, you must learn the mechanics of speed with every gun you compete with. This is the way I learned;

With the rifle or the pistol (say the rifle in this case), move to within 10 feet of the berm. Using no target at all, pick out a spot in the dirt. Load your rifle with ten rounds. At the

beep, shoot as fast and as hard as you can. At this point, you are not looking at or through your sights. You are not concerned with anything except actually working the gun as fast as you can (and not stabbing your finger with the trigger). Some people will keep their trigger finger inside the trigger guard, some “throw” the trigger finger out and forward when the lever goes forward. Some will take the entire trigger hand off the rifle and use the arm from the elbow to the fingers to cycle the gun, some will just use the wrist. Some will plant the thumb of the trigger hand on the side of the receiver and just use the fingers to cycle the action. The fact is there is no one single “right” way to run the rifle at top speed, so you will have to try several techniques until you find what is best for you. Be prepared to burn-up many thousands of rounds and more than a few band-aids. You will also have to put the rifle down from time to time to let it cool off.

Only after you find a technique that is comfortable and repeatable, start actually looking through (slightly over) the sights. Notice how much the front sight is moving. Now, try to smooth out your movements in order to calm-down the front sight, but do not slow down in order to do this. Remember this is about speed.

Pistols are much the same but again, the first few times you try it, do not use a target (especially at close range). Just get use to the feel and establish the relationship between how it feels to “thumb” the hammer as fast as you can and say, where your trigger finger is while the gun is under recoil.

When you are ready, start looking through your sights and trying to find ways to calm-down the effects of going faster with how they relate your front sight.

This may sound simplistic, but the fact is this is what it takes. If you don’t develop the mechanics of shooting faster, then you simply can’t improve your times. Don’t get frustrated (easier said than done) because just when you think you have it, your accuracy will suffer. So, you will have to find ways to be accurate while you are banging the hell out of your gun.

What’s happening is that you are re-learning both speed and accuracy and how they are intertwined. Yes, you must still have a good front sight picture and yes, you must have it on the target when you pull the trigger but you will find that target acquisition, sight picture and trigger pull must be accomplished as one continuous event during the string of fire and not just target-to-target.

As the sun sets slowly in the West.

Any good athlete knows there is a mind-body connection. I would recommend that you take the time to read everything you can get your hands on that has to do with the psychology of competing, even if it’s not related to shooting. Some of my favorites are:

-*Zen Golf*, Dr. Joseph Parent. Doubleday, 2002. I keep this one in my bathroom, reading room.

-*With Winning in Mind*, Lenny Bassham. Olympic World Champion, has a straight forward approach.

-*Practical Shooting, Beyond Fundamentals*, Brain Enos. Heavy reading for those that are ready for it.

[Editor's Note: you'll notice that those are the same books I suggested in Chapter 7.]

My final thought about this whole “shooting” game is this: Winning doesn't suck, but winning at all costs does. Learn to savor your accomplishments, and laugh at your mistakes. If you can't do that, bowling is a great family sport!

DANG IT'S DARLIN, ANDREA BEALE



Find a great teacher, and one that's not your spouse! Listen to what they have to say. This may seem a bit obvious but you don't want more than one coach filling your head with information. This just gets confusing. Everyone looks at a scenario or a shooting problem differently and has a different spin on how it should be done. Therefore, pick one person for a coach and for stage shooting suggestions, and use their advice.

You must practice if you want to improve your game. Every time you go to the range have a plan for what you want to accomplish in that practice session. This should also be your approach when you dry fire at home.

Have a game plan or goal for your shooting. This will set the tone for your approach to the sport. Some things to consider are:

- What do you want to accomplish in the sport?
- Are you there just to be with your spouse or do you want to seriously compete?

Don't forget about the mental game. This is as important as actual shooting. How you approach a match or practice session will set the tone for what you accomplish. If you rush to get there and are worrying about every detail and every shot, you are not going to do well. Take time to settle yourself and clear your mind. Picture each stage in your mind prior to shooting the scenario. See every shot, every movement you are going to make. Rehearse it in your mind so when you go to the line you have already shot this stage and know how the stage will flow. Smooth transitions and clear shot pictures will be what you should think about, not “am I going to hit that target?” You need to practice the mental side of the sport as much as the physical side. Set time aside in your schedule to practice your mental imagery so that it becomes second nature and you can do it quickly prior to shooting a stage.

Lastly, make sure you are having fun. If it all seems like work you will not stay with the sport. All of what I have mentioned takes time. I had no idea how to practice or shoot a scenario or anything about the mental game when I started shooting. I started out just wanting to go out and practice with Dan. We had fun; we laughed a lot and always met up with friends and made it a very social occasion. Matches were/are the same way. Once I realized that I could actually hit a target and felt comfortable with the guns, I started looking for a teacher trying to find ways to improve my game. Dan helped me a great deal and is still my main coach. However, I don't recommend spouses coaching one another, but in our case it works well. Dick Hudson (Doc Dalton) is also my coach and Dan generally leaves it up to him to correct me if I am doing something wrong.

EASY RIDER, CLYDE HARRISON

Authors Note: I sat down with Clyde at the 2002 Georgia State Match and he gave me these seven tips.



1. Practice as much as you can and keep it fun. If it starts to become to work, it's no longer fun.
2. Lots of short intense practice sessions are better then long drawn out ones.
3. Practice on small targets with out a backboard, you want the target out freestanding like you see it in a match. Keep the targets no larger than 10 inches in diameter so that the match size targets look as big as barn doors. This really helps your confidence.
4. Practice with a timer and with a buddy that can critique you and can get you back on track when you get lazy.
5. Practice is not just blowing rounds down range, it's full concentration, intense focus on the front sight, the target, and your technique for the perfect shot every time. Have a goal in mind when you go to the range.
6. Keep records of your practice session to establish a baseline and record your improvement. This isn't possible without a timer.
7. When you get to a match, take the match book with you and walk off each stage before the match. This will help your confidence as you'll know what to expect.

EVIL ROY, GENE PEARCY

The main thing I hope the reader will get from this book is that good shooters are not born; they are made through many hours of hard work, practicing and thinking about how to do things better. It is always easier to assume a skilled shooter was just born that way and is unbeatable than to realize that one can practice hard and reach that same level.

I know most all of the top shooters and I know of no "natural." To a person, they have all put in long hours trying to be the best they can.

HANDLEBAR DOC, TODD HODNETT

First of all, like most things in life, you get out of this (CAST™) what you put into it. You need to decide what you want from this sport and then devise a plan on how to achieve it. If you want to become a better shooter, watch others and learn from them, ask them questions, and take lessons.

Learn the proper way to practice. Dry fire, dry fire, dry fire. Speed is for practice and sights are for the match. Most people would be astounded at their own performance improvements if they would try to be smooth and make sure they pay attention to the sights. The shot you are about to take is the most important one. Once you have fired that shot, then forget about it and focus on the next one, which has become the most important shot.



Invest in yourself and the dividends will last a lifetime.



KANADA KIDD, KEN KUPSCH

First things first, you need to have the basic skills. Much of this can be done through dry fire drills as well as practice on the range. The fastest way to get these skills is to take a class or two. You have to know your weak points and work on them, rather than just the things you do well or like to do. You have to be able to do most drills without a lot of conscious thought. As an example, you shouldn't have to consciously tell yourself when to pull the trigger. When you have an acceptable sight picture, the gun should fire. With lots of shooting practice, this becomes automatic.

Once you have the basic skills, you have to maintain them. For some people that will mean you have to dry fire or practice several times a week. For others, perhaps once every couple weeks would be adequate. When you can shoot well on demand, it's time to go on.

Most shooters can do better in practice than at a match. They lose confidence in their ability and the fear of failure overcomes them. I guess it took me a long time to learn, but there's a lot more to life than winning matches. I think when you truly believe that the sun will still rise no matter what the result, it removes tremendous stress that actually

holds back your shooting ability. I can explain this best by a conversation we were having at a recent IPSC match. We were talking about who would win the match and to lighten it up a bit I said “just think about this, a hundred years from now it won’t make any difference who wins the match.” One of my friends standing there replied “tomorrow it won’t make any difference who wins the match!” I was surprised - maybe they really get it! Vince Lombardi once said, “Winning is not everything, but making the effort to win is.”

Sometimes people think that winning is something you do at a match. Nothing could be further from the truth. Winning is a lifestyle, period. The nice thing about it is you can begin whenever you want! I can’t emphasize enough how important diet and exercise are to life. If you truly want to be the best you can be, this is not an option. I tell people wherever I go and some that have taken me serious, have had some incredible results. In addition to the benefits to their shooting, their quality of life is enhanced beyond their wildest dreams.

The top 5 things to learn in a class are as follows:

1. Basic ability to use all the firearms efficiently.
2. How to practice and train.
3. How to retain this ability.
4. Have the confidence to apply this ability on demand.
5. Have the motivation to make better choices in life.

LASS CAHL, HEATHER LANDERS

Practice and shooting from a woman’s perspective

I’ve been shooting CAS™ for about 4 years. It started off as a hobby that my husband (Macon Rounds) and I could do together, but after a short time my competitiveness took over and I began to practice and improve. As in most sports men dominate the sport. But why is that in CAS™? There are no real physical tasks that should give them the advantage over us. What is the difference between the way a woman and a man shoot a stage? Through my observation and training I have found that most men approach a stage aggressively and most women approach the stage cautiously. Men are naturally aggressive and want to do things fast, while they are quickly moving from here to there most women are dusting off their hands and adjusting their hats. I had to overcome those same natural tendencies. Being aggressive is hard for most women, it doesn’t come natural, it isn’t the way God made us, but you can teach yourself to be more aggressive while shooting a stage. Watch the men shoot and try to emulate their actions. See yourself moving through the stage quick and smooth. Pick up your guns with a firm grip, lay them down quick and smooth, lever your rifle quick and handle your shotgun with authority. One day these things I am sharing with you finally came together for me. The first and most obvious thing was my times were much better. The second thing I



noticed was it seemed like everything was happening in slow motion while shooting the stage. And the most memorable thing about that day was a complement I received from my good friend Ozark Azz; he said to me "You are shooting like a sloppy man today." He really meant it as a compliment and I took it that way.

Here are some things I think every woman shooter should know. Know the mechanics of your weapons. What makes this gun tick? What happens when I do this with my gun? What happens when something goes wrong? Can I fix it on the clock or do I need to ground the weapon? Sometimes it is something simple that can be fixed on the clock with a little weapon knowledge. For instance if your cylinder won't rotate, it may be a high primer. Keep your hand on the grip with your thumb pulling back on the hammer, with the other hand reach up and try to turn the cylinder in the direction of rotation. This technique has worked for me and has saved several unfired shots. *I can't over emphasize how important weapon knowledge is.* It will also make you more comfortable with your weapons and other shooters more confidence in your ability. You will be surprised how much respect you get when you work through a gun malfunction on a stage.

Another very important item is sight alignment. Of course your guns should shoot point of aim with perfect sight alignment but where do they shoot with not so perfect alignment? How much out of alignment can I be and hit a target at 8 yards, how much can I be out of alignment and hit that same target at 12 yards? It is much less and you need to know how much. I seldom have perfect sight alignment when breaking a shot. Know where your guns shoot and how they function.

Dry Fire Practice

I spend a lot of time dry fire practicing, it is cheaper and I believe the most productive way to practice. When dry firing I focus on draws, sight picture and trigger squeeze. Other important areas are acquiring the correct and firm grip on the weapons, the pistol in particular. A common problem area that women have is letting the pistol recoil up. This happens because their grip is not firm enough. Not because they are not strong enough, but they simply are not holding it tight enough. I have witnessed and experienced that same problem myself. Practicing a 2-inch draw will help you acquire and maintain your grip, do this over and over again until you can acquire the same grip every time. I wrap my pinky finger under the bottom of the grip frame, this keeps my hand from slipping around and also helps to control muzzle rise.

The rifle should be held firm while pulling it into your shoulder with the forearm and the arm used for cocking should move quick and smooth but in a way not to disturb the sight picture (*authors note: think of the motion as "forward" and not "down"*). Practice levering the rifle, if you loose the sight picture while cocking, slow down and do it smooth. Maintaining sight picture should be your main goal with the rifle.

Now on to my favorite gun: the Winchester Model 97. I started shooting a double barrel shotgun but it just didn't fit my personality. The 97 works much better for me; it gave me so much to think about and so many loading options. I practice the over the top method and the single load right hand method. Shooting a 97 will help you be more aggressive

with all your guns. Most women are intimidated by shotguns like I was. The loud bang, the horror stories about hurting for days after shooting a shotgun one time, all these things have us brainwashed into being afraid of it. Overcome this fear by shooting the shotgun, shoot it a lot. Shoot it from the hip, shoot it on your shoulder, shoot it—shoot it—shoot it. Shoot it so much that you don't flinch and the loud bang doesn't scare you anymore. Shooting from the hip is a great way to desensitize yourself and you will be surprised at how accurate you can become.

Dry firing is also a great time to practice transitions. The most important thing to concentrate on while doing transitions is being smooth and have both hands moving at all times. Remember smooth is fast and your goal is to have no lost motion.

Live Fire Practice

I live fire practice in two ways. I practice like I'm at a regular match shooting stages. I take 50 rounds of pistol, 50 rounds of rifle and 1 box of shotgun shells. I feel this helps me prepare for match conditions. I know how my body and mind feel shooting cold and what it takes to stay in control. Before shooting a stage at practice or at a match, I'll go over the stage in my mind, go over it from start to finish, from the beep down to the last footstep. Close your eyes and see yourself moving through the stage, squeezing off every shot. If possible do the physical movements. I'll go over it several times until I don't have to think about what to do next.

Other times when I don't feel like being serious and just want to have fun I practice with my children, Lance (alias Palamine, 10 yrs. old) and Alex, my daughter, (alias Social Cahl, 8 yrs old). I work with them on their basic shooting skills and safe gun handling. We both enjoy it.

Remember, you will only shoot as good as the people you practice and compete with. I've been fortunate to be able to practice and receive instruction from many great shooters like Ruff Edge, Ozark Azz, Single Action Jackson, T.G. Reaper, Easy Rider, Wolf Bait, and of course Macon Rounds. My coaching and encouragement has come from these same cowboys and from many fellow shooters all of which are a part of my cowboy family.

LASSITER, TOM WILDENAUER



I believe in a lot of dry fire practice. It's important to help learn the muscle memory. I practice picking up and putting down guns from every position I can think of.

I shoot a lot of 22s for practice. They're cheap and they don't encourage flinching. I have full size 22s for practice guns so the feel and hand travel is the same as the match guns.

Work on the mental game. Given two shooters of equal shooting ability the one with the better mental attitude will win

(confidence in equipment, themselves, to let mistakes go, etc.). Never underestimate a stage, keep your focus, there are no gimmie stages. Lastly, shoot smart, there are no dummies in the winners circle.

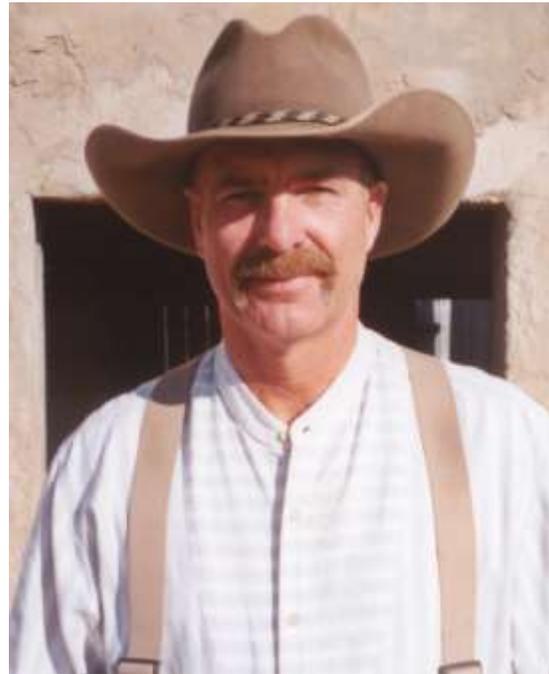
LONG HUNTER, JIM FINCH

If Jim had only 10 or 15 minutes to spend with a shooter to help them improve, he would stress the four following key elements for success.

1. Sights: Concentrate on the front sight and not the target. Shoot dots in practice and sight the guns in. Make sure that they hit where they aim. Find it amazing how many shooters have no idea where their guns print.

2. Dry Fire: Competitors get comfortable with their guns through dry firing. 80% of this game can be practiced and learned without setting foot on a range.

3. Mental Imagery: Spend a few minutes before your turn comes up to run through the stage and memorize it. It's important to go over the stage one shot at a time in your mind. Mentally see the sights aligned on every target and go through all of the motions. The time to do this is before you go to the line. This will save confusion when the buzzer goes off and will allow you to focus your attention on the sights.



4. Go to a class or get personal instruction. I went to see Gene Pearcey (Evil Roy) for personal instruction after my 8th match. This put me on the short track to success. What Gene taught me saved several years of frustration.

MACON ROUNDS, BEN LANDERS

“Smooth is fast!”

Practice

Make it fun and use it for stress relief. Don't make a job out of it. No matter how much you want to improve or win, winning is a very temporary accomplishment. Take it slow and go about your training methodically and deliberately. You will have years of fun and your skill level will never seem to peak but you will continue to improve at an enjoyable rate.



Everyone comes into this sport with a certain skill level. More than likely you will be strong with one weapon and weak with another. Work on your weak gun first. You will soon find that your proficiency with this gun makes it seem like one of your other guns is weak. This phenomenon will go on forever but your overall skill level will continue to improve. I am not saying to only practice with your weak gun, just put more time and effort into practicing with it.

All the information and training techniques we convey to you must be learned in three different arenas.

Dry Fire practice: Whatever techniques you decide to use must first be learned and perfected in dry fire practice.

Live fire practice: Once you are proficient with the dry fire technique, you must then become proficient with live ammunition.

Matches: There is no class, book or instructor that can give you match experience. Shoot as many as you can and concentrate on shooting them like you practice. This is the most challenging area to perfect. Don't revert to old habits. Don't think of the timer / buzzer as an erase button, think of it as a concentration signal. This is where your mind, and not your skill, comes into play (See Chapter 7).

I don't have a set practice routine but I will share some of the things I do to improve and maintain my skill.

I have three areas of focus for training: **Visual, Physical and Mental.**

Visual: Understand that your eyes drive the shooting.

Physical: When I speak about the physical or the body aspect of training I am referring to the act of pointing the weapon at the target.

Mental: Think about looking at your sight and squeezing the trigger. These two items will help you keep your mind where your eyes are looking.

I devote most of my training to mental, visual and dry fire practice. Ammunition is expensive and the good Lord has blessed me with many things but wealth is not one of them. So I practice what is least expensive. Many times each day I will practice visually. I'll pick out small objects and see how fast I can make my eyes **move and focus** on them. This type of practice can be done anywhere and at any time and best of all it costs nothing. If it is convenient and in a non-offensive atmosphere I will even get my body into this exercise. I say non-offensive because even pretending to draw and shoot or point a finger can get you in big trouble these days. I shoot Duelist so this is also a great opportunity to practice with one hand and have the other hand prepared to do something else. In conjunction with visual training I train my mind to be in the exact place that my eyes are. You will not be able to successfully navigate through a stage if your mind is focused on a different task than your eyes and body.

I know with that being said I am about to lose some of you to another article but the fact of the matter is, shooting is a simple sport. Shoot it in a simple mind. Now don't confuse this with being simple minded. Don't look at a stage and panic. Complete one task at a time and focus on it with all your attributes, once that task is complete, then and only then move on to the next task. It makes no difference whether it is a shooting task or one of the many nuances we are required to perform during a stage. Your focus and concentration should be on the task at hand and nothing else. While navigating through a stage if you find yourself thinking about something other than the task at hand (for example, a missed shot or a hard bonus to come), check yourself and get your mind back to where it should be. The most difficult thing to do in this sport is to keep your mind focused on exactly what you are doing.

This is a training exercise I recommend for all shooters, it can be done live fire or dry fire. I call it my target, sight, squeeze routine. Place three large targets 20 yards out and 10 yards apart. These can be used for rifle and pistol practice. The practice session should go like this: look at one target, bring your weapon into alignment with it and let the shot break. Once the shot is fired your *eyes* should immediately move to the next target. The **physical** act of moving the gun to the next target will automatically happen. **Your eyes drive the gun to the target.** Now as the gun comes to the next target you should be thinking sight, and once the sights are in alignment your *mind* should tell your finger to "squeeze" the trigger. **You mind should drive your eyes and body.** I know this sounds like a lot of double speak but most people do not know where their eyes are focused and what they are thinking about while shooting. Their thoughts are all a reaction to what happened instead of what should be happening. Having the targets far apart will allow you plenty of time to think and concentrate. Train your mind to control your eyes and body, and train your eyes to drive the shooting. This is a training drill that will help you hit the targets, if you practice this drill your times will improve mainly because you are hitting all the targets. Don't try to shoot fast. Let your natural speed set the cadence and your cadence will improve as you master this technique. Look At the Target, Look at the Sight and Squeeze the trigger. (Target, Sight, Squeeze) As you become proficient in this

drill move the targets closer together or add targets to the sequence. If after a run you find yourself wondering what happened or where am I shooting, move the targets back to their original position or slow down your cadence to accomplish the same result. Shooting in the Duelist category will also give the same effect as shooting targets that are spaced far apart, it will give you the added time to think about, target, sight, squeeze. In conjunction with this information I would like to emphasize one very important item that started this articles. "Smooth is Fast." Be smooth in all your actions. Don't waste your time trying to be fast. Draw your guns smoothly, pick them up and lay them down smooth, index from one target to the other smoothly. Be efficient by being smooth.

Macon Rounds Motto: Target, Sight, Squeeze—as Smooth as you can.

MARSHAL HARLAND WOLFF, SPENCER DAVIS

Choosing your equipment for this game is very important. There is a lot of stuff to buy when you're getting started and everyone wants to get started fast. Well, let me give you my rule of thumb when buying or recommending gear and equipment; if you don't have to wait for, it ain't worth having! Now, what I mean by that is that the best people to have make your holsters, boots, hats are backed up because they make the best product. The same goes for gunsmiths (on this one I am a little biased). I'm always very leery of gunsmiths and boot, holster, and hat makers that tell you they can deliver in less than sixty days. Now I am talking about custom-made stuff, not off the shelf equipment. Also, if you plan to stay in this game for any length of time it's worth spending the time and money to get the best gear there is and the stuff that will hold up the best for the longest amount of time. (Details of his gear are outlined in Chapter 1.)

First of all, it's worth telling you that I am rather high maintenance so everything I use is custom made or customized in some way. Let's start with the most basic tools of the *shootist's* trade; the guns. I use Colt Single Action Army revolvers chambered in .45 Colt that I got through the SASS Mercantile so they are a consecutive matched pair with my SASS number as the serial number (Note: they can be ordered this way). Now, contrary to what some people may tell you, **ANY** Colt or Colt-type revolver will require retiming and polishing (which has come to be called *an action job*) to stand up to the level of performance that we, as Cowboy Action Shooters, need for competition. I have done all of the work on these guns myself and, knock on wood, they are in the 25,000 rounds plus dry fire and counting range. Some shooters get all up tight about having the perfect grips on their guns. Now, don't get me wrong the grips are important but there is no super advantage to using one type of grips over another. The most important things about the grips are that they are comfortable and that they fit my hand. If you come away from a match with a sore gun hand, you're either shooting too hot a load or need to check into more comfortable grips.

As for a rifle I use a Navy Arms 1873 Deluxe Border Rifle in .45 Colt. If you don't know enough to pick a rifle based on its performance features then pick one based on what you like. One word to the wise though, if you want a '73 then wait and get one first because I know people who have 3 other types of rifles and want a '73. Once they got a '73 they

couldn't sell the others. Remember it is better to wait and save money for the best than to settle for something and regret it later.

Ah, here it is the age-old question; double barrel or 97. Well I use a 1901 made Winchester model 97. I favor a 20-inch barrel with screw in chokes. I shot a hammer double for 7 or 8 years before I switched to the 97 and for 6 rounds was only about a second slower with the hammer double so that question I'll leave up to you to solve on your own except to say that, at the top, there is a payoff to knowing how to use and use well any type of shotgun that is SASS legal. Shotgun shooting in our game is more in knowing the right loading technique than in how raced up your gun is.

Rick Bachman at Old West Reproductions made my holsters and cartridge belt. It's authentic. This is the perfect place to talk about costuming and speed. I wear 2-inch heeled riding boots and Garcia spurs all the time (okay, if the mud is 3 inches deep I leave the spurs in the truck but my feet don't balance right that day). If the boots fit properly it's not uncomfortable or any slower. My boots were made by David Espinoza in Phoenix and let me tell you it is well worth the money to have them custom-made to your measurements. I should have done that about 6 or 7 years earlier and not gone through 3 other pairs of boots trying to find comfortable ones. Does this sound familiar? Anyway, I digress. I used to wear a vest all year round because it kept my suspenders from getting in the way of shotgun shells but I have recently gone to wearing shield front bib shirts some too. How do you keep from getting hung up in your suspenders or in a silk scarf? Simple, button your suspenders under the top corners of the bib and wear one of those short neck ties or if you're wearing a vest then tuck the tails in the vest while you're shooting. Watch chains? They were never a problem for me but just slide the hanging part into the pocket with the watch and the bar through the buttonhole won't pull it out to any great degree during the stage. Basically, to shoot fast and costume well all you have to do is use your head to make sure that any part of your outfit that would hinder you is out of the way while you shoot and yes, you do have to get used to working around some of these things but that is not hard at all. Just think, the game will start to look different because more people will be costuming better. The only other part of your outfit that needs to be a high quality item is your hat. Have you ever tried to shoot a match in pouring rain with a \$60 wool felt hat? That sucker turned into a wet blanket on you in about 35 seconds didn't it? Now, for those of you who don't travel to some of the larger matches it's not as big a deal to pack up when it starts raining but when you've put out several thousand dollars to go somewhere like End of Trail you usually are pretty determined to finish what you started and get your money's worth out of it. I recommend that you call David Johnson at D bar J Hat Company. They will fix you up with a custom fit hat that is warranted for life and is extremely durable in the wind, rain, sun, sleet and snow. Cowboys invested big money in their boots and hats and we can see why; so they would keep going and going and going (oops, wrong commercial).

As a last word, the best advice I can give you is to enjoy yourself and grow in your chosen shooting category and if you want to be a top competitor, PRACTICE! If you need help, ask the top competitors. Take Evil Roy's school, go to the matches where the top competitors are and shoot with them. All of the top competitors in this game go to

matches where they can be around one another and push each other to become faster, cleaner, and better. Learn precision in all aspects of your technique because to be fast you must be precise. You can make it to being quick without being precise but to be truly fast you must be precise. I hope I've been some help by sharing some of my philosophy on this great game we call Cowboy Action Shooting.

PRAIRIE DAWN, BEV LUETKEMEYER

The first thing Sourdough Joe did was to make sure all my guns were working properly and that they hit where they were pointed. Then we worked on stance and grip. Then we worked on hitting the targets each time. Then we went on to transitioning from gun to gun and on to all the finer points of shooting that are covered elsewhere in this book.



One thing that Joe recommended very early on was that I learn to shoot pistols with both eyes open. It took a couple of months to do it, but that was time well spent. I can't stress how much easier it is to acquire targets and sight pictures with both eyes open. The method I used was amazingly simple. I started out by putting three or four layers of clear plastic wrap on the weak eye (the one you shut when aiming) lens of my glasses when I was shooting. This let me keep the eye open without it trying to focus on the sight. I gradually put thinner layers of plastic wrap on the lens until I was down to a single layer. Shoot looking through a single layer for two or three shooting sessions and then try it with a clear lens. You should be able to shoot with both eyes open at this point but it will still require a good amount of mental discipline to stay on track until it becomes second nature. At some point you will not even have to think about it at all.

When I get to the range I check out my guns (if I haven't already done that at home.) Tighten any loose screws. Add lubricant if necessary. Make sure any adjustable sights are in the correct position. Then shoot a group with each of the guns to make sure they are on target.

Now I have to reveal my training secret. I have the luxury of having a very skilled and knowledgeable training partner, Sourdough Joe (Joe Davenport). We have targets set up and make up scenarios that require us to practice different transitions and other shooting challenges. We use the clock and each other to gauge our performance for each stage. We provide each other with valuable criticism and feedback. We'll spend a couple hours shooting stages and working on transitions. We also spend a good amount of time doing single shot drills with each gun to develop muscle memory. We practice picking up the rifle and shotgun from different staged positions and shooting single shots. We practice drawing the pistol and picking it up from a table or other staged position and shooting single shots. One thing I've learned is that it is just as important to practice putting a gun back quickly as it is to practice picking it up quickly.

However you practice, keep it interesting and continue to challenge yourself. Find someone at or above your skill level to shoot with and you will both see improvement as you push each other to excel. To be a good practice partner you have to be able to do more than hold the timer and count misses. You must train yourself to be looking in the right place at the right time (much like Range Officer Training.) This will help your shooting as much as your partners. Watch your buddy drawing and re-holstering. Always be checking for proper grip and proper technique. Check to see if your partner is looking where he or she should be looking. Some shooters will be able to draw and re-holster much more efficiently if they look at their pistols and holsters while drawing and re-holstering. Also check your partner's technique for shooting the shotgun and rifle. Sometimes changing something as elementary as how you pull a shot shell from your belt can be a breakthrough. You can fling a lot of lead downrange, but if you aren't paying attention to all the details, you won't see much improvement.

Most of us don't have a lot of extra time to devote to practicing so make each mundane thing you do in practice count toward training. Load your guns like you are under the clock. Unload your pistols like you are under the clock. The first time you make the shoot-off and are facing multiple re-loads, you'll be glad you did! Also, don't violate any safety rules during practice, loading or unloading. Your mind is the biggest muscle that you have to train to be a top shooter. If you are lax with the rules in practice you will make mistakes at a match. Sourdough Joe's coaching rule is, "Shooting is 20% having good equipment and good ammo, 20% being skilled using that equipment, and 60% mental ability." Joe adds that luck also plays a role, "Add 2% for luck and the shooter that always gives 102% will be known as a top competitor." Joe likes to quote his daddy's favorite saying, "The more I practice, the luckier I get."

It may sound a little intense to make every task part of your training, but I believe that keeping up the intensity level of your training is an important part of developing the mental aspect of shooting. In practice we shoot a lot of scenarios off the cuff. That is, we make them up on the spot. We have just enough time to think through the scenario as we are staging our rifles and shotguns. That helps you become kind of instinctive in your shooting and helps you make the right choices on how to stage guns without taking a long time to think about it. But when we get to the match, we usually have more time to think about what we have to do and how we want to do it. I have found that it is very helpful for me to visualize the stage. I pay very close attention to the stage directions, try to stand at each shooting position and look at the targets from each position. Then I think about how I am going to stage my guns. I like to close my eyes and see the stage as I am shooting it. I hear the beep, draw my first pistol, see the targets and engage them in the prescribed manner seeing each target as it is hit (it is important to see hits, otherwise you might miss when you shoot the stage!). Then I see all the details of holstering that pistol and going to the next gun, how the gun is staged and how I pick it up. Visualize hitting all those targets in the correct order. See how the gun is put back or re-holstered. Which hand did I use? I keep visualizing until I have finished the stage. I try to think of all the details and see all the stumbling blocks as I go through. Pay attention to where you should stand at each shooter position so that you can see all the targets without moving. It takes some practice to get used to doing this. Too much detail may bog you down so start

out with the essential details, and then add more as you become more experienced with this technique. When I first began using visualization, I would go into the fundamental details of shooting each of my guns. That was helpful to me then. I don't think about that so much now that I am at a higher level of proficiency, though sometimes I need some remedial help and do it anyway just for reinforcement. Now, I concentrate more on making my transitions smooth and following proper procedure. Visualize the stage in detail before you get to the loading table. Then, after you have loaded and are ready to shoot, take another moment to visualize the stage again. This time try to do it in real time – that is, as fast as you intend to shoot it. This also takes a lot of practice so don't be disappointed if you can't do it right away. Keep at it and it will soon become second nature.

Another aspect of the game that is much more difficult to teach is mental toughness and concentration. When it is time to step up to the line, the shooter who can put everything else out of his or her mind for the next half a minute will be more successful than the shooter who is worried about how he looks in his new hat. I don't have any whiz-bang tips on how to develop mental toughness. You just have to practice and figure out what works for you. Breathing deeply is a good habit to get into. It can help you focus and the extra shot of oxygen doesn't hurt either. I always try to take two or three deep breaths when the Range Officer asks me if I'm ready. Then when I nod or say yes I really am ready. The more experience you have shooting matches the better able you will be to come up with your own routine to help you focus and do your best. I try not to put a lot of pressure on myself. I try to have fun shooting every stage. I also try to perform to the best of my ability on every stage. If I mess up, I try to learn from my mistake and then let it go. Life is too short to be stressed out by your leisure time activities.

QUICK CAL, CAL EILRICH

We all have our handicaps to overcome:

The most common handicap those of us past 40 have to deal with is eyesight. Many of us also have bad knees, shoulders, arthritis, and a host of other ailments, but fortunately CAST[™] is designed so that most folks can move through the stages fairly easy at almost any age. Eyesight is a main concern that should be dealt with on an individual basis. The most common mistake people who wear prescription glasses make is to try to shoot with Bifocals or Progressives. While it might work for target shooting, it will not work for speed shooting. To be an accomplished speed shooter you must be able to focus on your front sight while in an aggressive shooting stance. That means a lean forward stance such as an isosceles or modified weaver with a good grip and good balance. Whether pistol, rifle, or shotgun you must be what we call “into that gun”. That will not allow you to use the bottom part of you lens and it may not be possible to focus on your front sight in this position.

I suggest: Go to your optician and let them know you are a competitive shooter. Get into a shooting stance at home with your pistol and rifle and mark a set of glasses at the point of the lens that you are looking at your front sight. Measure the distance from the front sight of your pistol and rifle to your eye. When you go see your doctor let him know you want a full lens made to that prescription, but centered where you have indicated. My

doctor was so interested he had me bring my pistol and rifle with me to the session and marked them and measured for me, but then again he is a shooting enthusiast. Depending on your prescription you might want to change back into your regular glasses when not actually shooting a stage, but I've been able to get used to mine so that they are comfortable for hours at a time. Don't worry that targets appear fuzzy, that's how they are supposed to look if you are truly focusing on your front sight. The classic sight picture in shooting manuals show the rear sight slightly fuzzy, the front sight crystal clear, and the target fairly fuzzy.

Quick Cal's 50 Shot Drill

Described elsewhere in this book are dry-firing techniques and they are indeed very helpful and a major key to becoming the best that you can be, however, they do not replace live-fire drills. My favorite practice session with a pistol always includes what I call the 50 "Shot Drill". You simply set up 5 steel plates of various sizes, shapes and heights. I like to mix up targets and heights every time I do this drill, since I don't want to get used to shooting the same target array all the time. I also prefer to paint them various colors, since being prepared for any match is one of the goals of this exercise. A great aspect of this drill is that it can be completed fairly quickly and you can run it 2 or 3 times in a practice session.

The drill itself consists of 10 shots at 5 positions. The first position is at 6 yards and then move back 2 yards each time. The goal is to clean the 50 shots at competitive shooting times. It's a great point of reference with which to measure your improvement or to sharpen your skills if you take a long break from practice. It's also important to use various hand starting positions and use different shot patterns for each distance. With a proper timer you can record your first shots, between shot times, transition between pistols, and 10 shot total time.

Here is an example: Start at 6 Yards, hands at sides, 2 sweeps left to right; 8 Yards, hands above shoulders, Nevada Sweep Left to right on target 1,2, 3, 2, and 1, then Nevada Sweep Right to left on targets 5, 4, 3, 4 and 5; 10 Yards, hands on knees, alternate target 1 & 5 with 5 shots left to right, then fire 5 shots on target 3. 12 Yards, hands clasped in front, Nevada Sweep 1, 3, 5, 3 and 1, then alternate 5 shots on 2 and 4. 14 Yards, hands at sides, first sweep left to right and second sweep right to left.

Once you've learned all these patterns you can work on others until they all become 2nd nature and you can do them all in about the same time. When you can perform the 10 shot drill at 6 yards in the 7-second range you are becoming competitive, Top Guns can perform that drill in the 6-second range and some can even do it in the 5-second range. Sub 5s are possible but not at a consistent match speed. The more important aspect of this drill is to learn to shoot it at the right speed so that you can clean it on demand, that's what really counts.

Practice Sessions

In the beginning just go out and bang as many plates as possible, shoot as much as you can, whenever you can. This will train the subconscious and you will gain a lot of ground in a short time.

After you have acquired many of the basic skills you need to be competitive, you should shoot as often as possible, whether dry-fire or live-fire. It's much better to practice 100 rounds 3 times a week, rather than 300 rounds once a week. There is no warm up in matches; you have to be ready to go at your top level with out live-fire practice. People who tend to fire hundreds of rounds in every practice session, tend to not shoot well until they warm-up. Practice coming to the line cold in a practice session and shoot well from the beginning. Your first shots fired in each practice session are the most important. After that you can work on new things and various techniques you are trying to master.

Training the Subconscious to Perform

There is a great book called the *Inner-Game of Tennis*, it describes the fact that the subconscious mind can be trained so keen that you can learn to separate out conscious thoughts and just allow it to perform what you have programmed it to do. What we do in CAS™ is a series of “muscle memory” movements that have been learned through practice. Once these movements have been practiced enough and committed to muscle memory, you should not have to think too much about them again, except to occasionally practice to keep them sharp. This includes: drawing, re-holstering, proper grip, stance, balance, gun transitions, target shooting patterns, etc.

The key to attaining consistent speed and accuracy is being smooth and focusing on the front sight. You should never think about slowing down to hit the targets, you should instead only think about seeing good sight definition on the targets. After you have practiced enough you won't have to think about pressing the trigger when the sights are on, you'll just do it. Seeing the sights on the target will be the stimulus and pressing the trigger will be the reaction, with no other thought entering into the process. Once you have become proficient at the 50 Shot Drill & done enough dry-firing you will begin to establish an innate pointing ability and will become very good at target acquisition. At this point, you have to be careful that you are not pressing the trigger when you simply index on the target, you must have sight definition, or you will probably miss.

Pushing the Envelope

It's the point in which you can shoot remarkable times by just indexing targets, sometimes you can even clean some stages shooting at this speed. But it won't last for an entire match, and you'll go down in flames at one point or another. There is a very fine line between indexing targets and actually having sight definition. All Top Guns compete on the edge of this line and “push the envelope”. If you don't, you won't be fast enough to win a major match, especially with the talent pool that is out there in today's competition field, especially at major matches (Winter Range & EOT). If you fall into the trap of pressing the trigger upon indexing the target, the term for that in the world of speed shooting is called “hosing.” You will be hosing down the landscape and not winning matches.

To illustrate how competitive it is at the top level of the sport. The last truly dominant shooter was China Camp, who had a remarkable run in the mid-90s winning 5 EOT's in a row, his run ended in 1996. If you consider that Winter Range and EOT are the top two major CAS™ matches, and since 1997, that's 6 years or 12 Major Matches at the time of this writing. No one has won high overall more than once, except Evil Roy who won Winter Range in 2000 and EOT in 2001. Would it be possible for someone to dominate in today's CAS™? Probably not, there are simply a lot of great shooters out there right now. With Rank Scoring being so unforgiving, it takes most of the Top Guns out of the running before 50% of the match is completed. Can there be a Tiger Woods of CAS™? It remains to be seen, but keep in mind that Tiger can have a Triple Bogey on the first hole and can erase it with 3 birdies on the next three holes. Rank Points can't be erased; even if you win every other stage you can't win a major match (WR or EOT) with 2 misses on stage. There are just too many good shooters at a major and you will eat too many rank points and not be able to recover. That's exactly why learning to clean the 50 Shot Drill on demand is so important.

RED RIVER RAY, HARRIS RAY RUMMAGE

I would like to start by saying to all new shooters starting this sport, "Go with what feels the best to you". As far as the holster style, pump or SXS shotgun, rifle and pistols, don't let anyone push you away from your feelings within. I was told for many years that "slip hammering" my pistols was wrong, very inaccurate and not a consistent way of shooting. If you are not familiar with this form, you hold or pin the trigger back while thumbing the hammer with your off hand. While it does take practice, this



method is on par with conventional firing methods and has served me well over the years. I am not saying go out and start this, but do not let someone wave you off from anything you are comfortable with. If it works for you, then practice it till mastered.

The 97 Winchester is no better than the SXS and vice-versa. One should learn both. I have found that learning to shoot both well can get you out of a uncomfortable stage situation.

Action jobs, light triggers, flat sights and all the "hoop La" aren't worth a hill of beans without the most important ingredient, **PRACTICE! And more PRACTICE!** Go out and purchase a timer and practice daily if possible. Dry firing or live firing, they both help better your game. Within a couple of weeks everyone will notice a difference. No matter how much you spend on guns or what anyone tells you the only way to become top in your class is practice. My wife (Kill-em-all Kate) and I dry fire against each other man on man. It has greatly increased her speed to keep up click for click as we race each other to the finish.

No matter which guns you choose have a gunsmith do action work on them. A weapon that does not work smoothly and properly when you call upon it will dive you nuts in competition.

If you are lucky enough to have a “Top Shooter” as a member of your club, by all means watch, listen and ask questions. I have not met one yet who is not eager to help you. I am very lucky in this area to have “Marshal Harland Wolf” and “Island Girl” to shoot with every weekend. The both of them have taught me volumes. Who knows you may be the next “World Champ” or like me, a cowboy who has at least had some luck with the shooting sport my barber (Clint Crow) told me about. The best sport I have ever known, Cowboy Action Shooting.

Good luck and no matter what, Win, Lose or Draw, do it with the Cowboy Spirit.

SINGLE ACTION JACKSON, RANDY JACKSON

There are three things to successful shooting:

1. See the target
2. Align the sights
3. Maintain sight alignment through trigger pull until the gun lifts from recoil.
4. Repeat this as many times as you have targets.

The biggest gains (or losses) in improving your stage times don't involve shooting, it involves transitioning between guns. Spend some time with a good school or instructor to learn proper practice techniques. In real estate, it's location, location, location. In shooting, it's practice, practice, practice. Do it well, and have fun.



SLICK SILVER KIDD, CLAYTON DIEHL

Have fun. This is a hobby that everyone does out of enjoyment. Although I take my shooting very seriously, this does not mean I don't have fun while I'm doing it. When I'm out shooting, I get away from the everyday stresses of being a senior in high school and my little part time job. I wouldn't shoot if I didn't have fun.

Hit the targets. There is really nothing else I can stress more than making sure you hit your targets. The extra .5 seconds it takes you to get a sight picture on the target is worth it compared to the 5 seconds you will receive if you miss.

Smooth and efficient movements during the course of stage runs. This is something I really work on a lot at monthly matches. If you get really excited in a stage run you tend to make unneeded movements that take up time. Planning your movements should start the night before the match while reading your shooters handbook at a major match. When on the loading table make sure you pay attention to the props and anything that could trip you up or slow you down in a stage run and think how you can eliminate the potential for a disaster. Think about your movements on the loading table and basically prepare yourself mentally. **STAY CALM!** That is very important for efficient and smooth movements.

Confidence in firearms and ability. I really like to go into a match and know that I can rely on my firearms and other equipment. Make sure your guns are going to work well with the ammo you're shooting before you go to a match. It seems like common sense, but I have seen a lot of shooters with problems due to not making sure of their equipment before a match. This will be one less thing that you have to think about while shooting if you make proper preparations before a match.

Don't let others get you down. When you're shooting CAS™ and trying to be competitive there are many people that will look down on your competitive spirit. Don't let this get to you. They will also say that you should "only shoot for fun." People have fun in many different ways. Some people come to matches to shoot 24 different guns in a given match and saunter from place to place. They will also not worry about gun staging and/or movements during their stage run. These people have fun shooting CAS™ in their own way and that is a great thing! I personally have fun trying to shoot fast, clean, and completing the match at or near the top of the pack. There is nothing wrong with that in my opinion, like I said people have fun in their own way.

DOC SHAPIRO, JOEL SHAPIRO

Practice

I enjoy this game and try to do the best I can. In order to do the best I can, I spend a fair amount of time practicing. You just can't get better if you don't. Set up a practice schedule and stick to it. Here's mine:

Monday – Friday: Dry fire practice with revolvers, rifle, and shotgun. I use the drills that I described back in chapters 3, 4, and 5. I probably spend between 15 and 30 minutes a day working on something specific. I use a timer for a start signal. I wear all my leather and work on draw and holster, transitions, target acquisition, shotgun loading, and everything else I can think of.

Saturday: There is usually a match somewhere that I can get to. I often use the monthly matches as an opportunity to practice and push my limits. I go into each stage with a



specific goal in mind. Either: speed, perfect transitions, tight sight pictures, or some combination of them. If there isn't a match, and during the off-season, I go to the range for a few hours of practice. I shoot paper plates and work on the dot drill described earlier.

Sunday: If there isn't a match, it's a day off. One Sunday a month I do shoot IPSC. I look at it as "cross training" and find that it really helps my cowboy shooting. Of course, I am not using optics or a compensator!

I can't stress the importance of *meaningful* practice enough. When you practice, make sure to have a goal in mind. For example, today I am going to work on pistol to rifle transitions. I'll stage my rifle against the wall or lying on a piece of furniture. I'll set my timer up for a delayed start. At the buzzer, I'll draw a revolver, aim and shoot one shot, holster, draw the other revolver, aim and shoot one shot, holster, and retrieve my rifle, shoulder, lever, and get the first shot on target. I'm not worried about the amount of time it takes; I'll just work on that pistol to pistol to pistol to rifle transition, try to remove all extraneous movement and make it smooth.

Instruction

There is no substitute for personal instruction. If you have any bad habits, it can be very difficult to find and correct them yourself. It often takes someone else to help you with it. Nothing can take the place of a shooting school. Make the time to go to Evil Roy's, or Tequila's, or San Juan's, or any of a number of shooting schools located around the country. If that isn't possible, talk to some of the local top shooters and ask if they have a little bit of time to work with you or check with the members of your shooting club.

Have a Routine

Having a set routine that starts the night before a match helps get your mind into focus and prepares you for shooting. Do it the same way every time. Make sure that your gear is in order and packed up for shooting. Make sure your glasses are clean and your ammo and leather are in your range bag. Take along a few extras and don't forget tools and spare parts! You never know what you are going to need.

Eat a nourishing dinner, preferably with plenty of carbohydrates. I like pasta. Carbohydrates help to fuel your body during the course of the next day. Drink plenty of water to ward off dehydration. Stay away from alcohol! It acts as an agent for dehydration and may affect the way you feel the next day. You want to be sure to be at your best.

Go to bed a little early and make sure your alarm is set to get you up in plenty of time. Eat breakfast. Don't eat too much. You don't want to feel stuffed, but you need enough fuel to get you to lunch without feeling run down. When you eat lunch, follow the same guidelines as for breakfast. Keep it light and small.

Drink plenty of water. When the stage description is read, pay attention. Make sure that you know exactly the procedure for shooting the stage. Go through it in your head and

visualize yourself shooting the stage, including all the props and movements (don't forget the starting beep). Visualize each target hit. Stay confident and focused, but don't forget to help with posse chores. Put all the ammo that you need into a small pouch or loading strip. Take it with you to the loading table. Minimize the possibility of error. After your guns are loaded and ready, visualize the stage again. When you get to the line, be ready to go and know exactly what you are going to do and how you are going to do it.

Wrap Up

Make the time to practice. You just won't get any better if you don't. Ask questions of the top shooters in your area. Don't be afraid to go up and introduce yourself and ask whatever is on your mind.

Be willing to learn. Watch the other shooters you see, both the fast ones and the not so fast. Critique (to yourself) their performance and compare it to your own. This will give you an idea of what works and what doesn't.

Above all, don't lose sight of the **Spirit of the Game!** Practice to get better. Don't try to shave time by cutting corners. Don't get so focused on getting yourself prepared to shoot a stage that you neglect posse chores.