

Bullseye Pistol Basics

Allen Fulford

www.bullseyepistol.com

Introduction

In my job as a County Agricultural Agent, I found that I was working many hours and weekends, and the pressure of the job was really getting to me. For many years I was a plinker and I always liked shooting. I wanted to become involved in competitive shooting, so I really picked up the sport as a kind of therapy through a stressful period. When I was out on the range concentrating on my shooting, I put all of my worries out of my mind, and I found that it was a wonderful source of inspiration for the rest of the week. I was able to go back to work and accomplish a whole lot more. Competitive shooting has added years to my life because it has allowed me to relax, enjoy life more, and allow me to get into something that I could set goals, reach those goals, set more goals, and so on. This process of shooting, and the fellowship that goes with it, I'm sure, has added years to my life. If I had to put one thing above all facets of shooting, it would be the fellowship with other shooters. I think that by and far, shooters are some of the best folks in the world.

Fundamentals:

I would like to discuss several fundamentals of precision, or bullseye, shooting..

Stance

The first thing we need to consider is stance. I suggest that you face the target and turn your non-shooting side away about 45 degrees to start to try to establish the stance that is best for you. What we like to do is relax EVERYTHING in the body except the shooting arm, elbow and wrist. We like to relax the non-shooting hand, and do something with it, either hook it on your belt, put it in your pocket or hook your thumb on your pocket. Extend the gun and your arm above the target, close your eyes, and let the gun settle into the normal aiming area. Once settled, open your eyes and see where the gun is pointing. If your sights are either right or left of the target, you need to move your trailing foot around so that your natural point of aim is on the target. This is important so that we are not using muscles to move the gun (horizontally) onto the target. We should be using muscles only to support the gun vertically. We need to find a comfortable stance. We want to almost lock our knees, but not quite. We want to relax our stomach and all other parts of the body except our wrist, elbow and entire shooting arm; we want to remain as RIGID as possible without putting those muscles in a strain. If we strain, we will experience muscle fatigue, and our performance will be compromised quite a bit.

The Grip

The way we recommend to get a grip is to hold the pistol in the non-shooting hand, by the barrel or the slide, and take the shooting hand and assume the grip. Most experienced pistol shooters agree upon the amount of grip, or how hard, you should hold a gun. However, not everyone agrees about the position of the hand upon the gun. My personal preference is to

put the trigger finger farther through the trigger guard than you would normally find in printed literature. Because my fingers are fat and short, I do that so I will have more leverage with my trigger finger. This is different from the traditional method of the wrist and arm being straight in line with the barrel. Regardless, we must grip as high as possible on the backstrap so that we will have more control. Most of the good shooters I know do not hold their thumb down toward their other fingers. They keep the thumb relaxed and high and this is very important. Once you establish your best grip, consistency becomes very important. We can really change our point of aim because of our grip. Now in as far as how much pressure to use, I like to imagine using the using the same amount of pressure as holding a hammer or a very firm handshake. Most of the pistol shooters I know use a fairly strong grip. One way to determine how much pressure to grip the gun is to extend the gun and take your grip as tight as you can get it until you start to tremor -- then back off. This is probably the grip pressure that is right for you. It is necessary that you maintain pressure on the forestrap that is straight to the rear. It is also important that we have constant pressure during the shot in order that we are not milking the grip -- that is squeezing all the fingers while pulling the trigger.

Sight Alignment

The human eye is not capable of focusing on two separate planes at the same time. Therefore, with iron sights, we cannot clearly see the sights and the target at the same time. What we have to do is place our concentration and our focus on the front sight and accept blurring the target. With the optical sights, we eliminate having to line up two separate front and rear sights. We are either using a dot or a cross-hair reticle, but we all agree that it is still important to focus ON THE RETICLE and not on the target.

Pistol Movement and Trigger Control

One of the hardest things for a beginning shooter to accept is the movement of the pistol while they are trying to fire the shot. I cannot stress this too much as none of us can hold a gun absolutely motionless. Good shooters sometimes have the sensation of holding the gun perfectly motionless for some three seconds or so, but no one can hold perfectly steady for the entire time required to fire the shot. The principal of accepting this movement, and applying trigger pressure straight to the rear while at the same time keeping correct sight alignment, is the key to pistol shooting. I cannot say it enough, accepting this movement is very important. Your "arc of movement" is the entire area that your sight alignment encompasses while you are holding. Let's say your arc of movement is within the nine-ring on the slow fire target at fifty yards. And note that almost anyone can train themselves to do this. Remember then, if you can hold the nine ring, and you can mash the trigger straight to the rear causing it to break without any additional pistol movement, your shots will go within your arc of movement, and you will score a nine or better on each shot. If there is a secret to pistol shooting ... that's it.

Training and Practice:

Strength Builders

Since I first started shooting I have used a five pound weight to develop the muscles in my

arm that I use to hold the gun. I lift the weight upward with an extended arm and like to imagine that it is being suspended from my neck and shoulder area instead of being pushed up from the bottom. That is the same mental picture that I get when I am actually holding the pistol out there. A series of repetitions will do wonders for your ability to hold the gun. I strongly recommend using a weight to develop the muscles used to hold a gun because in everyday life we do not use these muscles. This is a big part of reducing your arc of movement and learning to hold still.

Sight Picture Exercises

Here's a trick that my old buddy Bill Blankenship taught me years ago. He would draw a vertical line on the wall and cross it with a horizontal line. Holding up the pistol toward the lines, he would study the movement of the pistol on each. He would concentrate on vertical movement for a while, and then on horizontal movement for a while. I have found that through deep concentration and study of my movements, I have been able to mentally picture my arc of movement, kind of like a circle, and am getting it smaller and smaller. I recommend this technique for your training program. Exercises like this will carry over and help you during a match.

If I am experiencing movement as I hold the pistol, and it doesn't matter if it is a little or lot, and the sights move off the center off the target, I've found that if I GENTLY try to bring it back in rather than a quick jerky movement, that is gently try to FLOW with the movement instead of being tense and making jerky correction, my wobble is able to settle down. And even if it does not, I am still able to break a better shot this way.

Trigger Control

There are two methods of trigger control. In both methods, when you settle in your aiming area, or even before, you take up the slack in your trigger. The first method I am going to describe is the one we all recommend to beginners. Once slack is taken, you actually begin to put pressure on the trigger. You can pull that early pressure, taking part of the poundage off, and continue in a gradual consistent pull until the shot actually breaks, accepting your movement all the time. The second method I will describe is pulling on the trigger only while the sights are aligned in an almost perfect picture. As they move off center, HOLD the pressure that you have. When the sights move back on center, with a movement you can accept, then you CONTINUE the pressure. This is "staging" the trigger. Press when it is on, hold when it is off. When everything is going well, I can shoot better scores when using this second method. On other days when I am not as coordinated, I have to use the first, or the straight-through pull.

Dry-Firing

We can practice all the above elements, but we still need to put them together in a dry-firing exercise. We do that by practicing all the elements we are going to be doing in firing a shot. We will put a target on the wall in corresponding size to that of one at 25 or 50 yds. and practice our breathing, our grip, our stance, and practice breaking the shot. All the time, we are trying to minimize our arc, analyzing the movement of the gun, studying the direction of the sights, and trying to break that shot. This is a good time to learn to break that shot with steady, constant pressure. I recommend dry-firing highly.

Shooting Practice Sessions

During practice sessions at the range, I usually shoot an entire (2700 or reduced) course. Afterward, I will practice things again that bothered me a little bit more than others. For example, after shooting the whole course, if I messed up a few strings of rapid fire, I would shoot a little more rapid fire at the end. I don't recommend practice shooting at the range just to expend the rounds. If an individual is actually learning something then a lot of range practice could be justified. In converse, dry firing is never a waste, I don't care how experienced you are. My old buddy John Farley declares that he shoots better with a minimum amount of practice. With me, it is exactly the opposite. I need much more practice than he does, and I try to learn something from every shot that I fire. Just to say that you fired 1000 rounds this week might be worthless. However, if you are learning from each shot you fire, it might be hard to ever say that you are practicing too much!

Match Experience

For me, there is no substitute for match experience. There is nothing like going to matches, seeing good scores starting to build, dealing with the mental aspects of a good score, and also dealing with the mental aspects of that buddy you want to beat. Taking all of this into account is no substitute for the experience of shooting real matches. After you get over that initial "stage fright," you will concentrate more on trigger control, etc. when it is in "real" competition. For me, concentrating on my "routine" keeps me from thinking about anything else. Thinking about the fundamentals of grip, stance, trigger control etc. pushes any negative thoughts out of my mind. If I can maintain this kind of positive thinking, then I am able to overcome match nerves.