

Introduction to Pistol Competition

NRA Competitions Division

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The purpose of this page is to give general information on how to get started in the sport of conventional pistol competition. Items discussed include: [How To Get Started](#), [Equipment](#), [Ammunition](#), [Accessories](#), [Eye and Ear Protection](#), [Targets](#), [Course of Fire](#), [NRA Classification System](#), [Tournament Entry](#) and, [Other Activities](#). The information will answer most of the most often asked questions that a beginner will have. The NRA stands ready to assist you and if you have any questions, we hope you will contact us. For more information on conventional pistol competition write to the National Rifle Association, Competitions Division, 11250 Waples Mill Rd., Fairfax, VA 22030. If you wish, you may phone us at (703) 267-1451.

Many individuals become interested in pistol competition; however, unless they start off with the proper information, they find it difficult. The cost of equipment is generally a stumbling block. Many feel that unless they have the best of everything they cannot compete. This is not true. Most start with a minimum investment of a .22 caliber rimfire pistol (autoloader or revolver), spotting scope and stand, and most important, eye and ear protection. It is also advisable to have a copy of the current NRA Rule Book.

Pistol Competition may be fired outdoors or indoors. The course of fire is basically the same for both, but the distance is different.

How To Get Started

If you have an interest in taking up the sport of pistol competition, it is recommended that you check the Coming Events Section of *SHOOTING SPORTS USA*. All upcoming NRA sanctioned tournaments are listed in this section. Find a tournament being conducted near you and contact the listed sponsor to request a program. Attend this tournament as a spectator. This will give you an opportunity to observe how it is conducted and talk to the sponsor and competitors. Be sure you don't disturb the competitors during the match. The time between relays is a good time to talk to them.

You will see a variety of equipment and accessories. Competitors have their own opinion as to what is best. This may sound confusing, but remember, you're there to gather information.

If there is a club in your area, make arrangements to attend one or more of its practice sessions. This will serve the same purpose of attending a tournament except a practice session is not always conducted under match conditions. However, this will give you a better opportunity to talk about equipment. Also, you may have an opportunity to actually shoot one or more types (brands) of pistol which will help you to decide which seems best for you.

An excellent way for a new shooter to start in competitive shooting is a league. Although NRA rules are used, a league is generally informal. Usually a handicap system is used so all individuals or teams have an equal chance of winning. A Sanctioned League Handbook and

application to have a league sanctioned are available at no cost from the NRA Competitions Division.

Equipment

It was stated previously that you don't need the "best of everything" to participate in competition. There are many good values in used equipment. If others know you are "in the market," you will hear of many good deals. Although the question of which is best is asked often, there is no answer. As you will find, each competitor uses his or her favorite brand. This can be related to buying a car. You may like one make and someone else a different make. However, both are satisfied with what they have.

Section 3 of the NRA Pistol Rule Book defines authorized equipment and ammunition. This section is not meant to restrict equipment but to define limitations.

Pistol - Autoloader or revolver? Up until about 30 years ago the revolver was the one to use. Some competitors still use a revolver, but the autoloader is now used almost exclusively. Autoloaders have been developed where they are capable of top-notch accuracy. An autoloader will provide an advantage when firing timed fire (5 shots in 10 seconds) courses.

It should be noted that the standard course of fire is a "3-gun aggregate." This is fired with .22 caliber rimfire, center fire, and .45 caliber pistols. However, it is not necessary that you have 3 different guns. In most tournaments you may enter and fire only one or more states of the aggregate. Many competitors entering the complete aggregate only own a .22 and .45 caliber pistol since the .45 caliber may be used for the center fire stage.

Spotting Scopes

A scope is necessary as this will allow you to see your shots on your target in order to make sight corrections. Scopes need a stand for support or some means to mount on a gun box if used. They come in various price ranges and, as with all optics, you get what you pay for. Good resolution is important as you will need to see a .22 caliber hole on a target at 50 yards if you fire outdoors. A 20X to 30X is generally used.

Ammunition

Not much can be said about ammunition. Obviously, you will need the proper ammunition for the pistol you'll use. Match grade ammunition is available commercially and costs more than "regular." This is manufactured under high standards and is more accurate for competitive shooting. Many competitors hand-load their own ammunition (except .22 rimfire). This is not only cost-effective but allows for loads to be "customized" for a particular gun. In many cases, hand-loaded ammunition is more accurate than commercially produced match grade ammunition. If you use the hand-load route, be sure to follow all safety precautions.

Accessories

There are many accessories available, and no attempt will be made to mention them all. Some of the most common and useful ones will be discussed.

1. Sights - All target pistols come with an adjustable rear sight. This is a must. However, various brands of adjustable sights are available, some better made than others. Again, experience will tell which one is better for you. Optical and electronic sights are available and are currently allowed in NRA Conventional Pistol competition. Those sights which project an image upon the target (laser) are not permitted. These sights are a help to the shooter whose eyesight is "not what it used to be." They are not recommended for the new shooter who is still mastering the fundamentals of sight alignment, which is absolutely necessary for a champion shooter.
2. Grips - All pistols come with grips. Unfortunately, these are made for a standard size hand. Since no two people are identical, it is unlikely that the grips from the factory will fit properly. Custom grips are available as accessories and will vary in cost depending on if you want true custom grips (made exclusively for you) or off the shelf.
3. Shooting Box or Kit - Some means are necessary to transport your pistol and accessories to and from the range. This can be as elaborate as a large box which holds everything to a simple cloth or leather case. The choice will depend on the type and amount of shooting you do. The box has an advantage as it can be used for storage at home.
4. Eye and Ear Protection - These items are a must and should be the first accessories you purchase. If you normally wear glasses and they have hardened lenses, you are covered for eye protection. If not, you should acquire shooting glasses designed for that purpose. Ear plugs or muffs are necessary also. Some shooters wear both.

Targets

Rule 18.15(e) in the NRA Conventional Pistol Rule Book states in part -- "it is the competitors responsibility to frame the correct target for the specific match and distance." As a new pistol competitor, you need to be familiar with what the proper targets are. NRA official targets are described in Section 4 in the NRA Rule Book. Sections 7 and 17 will give the targets required for various courses fired.

Course of Fire

NRA conventional pistol competition consists of firing slow, timed, and rapid fire. This is done at 50 and 25 yards outdoors and almost exclusively at 50 feet indoors. Generally an outdoor match will consist of 20 shots, slow fire at 50 yards (2 10-shot strings, 10 minutes per string), 20 shots, timed fire at 25 yards (4 5-shot strings, 20 seconds per string), 20 shots, rapid fire at 25 yards (4 5-shot strings, 10 seconds per string), and the National Match Course (10-shots, slow fire at 50 yards, 10-shots timed fire, and 10-shots rapid fire). This match consists of 90-shots for a possible aggregate total of 900 points. For a 2700 aggregate this match is fired once with each gun; .22 caliber rimfire, centerfire, and .45 caliber. Many match programs call for only one or two guns, that is a 900 or 1800 aggregate.

Most indoor tournaments are fired with .22 caliber rimfire only for a 900 aggregate. However, some indoor matches use all guns for a complete 2700 aggregate.

NRA Classification System

Many new shooters hesitate to enter competition because they feel they are not good enough and would not win anything. This is true to some extent as, with most sports, the first time generally does not prove productive as far as awards are concerned. The NRA developed, some years ago, the NRA Classification System to provide an equitable distribution of awards. This places all shooters in a particular class; Marksman, Sharpshooter, Expert, Master, or High Master, depending on their average. Tournament sponsors award prizes in each class and in some tournaments, depending on the number entered, second and third place. A new competitor must enter the first tournament in the Master class. Thereafter, he/she may use a Temporary Score Record Book, which may be obtained from the tournament sponsor or NRA to enter match scores and compute the average for each match fired. The next tournament would be entered in the class which the average covers. After a minimum of 360 shots, fired in NRA Sanctioned Competition, have been reported to NRA by the tournament sponsor, an average is taken and an Official Classification Card is sent to the competitor. The competitor must then compete in that class until a new classification card is sent by NRA. For complete information on the NRA Classification System, see Section 19 in the NRA Pistol Rule Book.

Another system generally used by sponsors to distribute awards is the Category system. Sponsors, using the Category system, will give awards to winners of various categories such as Civilian, Service, Police, Junior, Women, etc. Not all of these are used by all sponsors.

Tournament Entry

When entering a tournament, you will be required to fill out a Registration Entry Card commonly known as an SR-1 card which will be provided by the tournament sponsor. This card provides the information needed to place you in your proper class and category. Part of this SR-1 card is sent by the sponsor to NRA at the end of the tournament with your scores, so they can be posted to the classification system maintained at NRA Headquarters.

It is very important that you put your **NRA membership ID** number (if you are an NRA member) on the SR-1 card. (If you are not currently an NRA member your scores will still be posted for classification purposes, however, you may only compete in "Approved" tournaments. "Registered" tournaments are restricted to members). This will assure that your scores are posted properly and quickly. It is also very important that you always use the same name. For example, if initials are used, such as "J. D. Smith", then continue to use initials, rather than sometimes using "Joe Smith."

Other Activities

Competitive shooting is in itself a great hobby. However, this activity is generally done on weekends with maybe a practice session during the week. NRA has a program whereby the practice session and matches can be used to earn attractive awards. This is the *NRA Qualification Program*. In this, a shooter tries to equal or beat a "par" or "set" score. For complete details on the NRA Qualification Program, write to the NRA Safety and Education Division, 11250 Waples Mill Rd., Fairfax, VA 22030.

NRA also offers membership in three honorary clubs - The "2600, 2650 and 2670 Club." Membership is obtained by individuals firing a score of 2600 or better for the "2600 Club," a score of 2650 or better for the "2650 Club", and a score of 2670 or better for the "2670 Club". Scores must be fired in an NRA Sanctioned Registered 2700 aggregate tournament either indoor or outdoor.

For additional information, or questions relating to competition, you may contact the NRA Competitions Division by E-Mail at competitions@nra.org

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