

Outdoor Bullseye Pistol Shooting

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This is an article I wrote for the Connecticut Marksman many years ago. Seeing a new group of shooters coming up in the ranks, I decided to dust the article off and update it in May of 2014 – Frank Savino

Here in Connecticut we have a large number of pistol shooters who compete in the various indoor pistol leagues around the state during the winter. When spring comes around, most of these shooters put their guns away and don't touch them until the following September. Those shooters miss out on the outdoor competitive pistol shooting season. I feel a lot of these shooters do not shoot outdoor matches because they are unsure of their ability, or don't know what is involved in shooting this type of match. There is an unnecessary intimidation factor which doesn't need to exist. In this article, I am going to explain what is needed to compete and how to compete in a 2700 outdoor pistol match. Most of this information also applies to other pistol leagues and matches, whether they are fired indoors or outdoors.

Outdoor 2700 matches are fired with three guns and are sometimes referred to as three gun matches. The three guns are .22 caliber, centerfire, and .45 caliber pistols. Competitors only need two guns to compete as I will explain later on. There are some shooters who use revolvers for bullseye pistol shooting but the sport is dominated by semiautomatic pistols.

The first gun is the .22 caliber pistol or revolver. These consist of Rugers, Smith & Wesson model 41's, High Standards, Hammerlis, and Pardinis. The Feinwerkbau AW93 is beginning to gain in popularity. Some competitors use 1911 pistols with .22 conversion units like the Marvel. The .22 Ruger target pistol with a trigger job and dot sight is an excellent entry level gun. The referee may randomly weigh triggers on competitor's pistols at some of the bigger matches such as Regional Championships, State Championships or the National Championships. The trigger pull on the .22 must be at least two pounds.

Next, the Center Fire Pistol is any center fire pistol or revolver .32 caliber or larger. Guns that fall into this category are Hammerli or Pardini .32 cal pistols; these are .32 S&W long caliber. The Smith and Wesson Model 52 in .38 special was popular at one time. Some shooter use custom 1911pistols in .38 special, 38 super, or 9mm. Most shooters use a .45 caliber pistol for their centerfire matches. Using the .45 for centerfire eliminates the need for competitors to have three guns and three different types of ammunition. The trigger pull on centerfire pistols and revolvers must be at least two and a half pounds, however if you are using a .45 caliber semiautomatic pistol for the centerfire portion of the match, the trigger pull must be at least three and a half pounds.

The third gun is the .45 caliber pistol or revolver. Most competitors use a 1911 style pistol for the .45 matches. You will need one with a good trigger and adjustable sights or dot sight to get started. However to be competitive in the upper classes such as Master and High Master you will need a pistol that has been accurized by a pistolsmith. Shooters in these classes have pistols, which will shoot groups under two inches out of a Ransom Rest at fifty yards. The trigger pull on the .45 caliber semiautomatic pistol must be at least three and a half

pounds. The trigger pull on a .45 caliber revolver must be at least two and a half pounds.

For accuracy work on your target pistols, use a pistolsmith who specializes in pistols for bullseye shooting. Do not go to your local gunsmith, you need a pistolsmith who knows the game of bullseye pistol shooting. A friend of mine brought his Gold Cup to his local gunsmith to be accurized and invested a large amount of money into the gun. As he got to be a better shooter, he realized his gun was not shooting as well as it should. He sent his pistol to a pistolsmith who specialized in bullseye pistols for evaluation and found out the accuracy work was not done correctly. He then had to pay this pistolsmith to redo the work of the first gunsmith.

For sights, most shooters use electronic red dot sights such as those available from Ultradot and Aimpoint. If you use iron sights, they will need to be adjustable. It is perfectly acceptable to shoot iron sights, but most shooters use dot sights. I did recently see a shooter break 2600 with iron sights, Walking down the firing line looking at grips you will see everything from custom grips to straight military type grips. I have seen shooters win matches with all types of grips, so use whatever is comfortable. One word of caution, it does occasionally rain during a match and rubber grips get slippery when they are wet, so I recommend staying away from rubber grips.

As far as other equipment goes you will need a gun box with a spotting scope. Eye and ear protection are necessary items. Don't forget a screwdriver to adjust your sights and any other small tools you may need for your guns. Bring your cleaning equipment. You will need a light-duty staple gun to staple repair centers to your target. Other helpful items are brass catchers and screens to deflect your neighbor's brass. You will also need a baseball cap to keep the sun out of your eyes, rain gear, insect repellent, sunscreen and a folding chair. An "Empty Chamber Indicator" is another necessary item, these can be easily made from a piece of orange string from a lawn string trimmer. Some shooters use a small cart or handtruck to get their equipment to the firing line. This is especially handy during the National Championships at Camp Perry where you may need to carry your equipment a long distance.

For ammo any good quality standard velocity or match grade .22 caliber ammunition should do. When picking out .22 ammunition you need to buy ammo that works well in your gun. Just because one brand of ammo works well or is super accurate in your friend's pistol does not mean it will work in your gun. Buy small amounts of different brands of ammo and test it to see what works best in your gun.

Factory loaded .45 caliber match ammo is very expensive. Military and some civilian shooters use factory match ammo made by Federal or Atlanta Arms. The only way most civilian shooters can afford to shoot the center fire and .45 match is to reload. The most popular loads for the .45 use 185 grain or 200 grain semi wadcutter bullets, or 185 grain Nosler type jacketed hollow point bullets. Consult a reloading manual for proper loads for your firearm.

Now that you have your equipment ready, it's time to discuss the match. Most outdoor matches are what is called a 2700. Competitors fire 270 rounds, 90 with each gun. Each 90 shot match or 900 as they are called are the same course of fire except they are fired with the different caliber guns. Competitors fire the .22 caliber 900 first, then the center fire 900,

and finally the .45 caliber 900. The 900 point matches are made up of four fired matches. First is the Slow Fire Match, which is twenty rounds slow fire. The second match is the National Match Course which is ten rounds slow fire, ten rounds timed fire and ten rounds rapid fire. The third match, the Timed fire match is twenty rounds timed fire. The fourth match is the Rapid Fire Match which is twenty rounds rapid fire.

All shooting is done ten rounds per target. After each ten round target, shooters score and repair targets. All slow fire is fired at fifty yards. Timed and rapid fire is fired at twenty-five yards. For slow fire, competitors fire two ten rounds targets with a ten-minute time limit for each target. In timed fire and rapid fire, shooters fire two strings of five rounds per target. Each five round string in timed fire is has a twenty second time limit. The five round strings in rapid fire have a ten second time limit.

One aspect of match shooting all competitors should be familiar with is re-fires. A competitor who has a firearm malfunction or ammunition failure in timed or rapid fire may re-fire that string. Shooters are allowed one re-fire in each fired match. In other words, one re-fire in the National Match Course, one re-fire in the timed fire match, and one re-fire in the rapid fire match. If a competitor has another malfunction on a subsequent sting in the same match, he should try to clear the problem and continue to fire if he can do it safely and time allows. A competitor does not have to re-fire a string if he chooses not to, he can accept the score for the number of shots he fired up until the malfunction. It is important for a competitor who has a malfunction not to make an attempt to clear the malfunction. Do not touch the gun with the non-shooting hand. Any attempt to clear the malfunction will result in the re-fire being denied.

When a malfunction or ammunition failure occurs in timed or rapid fire the competitor should keep the firearm in his shooting hand and keep it pointed down range. At the end of the string, the range officer will ask if there are any re-fires. The shooter will then raise his non shooting hand. A line officer will verify the problem and determine the number of rounds fired. After all shooters have fired both strings for that target, the range officer will run a re-fire string for the shooters needing to re-fire. The shooter will load five rounds on command and re-fire the complete five round string.

In most cases, the shooter will have fired more than ten rounds at the target after firing a re-fire string. The person scoring the target needs to find out how many shots the competitor should have fired and score the ten shots of lowest value.

Competitors are required to score each other's targets. The range officer will generally tell competitors to pass their scorecards to the shooter on their right and score the shooter's target on their left. Necessary items for scoring include a pen and small clip board. Shooters should bring a baggie large enough to fit the clipboard and their hand into. If it starts raining, the clipboard with the scorecards is kept in the baggie to keep dry and the scorer can reach in the baggie to write on the scorecard without taking it out and getting it wet. Another good investment is a Fisher space pen, these will write on wet surfaces like scorecards if they get wet, or wet targets. Another useful item is an overlay for scoring.

The scorecard is set up with ten boxes for each target. Scorers should start with the box on the left and place the shot of highest value in that box then work to the right placing the a value for each shot in the box in descending order. The letter M is put in boxes to signify a

miss rather than a numeric zero. The shots are then totaled and the score for the target is placed in the proper box. The scorer also needs to write the score on the repair center of the target he scored. At the end of each match, the scorer adds up the total score for the match and signs the score card. The shooter then signs the scorecard, accepting the score. Finally, the shooter turns the scorecard in to the line officer.

There is usually a fifteen-minute break between the .22 Match and the Center Fire Match. Shooters get a lunch break between the Center Fire Match and the .45 Match which is usually about forty-five minutes.

The 2700 described in this article is the most common type of outdoor match. Some matches may vary from this. Obtain a match program from the match sponsor, as this will spell out the course of fire and match conditions for the tournament.

Competitors compete in one of five classes: Marksman, Sharpshooter, Expert, Master and High Master. Shooters are placed in classes according to their averages so they are shooting against other shooters of the same skill level. The first time a competitor shoots a match, he will compete in the Master class unless the match has a special Tyro class. New competitors will put their scores from their matches in a temporary classification book and calculate their average and temporary classification. They do this until the competitor fires 360 rounds in competition and the NRA sends them a classification card. A competitor who holds an NRA Indoor Pistol Classification may use that classification for his first outdoor match.

There are also other matches that are fired in conjunction with Regional Championships, State Championships, and the National Matches. These are Distinguished Revolver matches, and CMP leg matches. The scores for these matches are not part of the aggregate score from the 2700. There is an additional fee for shooting these matches; competitors in the 2700 do not need to fire these additional matches if they choose not to. However, don't be surprised if you show up to a match and someone offers to loan you a service pistol or revolver and ammunition to shoot the leg matches.

The Distinguished Revolver Match is fired with service type revolvers. Competitors who place in the top 10% of the non-distinguished shooters earn ten, eight, or six leg points. A shooter who earns thirty leg points is awarded the Distinguished Revolver badge by the NRA. Firearms used in this match are unmodified revolvers in .38 special with iron sights (see NRA rule 3.1.4). Ammunition is limited to .38 special with 158 grain lead bullets. The course of fire for this match is a thirty round national match course.

Civilian Marksmanship Program (CMP) Service Pistol leg matches are also held in conjunction with Regional Championships, State Championships, and the National Championships. Competitors fire .45 caliber 1911 or 9mm M9 service pistols with iron sights in this match. Allowable alterations to these pistols are limited and listed in the CMP rule book. Ammunition is restricted to round nose, full metal jacket, ball type ammo. Competitors placing in the top 10% of the non-distinguished shooters competing in the match earn ten, eight, or six leg points. Shooters need to accumulate thirty leg points to be awarded the Distinguished Pistol badge by the CMP. The thirty points accumulated by the shooter must include one eight or ten point leg. Non-distinguished shooters are only eligible to fire four leg matches per year. The course of fire for this match is a thirty shot National Match Course.

Competitors may enter partial matches if space is available at the range. Match sponsors give first preference to shooters who enter the full three-gun 2700, but will allow competitors to enter and only shoot one or two of the 900's if space is available. A new shooter who only has a .22 can enter and only shoot the .22 caliber 900 if space is available.

Most shooters are willing to help new shooters. If you have questions, contact the match sponsor. If you have questions at a match, ask the line officer or range officer. Tell the match sponsor that you are a new shooter when you are entering a match. Usually they will keep an eye on new shooters to answer any questions and ensure you enjoy the event.

Now you are ready to go out and shoot a match. A list of NRA sanctioned matches can be found at http://www.nrapublications.org/wp-content/ComingEvents/CE_Download.pdf. Another good source of upcoming matches in the northeast is the New Jersey Pistol website <http://www.njpistol.com/>.

Helpful Resources:

Shooting Sports USA – a free digital magazine put out by the NRA with competitive shooting news and articles <http://www.nrapublications.org/index.php/shooting-sports-usa/>

NRA Pistol Rule Book -

<http://compete.nra.org/documents/pdf/compete/RuleBooks/Pistol/pistol-book.pdf>

Civilian Marksmanship Program - <http://www.odcmp.com/Competitions.htm>

The Encyclopedia of Bullseye Pistol - <http://www.bullseyepistol.com/>

Bullseye Pistol Gear - <http://www.bullseyegear.com/bullseyepistol/home.php>

Champion's Choice - <http://www.champchoice.com/store/main.aspx>

Champion Shooter Supply - <http://www.championshooters.com/>

Larry's Guns - <http://www.larrysguns.com/>

Connecticut State Rifle and Revolver Association - <http://www.csrra.com/index.html>

Bullseye L Internet Forum - <http://www.bullseyeforum.net/>