



By: Pieter Lerm



Competition Shooting Tips

The decision to start shooting competitively carries with it many questions and self doubt. "Have I got what it takes, is my equipment up to the task and will the results be so bad that I feel embarrassed?" These are all very normal feelings I assure you and just something that will later become the norm as far as pre-competition nerves go.

All good competitors have a little competition nerves which serve to unlock the adrenalin charge when you need to think, move and shoot quickly and accurately. There is a moment when time stands still, vision and hearing become acute, and you shoot a perfect stage and sometimes, very rarely, a perfect match. We have all been in that magical place and I suppose that is part of why we love our sport.

I have been involved in other types of sport on club, provincial and national level and the drive to achieve perfection is part to all competitors. In every sportsman or sportswoman there is the desire to do better and one day to stand on the podium with a feeling that they have done well. I have won matches which I felt were undeserved. I have lost matches where I shot brilliantly, but that feeling and memory of a well shot competition has stayed with me.

For those starting out in the competitive environment the following would apply: After joining a shooting club you learn the safety aspects and club rules as well as range etiquette. If you wish to compete on provincial level in IPSC, you join your provincial body and through them, the national body SAPSA (South Africa Practical Shooting Association). Once you have completed an orientation course at your club, you are declared competent to first compete at club level and then progress to provincial and higher levels. Download the latest

rules from the IPSC website and study it well. Ignorance of the rules is unacceptable, as rules are there to protect you as well as help you. It is your responsibility to know them.



The safety area is where you make your weapon safe and this is normally at the entrance of a shooting club.

As with most things in life, you need to plan the way you are going to go about competing. Normally, competitions are published and you can have a look at the shoot booklet for all the information about the stages, shot count and start times. You can start planning, but keep in mind that a course of fire may be changed by the Match Director if there are safety issues that need to be addressed. These are normally not big changes, and are the same for all competitors ensuring fair play.

All these are peripheral to the basics of shooting and managing a

competition. It can be broken down into pre-match planning, equipment readiness, stage planning and management and the mental preparation for the match.

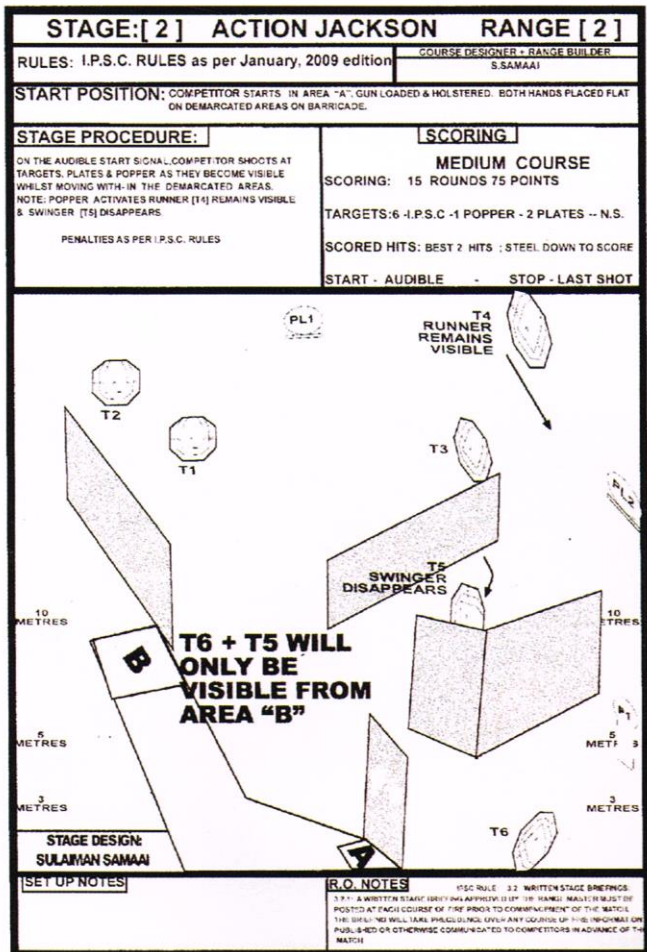
Pre-match planning :

Pre-match planning starts more or less one week before competition time. First on the agenda is weather watch. Temperature affects clothing, liquid intake and of course loading of ammunition. While the Over all length(OAL) on your rounds once established does not change, the powder charge should be adjusted. I have a winter load and a summer load depending on temperatures and try to keep my ammunition factor around the 175 mark. While you do not want excessive recoil, failing the chronograph factor test can ruin your day. Study your shoot booklet and memorise the course of fire so when you step up to the shooting line, the course of fire is a familiar one. The five minute walk-through is just confirmation of what you already know and checking if there are any significant changes from the published course of fire. See if there are difficult starting positions. If possible emulate and practice this beforehand at home. Footwear is very important. On rocky and uneven terrain, use footwear that supports the ankle. Make and use a checklist for equipment. I have seen people come to competitions without a gun, ammunition or a competition rig.

electrical optical sights. Each and every piece of equipment must be checked and be in perfect working order. This is done before every competition. Make sure that the ammunition you use is of the highest standard and makes the required power factor for the division you are competing in. Reliable equipment is a must if you hope to achieve your full potential as a sport shooter.

Stage planning:

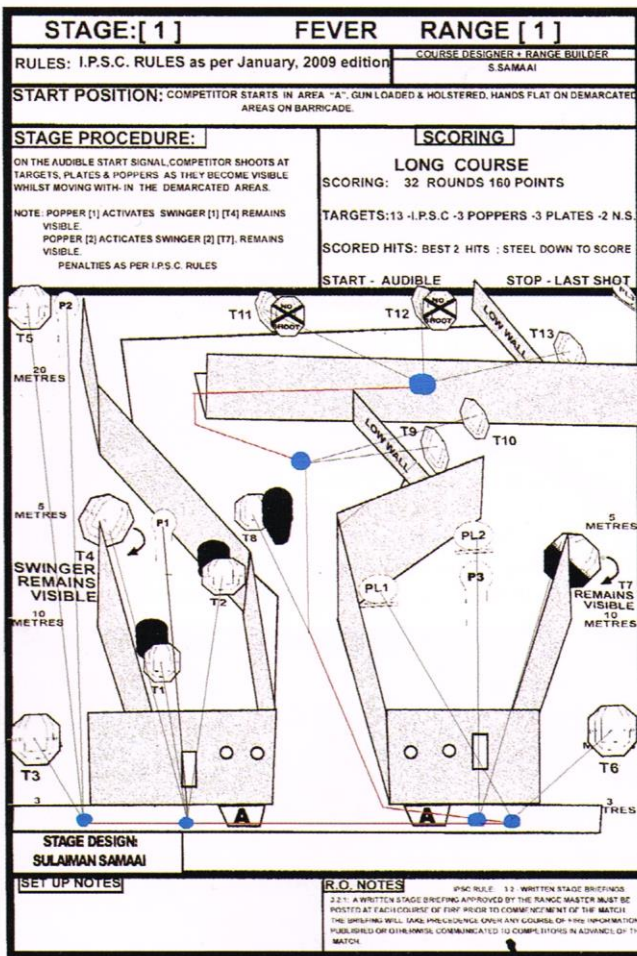
- a) Stages are divided into short (12 to 15 rounds), medium (16 to 20) and long stages (21 to 32 rounds). The higher the shot count, the more points weight the stage carries in the competition and the higher the points deficit if you should make a mistake. I do not consider stages to have different importance levels but to win a competition, you have to shoot all stages well. Plan to place yourself in one of the top five positions in every stage. A consistent performance here will almost guarantee you a top three finish.
- b) Remember that to make up time on a stage, you do not need to shoot faster and so increase the risk of a miss or a bad score. You only have to do two things simultaneously like shoot and reload on the move, speed up your target acquisition and speed up your movement between targets. Your shooting speed and accuracy stays the same while you make up time on movement. As Todd Jarrod said, "As will win you the match" and he certainly won his share.
- c) When you plan to shoot a stage, try and minimise your movement. Find shooting positions where you can shoot multiple targets without removing your weapon from the eye level position, so saving time to re-acquire sight picture and target. The biggest time waster in a competition stage is movement, so this has to be kept to a minimum. When moving, do it in straight lines between shooting positions as this is the shortest route. If you need to go prone or to a kneeling position, try to make this your final position on the last targets you need to engage. Getting into and out of these positions is a very time costly exercise.



Stage information is supplied. Use this to do your planning.

Equipment Readiness:

Make sure that all equipment functions faultlessly. Clean, lubricate, check and check again. There are no excuses for stoppages of a weapon except for structural failures like broken extractors, barrel links etc. If there is any doubt, take your weapon to a gunsmith and let him repair it. It is not fair to other competitors to try and sort your problems out in their competition time. This cleaning and maintenance includes all of the equipment you use from holsters with locking devices, to electronic ear protection and



Shooting positions are indicated with blue dots, movement by the red line, and target engagement with the black lines.



d) At barricades keep your distance and do not rest your weapon on the ledge. This normally results in a point of impact difference. Also, do not push it through the aperture as you will waste time having to reverse to continue to your next target.

e) Moving targets like swingers are shot at the place they change direction and are for a moment motionless. If this is not possible and you have to engage through an aperture, aim where the target is to appear and wait till you see the edge of the target and fire your shots immediately. This will place two good hits on the target.



Pepper popper aiming point in red. Blue indicates where the swinger would change direction and would be momentarily motionless, a good place to engage.



Swinger swinging past an aperture from right to left. The aiming point would be the red dot. As soon as the target edge appears, fire your two shots as quickly as possible

f) When you draw facing the targets to be engaged, focus on the target you are going to engage first. If you are drawing with your back to the target or you are having to pick up your weapon from a table, you always focus on the weapon until after the pick-up or completion of the turn. If shooting, plates and poppers always take a low sight picture one-third up in the circle. Most misses on plates are over the top.



Aiming point on the red dot.

Mental preparation for a match:

Your preparation for the match needs to be very thorough, so that your mind only has to concentrate on one thing - to shoot a good competition. To do this, you need to plan, practice and shoot the match in your head.

Your mind cannot tell the difference between actually shooting a match and visualising doing it. By visualising, you can practice the competition and this will lower stress levels and make the stages a familiar place and less formidable. It will simplify your stage planning and make you enjoy even the most nerve-wrecking competitions. You need to approach every competition with no expectations. Simply go and shoot as well as you can. Pressure is something you create yourself. Do you need to feel stress regarding competition? A certain amount of nerves is necessary, but too much could be detrimental to your functioning in competitive situations. The remedy is this old saying, "slow is smooth and smooth is fast".

It's ideal to reach a point where time does not rule your actions and you are not hurried by the thought of it. You need to break down the shooting actions required to finish a stage and execute each action properly, before moving on to the next task. There is nothing more corrosive to confidence than having to return to a missed target because of chasing time. Forget about time and do each task properly before moving on.

Go about your business smoothly and calmly and you will improve with each competition.

