

Try Three-Gun for a change

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Combat marksmanship is an essential skill for all Soldiers, regardless of their Military Occupational Specialty or position, but finding the time or a place to practice can be a challenge.

In the last few years, rifle and pistol clubs throughout Mississippi have begun hosting fast-paced, realistic combat shooting matches known as “three-gun” or “multi-gun” matches that continue to grow in popularity. The matches are practical shooting events involve the use of rifle, pistol and shotgun, and are designed to emphasize good weapons handling and shooting techniques.

The courses of fire vary from match to match, but each one essentially consists of a timed set of shooting events, or “stages” that challenge the shooter and provide a realistic training opportunity that improves weapon handling and marksmanship skills.

Some clubs add obstacles such as casualty drags/ fireman’s carries, low-crawl/high-crawl and sprints that increase the shooter’s heart rate, forcing him/her to learn how to control a weapon under pressure and score hits under stress.

As in all shooting activities, safety is paramount, and the fast-paced nature of 3-gun competition requires shooters to practice muzzle awareness, range safety and excellent weapons handling at all times, on and off the firing line. Equipment selections are also made with an eye toward safety, especially with regard to holster selection.

The equipment for these matches is fairly straightforward, and consists of a short list of required items.

■ Rifle – 5.56mm or larger, preferably magazine fed semi-auto, with at least three magazines and 150 rounds. The AR-15 is the most common rifle in this game, but other types have been known to make an appearance at matches, including vintage M1 Garands, so there are basically no limits on what you can use as long as it meets caliber and safety requirements.

■ Pistol – 9mm/.38 or larger, any type, with at least three magazines/reloads and 50 rounds. The choices here are as bewildering as they are numerous, but it’s best to keep it simple when you’re just starting out. Some experienced shooters use revolvers, but since time is a factor in this game, an automatic makes for a much faster reload and this makes a huge difference when you’re “on the clock.”

■ Shotgun – Any type, .20 gauge or larger, with 25 rounds. Any shotgun will do for starters, but as you develop your skill at this type of shooting, you’ll want to tailor your shotgun to maximize its utility in the kind of high speed shooting it takes to beat the clock. Shorter barrels and side-saddle shell holders come in handy here, and won’t break the bank. The most important accessory

you can buy for this kind of shotgun shooting is a magazine extension, because the key to doing well in the shotgun stages is to keep it loaded so you can keep shooting.

■ Holster – Must be a straight drop holster with no cant, conforming to the “180 degree rule,” and must hold the pistol securely. Your holster is one of the most important pieces of gear for your pistol stages, because your draw speed is a deciding factor when it comes to getting on target quickly and smoothly. Good holsters can be had for as little as \$30-\$40 if you shop around, and the difference in quality is noticeable if you’ve ever had to claw a pistol out of a bargain basement nylon holster in a hurry. Another thing to consider with this purchase is the fact



Photos by Staff Sgt. Kenny Hatten, CSJFTC Public Affairs

Kai Kennedy, of the Woolmarket Multigun Crew, fires his suppressed AR-15 from the prone position during the long range portion of the monthly 3-Gun match at the Coast Rifle and Pistol Club in Woolmarket. Below, Michele Sizemore White, of the Woolmarket Multigun Crew, engages steel plates with her shotgun.



Shooting left-handed, Staff Sgt. Kenny Hatten fires at steel plates during a handgun stage of the monthly 3-Gun match at CRPC.

that a good holster is far less likely to accidentally dump your loaded pistol out on the ground during an active shooting stage, which would be an instant disqualification and could get you barred from the range.

■ Belt – You’ll need a good belt to hold up all this gear, because you will be expected to reload from pouches instead of reaching over to a table or to the ground to pick up spare magazines. A rigger’s belt or similar equivalent is just the ticket, and will provide a good platform on which to base your holster and magazine pouches. A good belt also keeps your holster from being dragged upward during your draw stroke, and that will also reduce the time it takes to draw and present your weapon.

■ Magazine storage – Once you’ve made your belt selection, you will then populate it with pouches or magazine carriers appropriate for your chosen weapons. The variety of styles, colors and attachment methods is nearly endless, and talking to experienced shooters about your gear choices is the best way to find out what works before spending your hard-earned money.

■ Eye Protection – The use and wear of ANSI Z-87+ certified protective eye wear is strongly encouraged and is a requirement at some ranges. Army Approved Eyewear List protective glasses meet these re-

quirements in all cases, and are readily available.

■ Ear protection – Suitable ear plugs or muffs must be worn on the range at all times. Hearing protection is just as important as eye protection, and there are several reasonably priced electronic hearing protectors that will enable you to hear range commands and safety advisories without sacrificing noise suppression.

■ Clothing – Loose-fitting, comfortable clothes that will hold up under hard use are important here, because many matches take place rain or shine, and involve a lot of bending, moving, running and crawling as you negotiate the stages.

■ Footwear – Sturdy, well-fitted, closed-toe shoes or boots must be worn on the range, due to the possibility of hot brass or other range debris contacting exposed skin.

A word about gear: if you’re just getting started, it’s not necessary to go overboard with spending, because chances are there are local shooters who have spare gear that you can use to try this sport out before you spend money on it. This has the added benefit of being able to find out what works for you before parting with your money, and a chance to try the sport on a “trial basis” before purchasing gear.

The above advice also applies to your prospective gun purchases. Attend a few matches as a spectator and take the time to see what it’s all about before you dive in. Once you feel comfortable with the pace, procedures and techniques and decide to get involved, talk to other shooters and get information on the best gear and guns for the sport, as well as where to find the best deals.

Get in touch with shooters in your local area, and chances are, you will find that at least some of them participate in this fun, fast-paced and exciting sport. You can also search the Internet under “getting started in 3-gun” for more information about getting gear, finding local clubs and even pro-level competition opportunities.

Punching holes in paper targets on a “square range” can be fun, but for a shooting experience that will challenge all your marksmanship skills, three-gun is hard to beat.

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