

Air Rifle Training for Highpower

[how and why]

Glen Zediker

Here's David with his Steyr. It's a valuable training tool for him. He suggests using a scope on the rifle rather than iron sights for reasons he's astutely gone into in other materials we've done. I suggest never not taking David's advice. I should point out, however,

*Most of this next is nothing more than my opinions and beliefs on training with an air rifle. Any semblance to facts is, therefore, purely coincidental; the only true fact is that different things work for different people. There is precious little in our universe that is known **for sure**, let alone under all circumstances. The point to an article like this, or anything "instructional" in character, is to get a few ideas to throw in the mix with your own. Anyone who tells you otherwise has way too much ego.*

This little bit was hard to write because it's a multi-faceted topic, or at least could have opened more doors that could possibly have been closed in the confines of this space. Rather than crack a few and only let in some drafts, which, as any owner of a 100 year old house can attest to, hain't good, I decided to work with two different

themes, one at a time: why and how come first; next is what to get.

The first of the first is whether or not a High Power shooter will benefit from training with an air rifle, and let's say that benefit is only qualified by whether it helps his score. That answer has much to do with logistics, motivations, and expectations.

Logistics

This is the compelling reason I shoot air rifles. I have put a lot more rounds through my air rifles than I ever have, or probably ever will, my

across the course guns. I am not especially proud of that, but I am proud that I received a High Master classification one recent summer without having done much centerfire shooting during that same time. The nearest range is a two hour drive and has to be visited on a week day to avoid crowding (and in early morning to avoid cooking). There goes another day I probably should have been doing something else; or, I can take a break and get in 20 rounds with my air gun in the back yard or upstairs.

I don't know everyone's situation, but it's safe enough to venture that we'd all probably shoot more if it were easier to get to, and that mostly defines the province of an air rifle for the High Power shooter. There are other reasons someone might want to train with an air rifle, and some will be interposed as we go.

The main drawback to a competition air rifle is that one will cost more than just



that during the time David did more air rifle training he was also quite active in Silhouette Rifle.

However, I can also tell you that he just told me he's planning on doing a lot more offhand practice outdoors with his across the course rifle using a scope on it. He believes in scope training. Try it.

My glove and ear phones are the only pieces of equipment I use. Yes, the sound can be damaging in confined areas and an aural engineer can tell you why (has something to do with pressure). I have worked to develop an offhand position that relies on bone support, and that's one reason for not wearing the coat, but it's also because I don't like fooling with all the gear; that's what I'm avoiding. I can't say this could be the same for everyone, but can say that I've actually bemoaned some of the restriction I get in my coat after lengthy sessions with the "nekkid" routine. I notice especially the lack of firmness around the left arm and hip area when I put my coat on. I put the coat on, though, and see a reduction in sight movement that seems like cheating. It's helping, but not as much as it used to, and that's a big accomplishment from my perspective. This on and off approach will show someone, given the effort, and desire to put it forth of course, where the coat helps and where it hurts, and that will help a soul figure out how to wear it.

about any other piece of ancillary equipment most of us will own. One good air gun is about the same price of a nice stand and Kowa® scope, a new Creedmoor Sports® coat, 16 pounds of VARGET™, and 1000 Sierra® 80gr bullets. Wahoo. If a shooter wants and doesn't have any of those items, or similar, he might be best off spending first for them. I am not about to say what matters most: what matters most is entirely subjective, which now brings up motivations, the next factor.

Motivations

The time constituent may work in different ways for different people. As mentioned, for me it's the choice between shooting and not shooting; for others it may be an opportunity to shoot more; others still, especially those in cold climates, may look at it as a chance to keep shooting all year.

Of immediate consequence is that air rifles train offhand. That is, go ahead and admit it, where the most of us need the most help. Assuming the rifle is shot in its "native" offhand mode, the benefits to score are clear. The reasons the standing score might improve, assuming someone is of a nature where knowing "why" matters, may range from position improvements to technique improvements to, the easy one — more experience putting rounds downrange.

This side steps its way into attending to expectations, the third factor advanced at the start of this bit.

Expectations

What anyone expects as a payback on an air rifle investment not only plays a role in the decision, but, mostly, plays a role in determining how best to use it (and not use it).

Now comes opinions, and the first is that in no way should the air rifle be confused with an across the course gun. Given enough impetus, epoxy, and guile, I suppose that an air gun can be made to effectively duplicate a High Power gun, but if someone believes that practice is only worthwhile when match conditions are duplicated, or at least when equipment and surroundings are comparable, he probably won't get as much from such an alternative means of practice as air rifle shooting. There is little commonality between an air rifle and a High Power match rifle, let alone a Service Rifle. I am primarily a Service Rifle shooter, and some question the sanity of relying on a "nother world" firearm for training.

There are few implicit similarities in the Steyr® air rifle I train with and the AR15 I shoot across the course. The guns don't weigh the same, look the same, feel the same, or behave the same, and the triggers, well, they're not even close. But I set up, bring in the sight, and take a shot, and that's the same. I'm putting holes in a target with a target rifle. That's the same.

If someone wants to get what I think is the right mind set, he should try to make himself the best air rifle shooter he can be and see if that doesn't help his High Power. If a shooter is continually comparing what he can and can't "get" from either dominion, I think he's missing the point.

Attempting to duplicate High Power in the guise of attempting to "learn" High Power is likely to disappoint. What anyone will learn about High Power from shooting an

air rifle comes from shooting the air rifle. If that doesn't make sense, only experience will show things more clearly. As Homer Pearson at Champion's Choice told me: "You're learning to stand still and shoot..." [And on that point: a pellet is in an air rifle barrel for a far greater time than a bullet remains inside a centerfire barrel; "followthrough" is a self-learner.]

The only High Power mirror for me is the sight picture: I print my own scaled SR targets off a laser printer and have thinned a post sight to suit. I also turned the trigger *all* the way up.

Assumed Actualities

I've had folks tell me that dry firing eliminates any need for something like an air rifle, and that dry firing much more closely simulates shooting the "real" gun. I dry fire and believe it to be important, but I do not find it a substitute for putting a projectile downrange. The quality of dry firing is in the mind: if the shooter really pays attention and calls all the shots, then there may be no need or no benefit of an air rifle. Shooting is, as can be effectively argued, all mental, but I prefer to overlook analysis of what might have happened and stick with the holes in the target. I can call my dry shots, but still find that having coincidence of an impact with a shot call gives me more (and sometimes different) account. I pay better attention when there's something coming from the muzzle to memorialize my effort. Right, that no doubt indicates some problem somewhere betwixt my ear plugs, but shooting my air rifle is one part of the cure for whatever that is.

I have concluded that dryfiring teaches me shooting technique but not shooting, and that, of course, advances my belief that there is a difference in the two. Although dry firing my course gun is where I discover a lot of tricks, I've still found that the air rifle tends to teach me more about my position and technique. Again, it's not only what seems good or feels good or what makes good sense: when there is a shot mark on the paper then there is another level of confirmation. Due to the aforementioned time crunch, centerfire practice gets me into a different mode, which is more "production" oriented rather than "educational." Range firing is, for me, more for testing than trying.

Oh yeah, and dry firing is boring. For me.

Esoteric Intellections

It helps to have a willingness to learn what is there to learn. I picked up the air rifle in hopes that I would become a better offhand shooter. Although that effort was superscribed for High Power, when I shoot my Steyr® I want to learn something new (which frequently seems to be relearning some old new thing), refine things that are working well, get more tuned in to things I like. That's what I'm after, and it may not be what anyone else is after. I experiment a lot with my air rifle, trying different things to see how they work. This is not at all to say that each outing has me trying something entirely different. Quite the contrary: it is so frequently the small differences, the good days and the bad days, that seem to determine the score, so those are also the things I work on through the air rifle. One idea is trying to get to the root of what is different

on the good and bad days.

I do learn a lot in shooting the air gun that I take to the High Power gun. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, and, most of the time at least, some does and some doesn't. That leads to a back and forth refinement and experiment routine that usually pays off, somehow.

There is a fairly dusty joke that goes: "Doctor, it hurts when I do this [whatever that action is]..." The doctor replies: "Well, don't do that!" Okay, I didn't warrant it to be a funny joke, but it is funny how such simple advice is frequently overlooked. Great googly moogly, he's philosophizing from *Hee Haw*... But that's it: if someone is not happy with what he's doing, why try to do that same thing more? If all anyone wants to do with an air rifle is stand up there and duplicate the moves he makes with his High Power rifle, let's just hope it's Middleton Tompkins doing this, because short of that, most of us need improvement. If a person is happy with the way he shoots his High Power rifle, that is fine and I envy him.

Now, these "moves" referred to are not necessarily all to do with position and technique. They are often things which could be described as shooting methods or traits. Curing bad habits is part of the program: if someone has a flinch, for instance, the little *pfffft*, *twang* of an air gun shot won't cure it, but trying to watch the pellet hit the target might do something. If "match nerves" are a problem, a shooter can literally use his imagination to get up the adrenaline and cope with it. I sometimes bet money on my shots, money which I pay my wife. Example: a quarter for each 9, a dollar for an 8. Pay up to make it work.

Shooting the air rifle is a separate little game that helps me in another. It's doing something that helps me shoot higher scores across the course, and that's opposed to doing nothing!



Here. On me. Don't mention it. This is a jpeg image of a scaled SR target. Just adjust its size to get what you want from it. Click on it and it should open in a new window, copy the image, and then fiddle with it however your computer set up allows. The easiest is to adjust percentage when you print, but a photo program does better. This one is approximately the right size to show a sight picture from about 25 feet, which is the constrained limit of my "range" at home. I don't think that firing distance really matters since, again, this is a learning opportunity and not a training venue for air rifle competition. If you don't have the prescribed 10 Meters (about 33 feet), use as much as you've got. If you have more use more, and less is okay too. Sometimes, by the way, the "math" doesn't work on scale reductions and you need to go with what looks right on the wall. More: I honestly don't recommend using "official" targets, meaning tagboard-printed 10M. Reason is that the sight picture is very different. Even though the 10M target has such a teeny 10 spot, which is a strong incentive to hunker down the hold, it looks so much larger because the aiming black is so much larger. All ideas and notions and common sense aside, a venue I'm entirely happy operating within, the thought that a teeny scoring ring would make the outdoor target seem "easy" actually backfired on me. After getting myself "used" to the ISU target over a winter, the SR looked so teeny down there

I think it's a wise thing to maintain a notebook. Don't let learning go unpublished. These are things someone is trying to achieve through training with an air rifle, so it only makes sense to record them for reuse (and hopefully not refuse).

There is no chanting and incense involved yet, or probably shouldn't be, but I've never experienced a closer approximation of these zennish things we read about than when shooting my air rifle in a mentally monotonous but engaged session. It's running a program and getting lost in each shot. Distractions are the missing elements.

that it caused a tad amount more anxiety in my head bone. Get used to the sight picture, even if no other two elements are the same in this exercise of practicing with an air rifle, or so I say.