

High Power Competition Tips [one]

[pay attention]

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Preventing mistakes goes a long way toward allowing a shooter to score as well as he or she can. Performing to the limits of current skill level is, after all, the best anyone can hope for, and that's as true for a first-time shooter as it is for a 20-year High Master.

Take care in determining the best available terrain on the firing point. The shooter has only to know his preferences and be able to analyze his immediate options — but he has to do it right now. He needs to make up his mind and spend the time he has literally getting comfortable with his decision.

High Power Rifle is more than a shooting skill game, although there's no question that the shooter's skill is far and away the most important element in his or her success. But the point is clear: scoring well across the course demands addressing the myriad of external factors at work in High Power. Wind, time, and distance may be the most influential elements, and the ones that get most of the attention, but the one that "gets" a lot of us is overlooking a few of the little things that contribute to problems.

Preparing to Shoot

Picture an athlete stepping out onto the field: he's ready to play the game.

Come to the firing line prepared!

For all but the 600-yard prone slow-fire event I have on my coat, sling, glasses, and hearing protection, my clips are loaded, and so on. All I should have to do is pick a spot on my firing point, place my scope, lay out my gear, and wait for the 3-minute preparation period to begin. (I am in no hurry to shoot 600 until I start shooting: I normally finish my string in 6-8 minutes for reasons that require much more space than I have here.)

Find the best possible spot within the firing point. Don't just walk up, plop down the scope, and set up around it. I do suggest setting up around the scope, letting it serve as a base point for positioning the other gear, but take care to first determine where that base point should be. Since an outdoor firing line is very rarely smooth and level, take a close look at where you are about to stand, sit, or stretch out. There's no reason to end up with an elbow in a hole or a rock underfoot.

I'll move anywhere within my firing point to find the best terrain, but I'll also accept the fact that I may not be able to avoid poor terrain and, in that case, will immediately go about altering my stock or shooting position to offset it.

It's also possible that adjusting natural point of aim or weight distribution can be accomplished by actually taking advantage of uneven terrain. For instance, in sitting my ideal position is with my feet on a slightly higher plane than my rear. What I don't want is to be forced to have my feet lower than my rear. Other examples might be preferring to have one foot a little higher for offhand or one elbow a little lower for prone.

A shooting stool is a primary item of gear for the High Power shooter. There is simply no better or more efficient means to collect and carry necessary gear around the firing line, and it's made even more efficient by the addition of detachable bags. I use the stool not only as a vehicle and container for my gear but also as a rifle rest offhand and an aid in steadying myself in rising and returning for the rapids.

I carry a lot less in bulk than do most other High Power shooters, but rest assured that I have *everything* I need (and ever have needed) to win a championship right next to me.

Having access to equipment is absolutely mandatory for me to shoot my best. Notice the extreme proximity of the spotting scope eyepiece to my eye for the 600-yard prone event. This is made possible by the angled eyepiece and infinite adjustability of eyepiece orientation afforded by the saddle head scope mount. For every event, a goal should be never to break position to retrieve anything.

Warming Up

Ideally, all I'll have to worry about during the prep period is finding my natural point of aim and warming up for the upcoming event. I will have been watching the wind beforehand to see if it has a pattern. Although I am, of course, going to study conditions again prior to shooting, I arrive at the line with a good idea of what to expect.

It is important to spend as much time as possible confirming and adjusting natural point of aim and dry-firing, which means that the more time that can be created for this, the better. The shooting position must feel the same each time out – and, as mentioned, that often means adjusting the rifle or working with the terrain, or both. It's imperative to have sufficient time to make these adjustments and get comfortable with them.

Not paying attention to natural point of aim is probably the single most common, and costly, mistake I see High Power shooters make. There's no excuse for it, but I don't know how many times I see people just walk to the line, load the gun, and start shooting off-hand. The short time and simple effort necessary to discover natural point of aim makes a difficult event much, much easier (and it's likewise beneficial to the other events).

I warm up to shoot off-hand even before leaving for the range. After breakfast I find my position, hold the gun, and rehearse my upcoming performance mentally. Since we'll normally shoot offhand first thing in the morning, it's surprising how much faster it is to find the position and natural point of aim at the match after having had this little warm up session. I warm up for the rapid-fire events on the firing line by operating the bolt several times to "remind" my muscles what they need to do.



Event Zeros

Bringing the rear sight to zero is compulsory prior to shooting any event. One of High Power's greatest disasters comes after forgetting to take the sight to event zero before firing a string. That will not happen if he establishes two separate times prior to check event zero. Make these times a routine. I make my sight change for the next event before I leave the line for the previous event. I index the sight windage knob back to its no-wind zero setting and then move both windage and elevation to the correct zero for my next event. I then double check my event-zero when I'm on the line for the next stage. At this time I calculate any wind I need for conditions and put it on the sight.

For those not familiar with these concepts or terms, "no-wind" zero is a predefined

To easily eliminate one major disaster, set two routine times when you'll take your sight to event-zero. I adjust zero for my next event before leaving the line from the previous event and then again upon preparing to shoot the current event. By the way, that's my "data book" stuck to the side of my stock: it has all my sight settings.

Elevation is more variable than wind from match to match and day to day, and that's why I don't have an elevation "zero" setting indexed on my sight knobs for any particular yard line. Obviously, though, elevation zero needs to be high on the checklist in preparing to shoot an event. My elevation is indexed using the vernier scale on my rear sight.

starting point for the windage knob. My no-wind zero is my 300-yard rapid-fire setting: "0" on my windage knob would result in a vertically centered shot on a calm day at 300 yards. "Event" zeros are unique settings necessary to center shots from different yard lines and shooting positions. Therefore, my no-wind zero is also my event zero for 300 rapid; I then have three other event zeros which work from that setting.

I hold the rifle with varying degrees of cant to make it fit my body better: in offhand the rifle is canted toward my left; in sitting it's canted to the right; in prone it's canted left, but not as much as for offhand. I attached my rear sight base so the sight sits vertical in prone, and then rotated the clamp-on front sight mount to match. Since my sights are level for this event, that's why my no-wind zero is for 300 rapid. If a shooter held his gun upright for each position, no-wind zero would be essentially the same at 200 and 300 yards (drift caused by the effect of bullet spin requires a minor compensation at 600 yards).

Data Books

Most High Power shooters are big into data books or scorebooks; this is the way most service rifle shooters are trained. I don't keep a data book. My "data book" is the zeros I have pasted to the side of my gun.

The primary focus in using the data book is on plotting the location of each shot and the correction used to fire it. Plotting shots is all well and good, to a point. That point is when it starts affecting your performance. If you're writing during the same time you could be reading mirage or preparing to shoot, you're wasting time. You have to correlate other things as you're shooting that matter more than what you're writing in your book. For instance, you've got to correlate your calls with your hits with prevailing conditions with sight corrections. Instead of writing each entry as you go, you will be better off to correlate the last three shots in your mind and keep track of those. Let's say you were centered on number-one and went right on number-two, now you know that you're going to go to the left before shooting number-three. That's done in your head so it's done quickly and you're right back on target trying to shoot a good shot. Keeping the three-shot tally running in your mind gives you more time to concentrate, more time to pursue your goal to shoot a "10."

Now, I will say that it is a good idea to maintain a notebook for yourself. This isn't a data book since it's updated after, not during, each match. One function of a data book is that it provides a retrospect of your experience that day. A notebook can do the same thing, but it can also do more. For instance, you have room to write down things that were on your mind, notes on refinements that were necessary due to the firing point, ideas you may have come across, things you might want to experiment with – you name it. Maintain these notebook entries after matches and training sessions, even from dry-firing. The point is that there will be a lot of things that are more important to your next match than how your shots plotted out for this one. And, a very important function of the notebook is using the experience written in it to prevent future mistakes.