

Highpower Rifle Competition

by Travis W. McCoy

More shooters across the United States are trying NRA Conventional Highpower Rifle competition now than ever before. Highpower shooters account for the largest number of shooting sports competitors. On this page I will try to explain the styles of this sport as much as possible.

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Introduction

In NRA Conventional Highpower Rifle Competition, shooters compete with either a "service rifle" or a "match rifle." The service rifle category is generally limited to either the unmodified M1, M14, M16, or their commercial equivalents. Match rifles typically are of custom make, conforming to the desires of the shooter. They are more free of regulations than are the service rifles. All shooting, with the exception of limited long range events, are done only with metallic aperture, or peep, sights.

Shooting consists of either "across the course" or "long range" matches. Shooters competing "across the course" are required to fire at distances of 200, 300, and 600 yards. In a typical Regional, or 800 point aggregate match, the course of fire is a total of 88 shots. Twenty record shots are fired in each stage, plus two sighting shots. Each shot is worth a maximum of ten points, with the entire match being worth a total of 800 points.

The first stage of fire consists of shooters firing twenty shots for record, slowfire one at a time, in the unsupported offhand position at a distance of 200 yards in a time limit of 20 minutes. The target used has a 7 inch ten-ring with a 3 inch X-ring. The number of X's are used for breaking ties. Each succeeding scoring ring is three inches wide. The aiming black is 13 inches wide, consisting of the 9,10, and X rings. The lowest value ring is the 5-ring.

In the second stage, two ten-shot strings are fired rapid fire from the sitting position with a time limit of 60 seconds for each string. This is also done at 200 yards using the same target as was used for offhand.

The third stage of fire is rapid-fire prone (lying down) at 300 yards. Each of two ten-shot strings are fired in a time limit of 70 seconds. The dimensions of the target are the same as the 200 yard target, with the exception of an additional ring of black to facilitate aiming.

The final stage is fired at a distance of 600 yards. Twenty shots for record are fired slow-fire from the prone position in 20 minutes. The target used has a 6 inch X-ring, and 12 inch 10-ring. The 9 and 8 rings are each three inches wider. Each ring of value below that is six inches wider. The aiming black consists of the 7, 8, 9, 10, and X rings, which constitutes a 36 inch aiming black.

Long range matches consists of those fired at distances of 800, 900, and/or 1000 yards. Most long range matches are twenty-shot matches, with unlimited sighting shots, fired from the prone position at 1000 yards. These matches are fired with both metallic sights, and telescopic sights, with shooters often using specially made rifles chambered for large magnum calibers. A special type of match, competed in internationally, is known as the Palma Match. It consists of 15 shots fired at each of 800, 900, and 1000 yards, using only the .308 Winchester cartridge. The same target is used at each distance, making it harder as the distance increases.

The National Highpower Championships are held each summer at Camp Perry, Ohio. Camp Perry, located on the shores of Lake Erie is an Ohio National Guard Training site that has exceptional facilities for Highpower Rifle competition. Thousands of shooters from almost every state and several other countries travel here to compete.

Getting Started

It is often intimidating to new shooters to shoot for that first time. Most anticipate that they will be surrounded by great shooters and they don't feel capable. This isn't true at all. Most shooters are very helpful towards helping new shooters. Before jumping head-first into highpower competition, I suggest that you attend a match to get the feel for how it is ran and what exactly goes on. Talk to people and get to know them. Introduce yourself as a new shooter and ask them to explain anything that's not clear to you. If you aren't sure where a match is near you, your best bet is to ask around at a local gun club, or contact your state's Rifle and Pistol Association. Most active shooters in gun clubs will at least know someone that shoots highpower, or a range that holds matches.

Equipment

Highpower shooters are known for the large amount of equipment that they haul out onto the range. However, each piece has serves it purpose to help the shooter score better. Below is the basic equipment used along with a description of its use. Though each of these items are generally necessary, it isn't necessary to go out and buy all new equipment. In getting started, it's generally best to ask other people's opinions and ask to try their equipment to see if you like it. It's also much cheaper to buy used equipment rather than new.

Rifle:

Service Rifle: Shooters preference as to service or match rifle. Calibers are limited with the service rifle, but widely varied in a match rifle. Service rifle shooters are limited to the M1 Garand, M14/M1A, or M16/AR-15. These rifles must be shot as is, with no external modifications. Internal changes can be made to enhance accuracy. Most shooters shoot an M1A, though the AR-15 is gaining more popularity. They are both equally capable of shooting well, but the M1A generally is easier to get to shoot accurately and maintain.

Match Rifle: Match rifles most commonly are bolt action, based on Winchester or Remington actions. There are few rules regarding these rifles, so they are generally customized to the shooters preference, including barrel length and style, caliber, stock design, weight, etc. If you aren't sure of a caliber, the most popular ones are the .308, 7mm-08, 6.5mm-08, and the .223.

Sights:

Service rifle- National Match rear sights are a necessity. Also, a .520 diameter hooded rear aperture is preferred over the more standard .575. The smaller aperture provides less room for error in sight alignment. The width of the front sight is mostly a matter of personal preference. Most shooters use the narrow NM sight, but some prefer the wider standard blade.

Match rifle - A good high-quality rear sight with repeatable settings is essential. The Warner and Paramount sights are among the best. Front sights are basically the shooter's choice. The Middleton Tompkins and Tiger Sight are very popular.

Shooting jacket:

The purpose of the jacket is to provide support, and to pad the shooter to minimize the effect of pulse and recoil. The best coats are the NRA-style of either heavy Cordura or leather make. Several companies manufacture good coats, including Creedmore Armory, Custom Leather, Inc., and Hawkeye.

Spotting Scope:

The spotting scope allows you to see the spotters and scoring disk in your target. They are also often used to locate shot holes during the rapid fire stages. More importantly, when shooting long range, they allow you to judge the wind by watching the mirage. Scopes vary in power and objective diameter. The power used should be between 20 - 25X. Diameters should be larger than 50mm, preferably 60mm or larger. The best scopes are made by Kowa and Unertl (if you can find one). When buying a scope, you basically get what you pay for.

Scope Stand:

A scope stand that allows you to adjust the scope so that it can be viewed in all positions is necessary. The standard for years has been the Freeland Bipod, now made by Champion Shooters' Supply. Other quality stands are also made by Mo's, and Les Baer.

Sling:

For the service rifle, the sling must be of military style. The Turner sling is the best, though it is a little higher than others. Steer clear of the military MRT slings, they will stretch a lot, as will the Brownell's Competitor Plus sling. For the match rifle, adjustable slings with arm cuffs and buckle adjustments are the norm. These are made in many styles by many companies such as Jensen, Anschutz, and Gehman.

Glove:

The glove is necessary to pad the hand from the pressures of the rifle. They come as either mitts or gloves. This too is a personal preference. If you use a full-finger glove, the Anschutz Top-Grip or model 101 are an excellent choice. The Creedmore gloves tear up easily after a few year's use.

Mat:

The mat is used to provide some padding between the shooter and the ground. The most common mat found is from Champion's Choice.

Shooting Stool:

The stool provides the shooter with a way of storing all his/her gear. Wheels and handles are commonly attached so that all of the shooter's equipment may be strapped onto the cart and wheeled onto the range. There are also many types available. I believe the best to be that from Champion's Choice.

Data Book:

The data book provides the shooter with an accurate record of sight settings, conditions, groups, and scores for matches previously fired. An accurately-kept data book is almost invaluable to the service rifle shooter when judging sight settings. These come in many types. I believe the best is the X-ring data book from Mo's Competitor Supply and OK Webber..

Addresses of Suppliers:

Champion's Choice
201 International Blvd
La Vergne, TN 37086

(615) 793-4066
(800) 345-7179 (orders only)

Champion Shooters Supply
42 N. High Street
New Albany, OH 43054-9500
(614) 855-1603
(800) 821-GUNS
(Competition supplies)

Mo's Competitor Supply
34 Delmar Drive
Brookfield, CT 06804
(203) 775-1013 FAX (203) 775-1010
(Owned by Mo Defina. Gunsmithing services, complete supply
of rifle competition equipment; has the best prices on jackets.)

O.K. Webber
Eugene, OR 97403
(541) 747-0458
(owned by Otto Webber. Shooting supplies, Paramount sights and actions, good prices)

Creedmoor Sports
P.O. Box 1040
Oceanside, CA 92051
1-800-4-HIPOWER
1-800 -444-7697
FAX (619) 757-5558
(Maker of good highpower equipment and supplies. Very good coats.)

Accuracy International
P.O. Box 2019
Bozeman, Montana 59715
(406) 587-7922
FAX (406) 585-9439
(Jack Foster, owner. International style and general shooting equipment.)

Sinclair International, Inc
2330 Wayne Haven Street
Fort Wayne, IN 46803

(219) 493-1858

FAX (219) 493-2530

(Large supplier of fine quality reloading gear. They also have a reloading manual that gives excellent information about reloading for accuracy.)