

IDPA Course Design Rationale

Of the many concepts set forth in the establishment of IDPA, none is more important than the requirements of Course Design. When the IDPA founders set out to structure "Defensive Pistol" guidelines, the one area that became very critical to the long-term survival of this shooting discipline was the problems that shooters are asked to solve must reflect reality. Requirements like the use of cover, reloading behind cover and the limit of 18 rounds per string of fire were all based upon the principle that defensive pistol shooting should help promote sound basic self-defense tactics and test the skills you would need in a real self-defense encounter. Other guidelines in Course Design such as most ranges being 15 yards or less reflect the fact that real life self-defense requirements rarely require handguns to be used beyond this distance. If on special occasions you want to utilize targets in excess of 15 yards this can be allowed to test shooting skill. Our goal is to make the ranges at which we engage targets to be within the norm of most self-defense scenarios.

The issue of distance that a shooter must travel in any scenario is clearly an issue also. Any movement of the shooter from start position to the final firing position should not exceed ten yards. We do not wish to see IDPA matches turn into track and field events. Think about it, few self defense scenarios require the shooter to run or cover a very long distance. If you allow your stages of fire to exceed more than 10 yards of movement, you begin to reward foot speed not shooting ability. Our Vickers Count scoring system is very good when applied to shooting, but becomes distorted when time is excessive for long distance of travel or the need to negotiate obstacles requiring more time that actual shooting does. Beware of course design that places too much effort in moving over a long distance or getting around obstacles.

If barricades or other range props that are designed to allow the shooter to use them for cover are provided, make sure that they are used properly. Make the shooter stay behind the cover area while actually shooting or reloading. A common problem is when using some form of low barricades, many shooters will want to squat and shoot, then move quickly to the next firing area. This type of tactic is very common in IPSC. Clearly, the squat position is fastest to use in many events... but it is a match tactic and not a viable survival one. If you are going to use low cover for protection, you will not use this gamesman squat. The answer to solve the problem of using a low cover position is to require the shooter to have at least one knee on the ground when actually firing. Now someone is bound to note that older shooters will be slower on this than young ones ... or a person with a prior knee injury will not be able to do this technique as well as someone with a good set of knees. This is a fact of life, and will be exactly the same in a real life self defense scenario.

Of key importance, when developing a new IDPA stage of fire, think about just what it is that you are trying to simulate. Ask yourself, "could this really happen?" or would this stage test skills that would be viable and likely used in a defensive

pistol shooting scenario. Some stages are by nature going to be short in the number of rounds fired. Real life self defense shooting rarely require a high number of rounds to be fired. You could design some really great scenario stages around four or five round strings. The way to make it more challenging is to make the contestant do the same drill with different methods such as strong hand only, fired from a close in retention position, or maybe while backing up. Consider a variety of different ways a real life encounter could be solved, then make your strings of fire reflect it. One of the great sins of course design is the practice of many course designers to get overly complex. Complexity is the enemy of any course design. Keep it simple. Targets can be color-coded or have symbols attached. Each string of fire can be started by allowing the contestant to open a book or turn over a card to identify a color or symbol which he/she will in engage.

Beware of the practice of setting a sea of non-threat targets out in the stage to make the difficulty of the shooting greater. We have an IDPA course guideline that states that you may only use one no-shoot target for every three shoot targets. In the real world, shooting near non-hostile targets is dangerous, criminal, a sets you up for serious liability issues. If you wish to make a shot more difficult, then use simulated hard cover to reduce the amount of the target exposed.

Note that there is a long history of action pistol shooting stages that have become common after 20 odd years of IPSC competition. Many of these are not practical simulations of a self-defense encounter at all. There is more than a slight threat that many individuals will try to follow this example and design IDPA stages of fire that are similar. We must not allow this type course design to become part of IDPA. The great failure of IPSC to remain practical has been the total failure to correct course design. Keep the procedure of stage or course design within the IDPA guidelines. Do not exceed 18 rounds per string of fire. If any form of cover or props that represent cover are used as part of the stage, then cover must be used by the contestant. Tactical reloads, or even speed reloads must be accomplished behind cover if available.

Often we hear of match designers who like to make their courses or stages unusual to the point that they appear silly. Some of these are simple modifications of cowboy match stages that require contestants to ride rocking horses and shoot targets after walking through swinging saloon doors. Sometimes these stages are called silly names like "Revenge of the Green Men from Mars" ... such mindless style scenarios simply degrade what IDPA is about. Please don't try to turn IDPA into the same non-practical action shooting as other shooting games. One of the most common heard statements about poor or stupid course design is "well, it is the same for everyone". Stupid is stupid. Claiming that it will be the same for everyone is a lame way of rationalizing a poor, silly, or stupid stage or course of fire. Anyone using the line "it is the same for everyone" to justify a stupid or tactically unsound stage should not be allowed to run or design any stage of fire in IDPA. Mistakes will be made in IDPA, but any time that these stupid or silly course designs are allowed to flourish it will lead to the demise of IDPA quicker than any other factor.

Sample pages from Course of Fire Book

You will find several challenging and realistic courses in this book. All can and should be modified as necessary for safety reasons to make sure they are compatible with your range limitations. Many courses are shown in their basic format, the degree of difficulty can easily be increased by adding no-shoots, hardcover and vision barriers. Some of the simple courses become very difficult by doing nothing more than reducing the "shoot" portion of the targets. Start positions shall be established by the match director EXCEPT on the Defensive Pistol Classifier Course.

SCORING METHOD

- Vickers Count - Take the total time to complete the string of fire and add five tenths (.5) per point dropped.
- Par-Time - On stages designated "Par Time" there will be a pre-set maximum time limit for each string of fire. Any shot fired after the cease fire signal will incur a five (5) POINT penalty per late shot fired.

PENALTIES

- Procedural Error - minus three (3) POINTS on "Par Time" add three (3) seconds on Vickers Count stages.
- No-shoot Hits - add single five (5) second penalty.
- Failure to Neutralize Target (i.e. less than 4 points total) - add five (5) seconds.
- "Failure to Do Right" Rule Infraction - add twenty (20) seconds.

COURSE OF FIRE GUIDELINES

- Every effort shall be made to design the course of fire so it will be in the competitors best interest to negotiate the course in a tactical manner.
- Courses of fire should emphasize defensive shooting skills and not athletic prowess.
- Providing cover in scenario stages is encouraged.
- A shooter who engages a target with one foot completely in front of a forward fault line will incur a single procedural penalty.
- No more than two threat targets may be positioned farther than 15 yds in any scenario stage.
- Courses of fire shall not require weak hand shots beyond 7 yds at no more than two threat targets may be specified weak hand only engagement.

- The cumulative distance separating all firing positions shall not exceed ten yards on any scenario stage.
- There shall be no more than two non-threat targets presented in any scenario stage.
- Any questionable ruling regarding scoring or procedural error will be decided in favor of the shooter.