

This Smallbore Business

by Brooksie



PART 3 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPARATION OF A SMALL BORE SHOOTER

In part 2, I outlined the relaxation phase, where the shooter can teach themselves to relax by the down the 20 steps routine with use of prepared tapes. I can assure the doubters out there that this works but, I have heard many say (including myself at one stage) "This is crap, what do I need a guru for?"

You see, target shooting is quite demanding, particularly with the advent of the new 'finals' system where the shooters reach the top eight in qualification, then start again from scratch! (The 'old' days where you carried your qualification score with you no longer applies). This is a mentally demanding routine!

Relaxation for the performance that is to come is essential, as is the attitude to compete at decimal levels in order to succeed, most particularly for prone shooting. Apart from the 20 steps routine, there are many ways to learn to relax and, it also does not just mean when you are competing, or in the preparation period prior to commencement of the match.



Brooksie – in shooting jacket and muffs – relaxes in his garden

Training methods can also be applied to relaxation factors and even apply if the only method available is indoors on a Scatt machine or similar. Sometimes it is difficult to shoot live-fire when the range - or the rest of the country - is under two metres of snow!

I believe that relaxation can be achieved

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by a mind-set, where the shooter can 'tell' themselves to relax and work hard on the breathing and muscles relaxation.

For instance, as you read this, probably in front of your computer, just sit in your swivel chair and 'ram' over the muscle structure in your shoulders. Feel the muscle tensions and strength within, then simply let your shoulders drop. You will feel the immediate calmness down your arms, across the chest and in the back of your neck. Got it?

Well, you can achieve this in your prone position by exactly the same method as you relax different muscle structures within your body. (Whilst doing this, watch the effect on the foresight picture and the natural aiming point! If it moves then you are forcing the rifle onto aim!)

Learning to relax in a physical sense, as I mentioned last issue, is a matter of a different training routine, designed for the specific purpose. Like 95% of shooters, I love to listen to music, with my preference for classical music (particularly opera) playing in my earphones. I also like the feelings associated with the waltz music of Johann Straus and others and, I have often trained on my own, over my home range, with Opera playing softly in the back ground through the ear phones. You do not need loud music, just the merely audible to allow you to continue with the project in front of you. Of course, this is personal preference.

I once was subjected to a shooter alongside, who was whistling as he shot his score and I actually was able to 'shut him out' as my own performance rolled on. This was a short-range match in an Australian

Championships fired in Tasmania, which I won, but there were quite a number of shooters who complained bitterly! The 'whistling wonder' was reprimanded and told to cease but I appreciated his attempts to relax himself, learned how to 'shut him out' and carried on regardless.

Even when dry-firing at home, down in the basement, I used music to achieve an end and, even when embroiled in a match far out of Australia, if I was starting to feel apprehensive, I used the operatic melodies within my mind to bring the techniques back on track.

This was usually contained also, within the muscle structure of various regions in the position simply by allowing the muscles to drop to no tension at all, then restart the position process with normal tensions. You will be surprised at how easy this is to do but, it needs to be trained into the method in the early training, as you work on your goals for an upcoming championships.

It is simply a means to an end!

The psychological profile of a champion shooter is epitomised by the display of how relaxed they seem to be as they go about their techniques, particularly the repeatability of their own processes.

This alone is definitely a mind-set of the individual and comes from a devoted section within the off range training generally.

Attitude also plays a very important part in the performance and it is interesting to watch some of the ISSF YouTube media of the finals from 2014, where you can actually see the mind set of the finalists. There are

some that suffer and there are some that realise their opportunity to gain a medal in the event, often gaining enormous ground as the finals unfold.

I have said often, that you can see how easy a champion makes the performance appear but no one can get an idea of how the shooter is thinking, what their method of mental techniques are in order to produce the result. I can assure you all that this was specifically trained into the psychological preparation very early in the routine!

The best instance of this was in the men's free pistol event from Granada, where the current best free pistol shooter in the world gave a graphic description of high skills as he accumulated a lead that was totally unassailable as the finals wore on. Pretty good when you can shoot a 'one' in the final and still win!

Well, from my observation on You Tube, he realised his lead would not be caught and he relaxed his techniques completely. I could see this in his expression and his last three shots were considerably wider than the previous series. Simply put, he knew he had won! I was really impressed with his shoot, in probably what is one of the most difficult events in the shooting sports. The repetition he displayed with the physical positioning was extraordinary and I suggest that our readers watch that You Tube carefully. You will find it on the ISSF web site.

My own tapes that I had prepared by my sports psychologist, were totally designed to be able to bring my skills out when I needed them. They were relaxation tapes but emphasised my techniques in gaining

the relaxed mental state that I needed to perform. It gave me the screamers when I shot scores in the European circuit that were several points below what I was capable of, or reached in the Australian selection trials. Graham Winter recognised this problem and his psychology skills were put in place in my own techniques over an eight month training system at home. His work put me through the door, and I appreciated this immensely!

One of his quotes on those tapes (one new tape arrived each month, as we were 1000 miles apart in Australia) is something I have never forgotten and revisit often. The quote?

"I can show you the door Brooksie, but it is you that has to walk through it!"

As I said, I have never forgotten this!

While on the subject of competitions from Granada - an Australian, Warren Potent, realised a life-long ambition and shot his way to a Gold Medal in the 50m Prone event. His finals performance was so well structured and his history with me goes back to 1986 when the Aussies won the world team championships in Suhl, East Germany (DDR as it was then) and Warren was a young member of our team, together with Alan Smith and myself. Since then I have watched him become one of the finest prone shooters in the world.

Very impressive Mate! Well done and I have waited for that moment for the most part of my life in shooting. Us Aussies are really proud of you!

Brooksie.