

## AMBUSHING A SWINGER:

Mike Seeklander rips two into a swinger as it hits the "sweet spot."



### AMBUSHING Swingers, Sliders, and Bobbers

By PJ BENSON, TY-45006

PHOTOS BY PHIL STRADER, FY-31992

This issue's tips come from Mike Seeklander and Phil Strader of the United States Shooting Academy (USSA).

Seeklander's background includes being a Marine combat veteran of Desert Shield and Desert Storm, being an air marshal, and being a senior instructor at a large federal training center in Charleston, S.C. Phil Strader served as a police officer and firearms instructor for the U.S. Capitol Police for ten years. Both are top-tier USPSA shooters who focus on

# GM Tips

## CONVERSATIONS WITH USPSA'S TOP GUNS

Limited Division, frequently appearing as part of the Limited "Super Squad" at the USPSA Nationals.

### Background

I was fortunate enough to be on the same squad as Mike and Phil at the 2007 Single Stack Nationals. One of the many great things about the Single Stack Nationals is that Grand Masters are in almost every squad. Being on the same squad as them was a great learning experience for me.

When I called Mike about an article on how to shoot moving targets, Mike suggested adding Phil to the mix. Together, they provided some highlights from their USSA Practical Pistol curriculum.

### Principles For Activator-Type Targets

Mike takes an aggressive approach to activator-type targets.

"They are designed to distract the shooter. Don't let them!," he says.

He teaches that activators are just another type of target, but one that needs to be approached with a different mindset. He says, "Shoot them like any other target — front sight on the brown and press the trigger." Mike insists that they are really never moving as fast as they seem!

To prove that, he advocates demystifying the process.

First, learn your reaction time. Typically auditory reaction time is about .18 to .23 (of a second). If you have to decide something, like "should I press the trigger now, or wait?" your mental reaction time is usually slower. Mike calls this the decision reaction time vs. straight reaction time. This means, you have to anticipate where the moving target will be approximately .5 seconds after you decide you want to shoot.

Next, it pays to know your split time between shots. Phil suggests, "Typically, splits in practice are in the .25 or longer range for the C shooter. Most average shooters have slower splits in a match, typically in the .34 to .5 range."

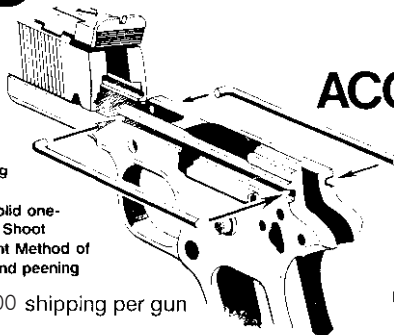
If you can see that the target will pause for half a second, and you know you only need a third of a second to fire your second shot, then as long as you time the first shot correctly, you

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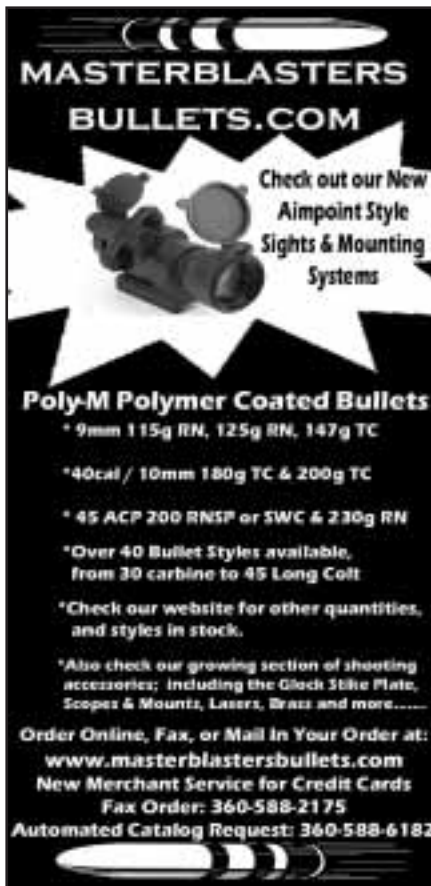
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will have time for two aimed shots.

### **Additional Advice**

The mantra of USPSA is the ability to call your shots. The quality of your sight picture determines how fast your can really shoot. Many times shooters will do two quick-but-sloppy shots on a swinger then add a third or fourth shot for insurance.

This wastes time and challenges your self-confidence during a course of fire. It may be better to be a little slower and more accurate — but with no doubts.

Phil offers this advice, “There is rarely a performance advantage to trying something tricky at the C-D level. Shoot them like any other target. They NEVER move as fast as they seem. Do not let them intimidate you!”

To improve your odds even more, “it makes sense to hit the activator, then the other targets and return to the swinger after it has slowed down.”

Pay attention during the walk through. Get a prime viewing station to observe each mover when it is demonstrated. Remember there are at least two pauses in the mover. First, the time between when the activator is hit and when the mover actually moves, and second, the time it takes for the target to reach the prime shooting position. This prime shooting position for swingers and bobbbers happens when the target reaches the end of its arc or top of the bob, momentarily pauses, and begins its return.

### **Swingers**

Mike tells me, “the three key aspects of successful shooting of swingers are; Speed, Timing, and Technique.”

### **Speed**

Mike says, “Knowing A) how fast the target appears after being activated, B) how long does it stay in the sweet spot, and C) how fast does it return to the sweet spot, are key to successful shooting of swingers.”

Phil offers these observations:

Most D and many C shooters should just wait and prepare for their optimal shot at the swinger. This may mean letting the swinger cycle one more time to expose the sweet spot again. More experienced C and B shooters may be looking at other targets of opportunity while waiting.

The timing of a fast moving target can be very intimidating. Phil reiterates, “activate the swinger, then shoot all the other targets possible while the swinger slows down.” He says the shooter should focus on the sweet spot. If you’re unsure where that is, you can find the sweet spot by watching where other shooters engage it, or by looking for where the brass piled up from the previous squad relative to the impact area in the ground.

Index your gun on this spot and wait, then, speaking like a true Marine, Mike says, “AMBUSH THE SWINGER!”

### **Sliders**

Successful shooting of sliders can be summarized into two concepts: leading the target, and gun movement.

### **Leading the Target**

Sliders usually start behind hard cover and end behind hard cover. The shooter has a limited time and space to shoot the slider. As with all moving targets the following questions need to be answered:

What is the time gap between shooting the activator and the slider appearing?

How fast does the slider move and/or how long is it exposed?

How far away is the slider?

The answers let the shooter know how much lead and time will be required to hit the target. Based on numerous matches, Phil believes, “using the leading A/C perforation is probably enough of a lead.” If you use too much lead you might be shooting D’s instead of A’s.

## **Gun Movement**

Mike also advises, "keep your gun moving!" He notes that all too often shooters stop the gun when they shoot, then try to play catch up. This leads the shooter to hurry their second shot. A hurried shot is usually not a called shot. Mike emphasizes keeping the gun moving in the same direction as the slider, allowing the sights to return on the target. This saves a lot of time in acquiring the target, sight picture, and releasing the shot.

## **Bobbers**

Mike says, "Use the same techniques for swingers and AMBUSH the Bobber!" Find that sweet spot and wait for the bobber to come to the sweet spot. Take your time and call your shot. For the less experienced shooter, knowing your reaction and split times will determine whether to fire two shots with one exposure or if you will need two exposures with one shot each.

## **Clamshells**

Mike says, "The speed of the clam shell is everything!" This will determine if you "can engage it with two reasonable hits before the no-shoot target blocks the target." One reasonable hit and one no-shoot mike are not acceptable! If you cannot get two reasonable hits before the no-shoot appears, be prepared for the head shot.

## **Drop Turners**

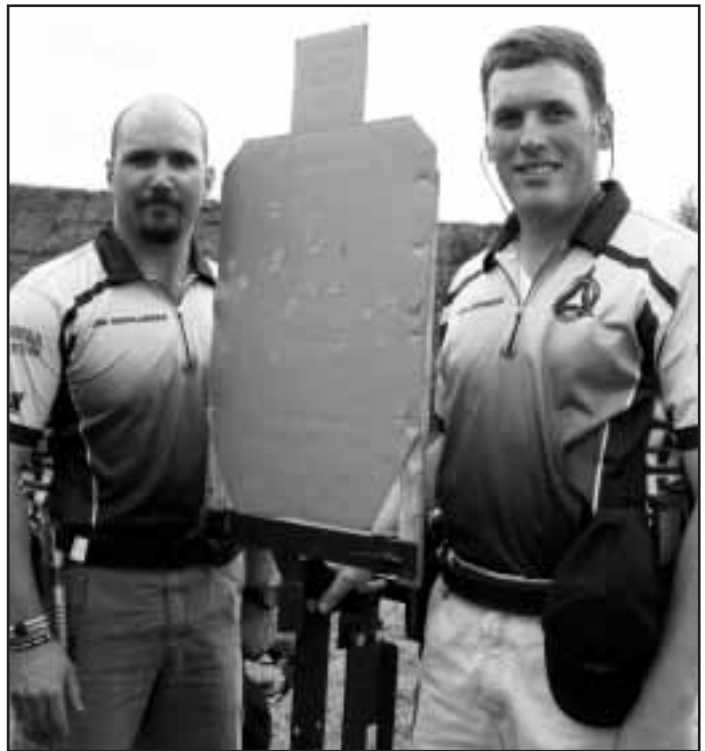
Drop turners generally move very fast. Some provide one exposure while others two or perhaps three opportunities to shoot it. Many drop turners are activated by opening a door or pushing open a window. Phil says, "be prepared, get your gun up high with your sights in your field of vision." When you open the door, be prepared to shoot the target before it is fully exposed. Hitting a 50 percent exposed target early produces an oblong hole. You get credit for the hole in the highest scoring region of the target. There is nothing wrong with an oblong hole on a drop turner. Shooting early will give you time for your second shot.

## **Disappearing and Non-disappearing targets.**

A miss on a disappearing target is recorded as a "no penalty mike." The shooter is not penalized for missing the target.

A non-disappearing target stops with some portion of the target exposed. This type of target is scored like any other target. For example, clamshells leave a head shot exposed after the no-shoot is activated.

Phil advises that on disappearing targets, you might be better off taking one good shot then rocketing on to the next target rather than trying to get a less-than-perfect pair, or waiting for a second exposure. You get about the some points, with less risk and less time.



**Grand Masters Seeklander (left) and Strader are counted among the top iron-sight talents in the United States.**

## **Conclusions**

Mike, Phil and I discussed the two themes we integrated into this article at length. The mechanics of shooting moving targets are just as important as the mental aspects.

The mechanics of shooting moving targets revolve around the mathematics of shooting, reaction time, split times, speed of targets, distance to target. By effectively using our practice sessions to work on the proper timing, we can eliminate a lot of the math. Nonetheless, the shooter must determine if he can effectively engage the mover with two shoots or if they need to pause and wait for a second exposure.

Mike and Phil repeatedly talked about the mindset needed to acquire more confidence in shooting moving targets. Be prepared to shoot the target. During many business presentations over the years I have used the phrase "Be Proactive Not Reactive." Mike and Phil emphasize this philosophy, in different terminology. Be prepared to shoot the target on your terms, within the parameters of your skill set. Have the mind set to shoot the targets at their sweet spot. "Index your gun and AMBUSH the Swinger!" was repeated over and over again by both Mike and Phil.

As always, these tips are directed at the D, C, and B shooter. The goal is to provide a foundation that helps these shooters improve their ability and confidence. If you have any questions or suggestions, you can contact me at [pjben-son45@aol.com](mailto:pjben-son45@aol.com). For more information about USSA and their training programs, contact Mike Seeklander at [mike-seecklander@ussa.com](mailto:mike-seecklander@ussa.com).

