

# Behind the Badge

by Rob Haught CL068



Now that we've decided to take the plunge and have decided which sidearm and holster combination to use, the only other items needed to compete safely are good quality eye protection and hearing protection. There are many brands of each available that will do the job. When it comes to eye protection, please don't skimp. Many years ago, before the popularity of polycarbonate shooting glasses, a friend almost lost an eye due to a bullet coming back from a bowling pin and shattering his prescription glasses and entering his eye. Surgery saved his eyesight and he shoots at a national level to this day. This event was one of the catalysts for the use of impact resistant shooting glasses at major matches. Many brands are serviceable, including Oakley, Wiley-X, etc. Get the wraparound style to give you the most coverage and interchangeable lenses to get the most versatility in daylight and low-light scenarios.

Hearing protection can be as simple as soft foam earplugs or as hi-tech as electronic earmuff style units. As soon as I was able to afford them, I moved to the electronic muffs. They allow you to clearly hear range commands and, when engaging steel targets, give instant audio feedback on hits. Again, several good models are out there in a variety of price ranges. Dillon, Pro Ear, Sordin and Peltor all will do the job.

As was previously mentioned, you will need a minimum of three

serviceable magazines for your blaster. Six is even better as it will allow more time between stages to top off. You will only use three at a time in most cases. A small range bag to carry your kit is also useful. This doesn't have to be fancy; there are dozens out there that will work fine. Just remember; the bigger the bag the more junk it will ultimately accumulate and soon you will need wheels to move it around. The small stage bags from I-Shot are very popular and you will find it just about perfect for IDPA matches. You can carry everything you need in one and I have been using this setup for the past several years.

Now that you have all your ducks lined up in regards to gear, what can you expect when you arrive at your first match? The first thing that will catch your eye when you pull into the lot is the diverse group of shooters present. You will see all ages of men and women from every walk of life. It's kind of neat, all these different types with a common hobby. You will need to register at the stat shack and they will typically ask you to sign a waiver, (we know all about the attorneys!) and will ask in which division you wish to shoot. Most likely, I'm assuming, it will be in Stock Service Pistol. You will then tell the nice person that this is your first match and you are a Novice. They may ask you if you wish to join the IDPA organization. You will need to after a few matches if you want to continue anyway, so now might be a good time.

In other sports you must shoot several matches then an average is determined to give you a classification. In IDPA, there is a standard Classifier course of fire that is offered by most local clubs a few times a season that can classify you on the spot. After shooting it, you will be placed in Master, Expert, Sharpshooter or Marksman class. Then you will only compete within your class in your division. This system allows a new shooter to feel better about competing with others of his skill level rather than seeing the big dogs and getting discouraged thinking he will never be able to compete with them. That is a natural feeling, but most forget the big dogs all started the same place he is standing right now and put in the hard work and effort to get to the Master level.

You are given a score sheet and you step out to start your match. I would recommend watching a few shooters go through each stage before stepping up. Each stage usually has the course description posted for you to read which explains the scenario and rationale for it. It will tell you what type of stage it is; standards or scenario and whether it is scored Vickers or Limited Vickers and any other detail specific to that stage. If that just sounded like Greek to you, don't fret. When your name is called, simply tell the Safety Officer that this is your first time and he will be very happy to walk you through it. I don't know any SO who does the job because he hates it. They are typical of

(Continued on page 27)

volunteers in any endeavor in that they enjoy helping others and new shooters are especially valued people. Most importantly, don't be afraid to ask questions.

A lot of buddies kind of form up into a group and move from stage to stage. Don't be afraid to ask a group if you can join them and tag along. You will learn a lot and make some new friends. Shooters as a species, regardless of shooting sport, are the friendliest folks I have ever met.

The stages will likely be one of three types. The first is what we call a Standard Exercise. This will resemble a normal LE Qualification course with several individual start signals and is a test of gunhandling and marksmanship skill. It could involve one or more targets and can be from arms length to thirty yards or so. Skills such as strong hand, support hand, reloading and pivots and turns are tested in Standard Exercises. These are scored either Limited Vickers, where only a set number of rounds are allowed to be fired per string and the time is recorded for each string and .50 seconds added for each point dropped, or each shooter is given a par time for each string of fire and the total points down calculated as above. A word about this Vickers count, it was named after Larry Vickers, an IDPA founder. Get him to tell you the inside scoop if you see him as to how it came about. It's a funny story. It has proven to be a very simple and effective scoring system that places a premium on time without sacrificing accuracy. In other words, it is very difficult to miss fast enough to win.

The second type of stage and

the most fun for most folks is the scenario stage. These courses of fire are designed to reflect situations where you might reasonably be required to use a sidearm for self-defense. Carjackings, Robberies, Home Invasions, Street Muggings are all food for thought for the course designers. What makes IDPA so realistic are the props used in these scenario stages and the rules that keep course design from getting out of hand. This is where the LEO can gain much needed familiarity with use of cover and gunhandling skill in a wide variety of situations. These types of stages are typically scored with the Vickers Count method. This is simply your raw time plus .50 seconds added for each point dropped, plus time added for any penalties incurred. The system is very simple and lowest time wins. Easy to remember and work with.

The third type of stage seen often is called a Skill Drill. This is simply a test of a particular skill that doesn't utilize a scenario to test. Something like 20 yd. head shots comes to mind!

You may see all of these types at any given match. At the local level, it is smart to bring about 100-150 rds. of ammo. My rule of

thumb was always to bring enough to shoot through at least twice in case there was time and there was a really neat stage I wanted a second shot at, so to speak. Most clubs offer re-shoots for a reduced price so why not take advantage of it?

At the end of the match you will have your scoresheet in your hand and, as most places are on the honor system, you will turn it into the stat shack. In a few days most clubs either post the scores on line or send out the results snail mail so you can see how you fared overall. Regardless of how you did the biggest question is "Did I have fun?", next is "Did I learn anything useful?" Hopefully you will be able to say yes to both.

In closing I would say again don't be afraid to ask questions and don't think you will look any worse than anyone else who is shooting their first match. Some local clubs offer something like a "New Shooters Clinic" taught by older shooters that is designed to help prepare you for match participation. If you local club does this be sure to take advantage of it. Good Luck!

As always I look forward to your thoughts. [www.symtac@yahoo.com](http://www.symtac@yahoo.com)



**Don't SWEAT IT**

**Only \$14.95** Per Pair Plus S/H  
[www.muffsweats.com](http://www.muffsweats.com)



**JR'S HEARING MUFF SWEATS**

- » Fits Most hearing muffs
- » Easy to install - Easy to remove
- » Absorbs perspiration
- » Durable cotton/polyester blend
- » Machine Washable
- » Helps prevent ear fatigue
- » Helps prevent spread of infection
- » Made in USA