



Fundamental shooting skills must be learned, practiced and developed to a level of consistent performance in both training and competition.

Coaching Column

Follow Through – a fundamental shooting skill

Vladimir Galiabovitch

‘Follow through’ is a term we have probably all heard of since the day we first picked up a pistol. But what is ‘follow through’ and how do we achieve it? In this article I hope to give you an understanding of what ‘follow through’ is and provide some ideas on how to develop the technique in training.

The majority of publications that deal with the education of pistol shooters define it along the lines of consistently delivering all the actions required to fire a shot beyond the point that the shot is fired. In the 1996 Oceania Shooting Federation Coaching Manual, Tibor Gonczol states that *“Follow Through is the ability to continue to employ, through and after the shot release, all the factors that the shooter was endeavouring to employ before and during the shot.”*

On the other hand, in their publication, *Pistol Shooting*, Laslo Antol and Ragner Skanaker provide a practical description of ‘follow through’ and state that *“Releasing the shot should not be regarded as the final point of action. After firing you should continue holding the pistol on aim, recording in your memory the sight picture you saw at the very moment of the release of the shot. You should allow the recoil to take effect after which the pistol will return to the position it occupied before the release of the shot.”*

The first fundamental skill for successfully carrying out the ‘follow through technique’ is a firm and consistent grip. It is important that the shooter’s grip on the pistol is consistent and he/she is able to maintain this consistency during the shot. The vast majority of shooters hold the pistol by overlapping the fingers when gripping i.e. the middle, ring and little fingers are placed around the grip while the thumb and index finger are placed around the neck of the grip. The pressure is then applied straight back along the line of the pistol barrel

The shooter also needs to have a clear idea of the most suitable amount of pressure to be exerted on the grip. The power of the shooter’s grip needs to match his/her physical ability. (A dynamometer can be used to measure the degree of pressure used by the shooter to hold the grip.) Training needs to include some simple exercises, such as squeezing a small ball, in order to get a feeling for the right pressure. Isometric exercises for the fingers are also important to develop muscle strength in the fingers and wrist, which will give the shooter better control of the pistol. It is important that initial training familiarises the shooter with the gripping technique while developing an individual style that is comfortable for him/her.

An important aspect of developing the shooter’s gripping technique is that this must be done in conjunction with developing his/her trigger squeezing technique. The technique of squeezing the trigger is dependent on the individual’s neurone-motor ability and will require both time and practise. I would recommend spending as many hours as is necessary to develop the technique of squeezing

the trigger, then dry firing while observing the action of squeezing the trigger, from different angles, shooting with support under the pistol and when firing without a target.

Testing the efficacy of these techniques could be done by firing with some support under the arm behind the wrist. Shot grouping on the target will be a good indicator of technique development, assuming that the shooter has a clear understanding of how to aim. Shot grouping needs to be close enough while the shooter continues to develop the technique to the point where he/she is able to maintain the technique throughout the shooting process

Michail Nestruev is one of the best shooters in Free and Air Pistol. Notice Nestruev's finger placement in the pictures below. In the picture on the right the middle pads of the fingers that are overlapping the grip are perpendicular to the pistol barrel. The middle picture shows that the fingers are comfortably overlapping the grip and the index finger is perfectly positioned on the trigger. In the left picture you will notice the perfect positioning of the thumb.

The second fundamental skill in the follow through technique is the ability to keep the upper body, the shooting arm and the head static for the time it takes to fire the shot and execute the follow through. This skill needs to be developed from the very beginning. The physical ability to hold a pistol and the body steady is essential.

Positioning of the head is as important as developing a good grip. Basically, a neck-tonic reflex will cause the shoulders to move whenever the head moves. Shoulder muscle tension will thus be changed and, as a result, recoil of the pistol will change and the sight picture will alter. In short, the shooter needs to undergo as few movements as possible and should only be limited to movements that are required for shot production.

The following exercises can be used to develop the ability to keep the body, arm and head static:

1. Draw a dot on a mirror at the same height as your eye or slightly lower. Holding your pistol, adjust your shooting position

in relation to the dot. Hold the pistol in the shooting position with your eye, front sight, rear sight, the dot and your reflection in alignment. Maintain this position for about 15 seconds and follow with a 30 second rest period to allow for recovery. Repeat the exercise and slowly increase the holding period until you are able to maintain this position for about one minute.

2. Draw a dot on the window at the same height as your eye or slightly lower. Choose an object that is as far away from the window as possible and has a very sharp angle such as the corner of a building. Hold the pistol in the shooting position with you eye, front sight, rear sight, the dot and the object in alignment. Maintain this position for about 15 seconds and follow with a 30 second rest period to allow for recovery. Repeat the exercise and slowly increase the holding period until you are able to maintain this position for about one minute.

These exercises can be modified by you standing on your toes or placing a narrow piece of wood under your toes. They will allow you to develop muscle strength and give you an awareness of your upper body position. While these exercises are primarily for precision shooting they are also very beneficial for Rapid Fire Stage.

The development of muscle movement in the shooting action is achieved in different ways and for different groups of shooters i.e. adult shooters whose bodies have finished growing or junior shooters whose bodies are still growing and taking shape. The shooter (or coach) needs to be able to estimate and understand his/her level of performance in each technique and develop suitable exercises that the shooter repeats in training for prescribed periods of time.

Shooting skills need to be learned, practiced and developed to a level where the shooter is consistent in his/her performance in both training and competition conditions. If you develop consistency in your techniques for gripping, squeezing the trigger and maintaining your shooting position the 'follow through technique' will become a natural part of the entire process. 🌟



The thumb perfectly positioned.



Fingers comfortably overlap the grip and index finger perfectly positioned on the trigger.



Middle finger pads overlapping the grip are perpendicular to the barrel.