



Talbot on target! SSAA 3-Positional

Our Communications Officer Sam Talbot is a man on a mission - to learn the SSAA disciplines one at a time. The mission continues as he shoots SSAA 3-Positional.

As you may recall from last month I had just bought a new rifle, attached a scope to it and finally got it sighted-in. Since I knew I was going to be shooting SSAA 3P this month, I sighted the rifle in at 50 metres. Already being at the range seemed too good an opportunity to not try out some of the positions I would soon be shooting from.

Despite not really knowing what I was doing, after a quick Google search I promptly got down on the ground in prone position. This seemed easy enough and nine out of 10 shots landed comfortably towards the middle of the target, with just one wayward effort failing to make an impression. With my confidence buoyed I tried kneeling, and quickly realised it's much harder than it looks - especially at 50m.

As I attempted to balance on my back foot while simultaneously figuring out where my elbow should be on my left knee, I became a trembling tower from top to bottom and shook like a leaf. Even though it looks like it doesn't take much energy to pull a trigger, the concentration needed to stay perfectly still takes a surprisingly amount of mental and physical energy. To be fair though, I was getting a little tired having done quite a bit of shooting already.

Since I was shaking so much my strategy quickly turned from finding the bullseye to just trying to hit the target - a strategy I would employ again during the 3P competition. My practice round culminated in a lousy 7/10 standing and 6/10 kneeling shots hitting somewhere within the target rings. It quickly became apparent I may not be a natural when it comes to 3P shooting. But with my first competition already scheduled for the coming weekend, I would not have another chance to practise. Sometimes it's best to throw yourself in at the deep end.



But first, what is 3P?

My grandfather, an accomplished duck hunter, fisherman and shooter, used to say: "Why stand when you can sit? Why sit when you can lay down? And why lay down when you can sleep?"

And that's basically all you need to know about 3P. Much like resting, shooting tends to get easier the closer you find yourself to the ground.

Seriously though, 3P is based on simulating shooting positions in the field and is a slow-fire event, which means competitors have plenty of time to take their shots.

Three rounds of 20 shots are taken over a 30-minute time limit, starting from a prone position, followed by a standing position and finally a sitting or kneeling position - competitors may choose to sit or kneel, with most opting to sit because of the lower centre of gravity and it being generally more stable.

Rimfire competitions are shot over 50m and centrefire competitions over 100m. For rimfire your rifle must weigh not more than 4.6kg and less than 5.5kg for centrefire, although your local competition is unlikely to produce a scale and weigh your rifle. You

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can wear a shooting jacket if you want, and even though I don't have one I probably should have put on a thicker jacket instead of just a loose hoodie. Thicker jackets help to absorb some body movement and make the positions more comfortable when you're on the ground.

Finding a range

One thing I didn't address last month was how I found a SSAA range. I did a quick Google search and found SSAA Para, which is quite close to me and one of the larger clubs in South Australia. They also offer most SSAA disciplines including 3P, so SSAA Para is a very good fit for the shooting I want to do. If you're still unsure about what range or club to attend, your SSAA state branch will be able to recommend one and put you in touch with someone.

As a beginner, I called SSAA Para and asked to be directed to whoever ran their 3P competitions. This turned out to be their 3P captain who also happens to be one of Australia's best 3P shooters, Rod Frisby. Rod told me all I had to do was show up on time and he'd be more than happy to show me the ropes. The 3P competitions at SSAA Para are run for the bargain entry fee of just \$2, although you are expected to help set up and pack up.

Competition day

The competition at SSAA Para was actually for the NRA version of 3P not the SSAA version, but shooters were welcome to shoot the SSAA version, which is similar enough that both can be run at the same time. In fact, all but two competitors shot



Rod Frisby teaches Sam some basics.

SSAA 3P on the day. The other shooters greeted me very positively and the environment was quite relaxed – we were definitely not shooting for sheep stations.

Before things got under way, Rod talked me through the rules and demonstrated the positions. I thought I'd found a good prone position until Rod pointed out that your forearm must be more than 30 degrees off

the ground. He also insisted I sit instead of kneel (although competitors can do either) since it's widely considered the better option. In fact, everyone else competing chose to sit instead of kneel. As for the standing position, Rod showed me the correct way to position my feet and we did our best to find a position I could comfortably hold.



SSAA 3P targets on the left and NRA 3P (black) targets on the right.

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The important part

During the shooting I thought I was taking my shots fairly quickly, but at the end of each round I was the last competitor to finish. According to Rod, about eight minutes is the usual time taken by most shooters unless it's windy, which can increase times slightly.

I was nervous to begin with and this showed in my scores. I also spent too much time thinking about my next shot, whether my positioning was correct, assessing the wind and generally thinking too much about wobbling. All this over-thinking meant I completely forgot to push the bolt forward a couple of times. Few things will mess up your shooting more than over-thinking, and I was particularly guilty of this throughout the competition.

Despite my initial nerves I completed the prone position with a score of 138.1 from my 20 shots. This included failing to register a score on my second shot. Scoring is simple and is the total sum of your 20 shots, 10 being the highest possible score with a single shot. Each ring further from the centre of the target is worth one point less all the way down to five, and anything else outside of that is scored as zero. Hitting the most inner-ring (the "X" ring) counts as a 10 but is also represented in the scores after a decimal point. For example, the ".1" in my score of 138.1 denotes I hit one X-ring from my shots, a feat I would not achieve again that day.



The standing position, where things started to go downhill.



Rod shows Sam what a good score looks like.

Things start heading south

After the prone position it was time to stand up, and for me that meant failing to hit the target altogether on a couple of occasions. Failing to score on some shots was a bit demoralising, but by my final few shots were much better, and by then I had figured out a position that worked better for my body and my accuracy increased accordingly. Initially I was trying to tuck my elbow into my hip as I'd seen other competitors do. Since I don't have the body type for that sort of position, I performed much better when I simply relied on my arm to stay straight.

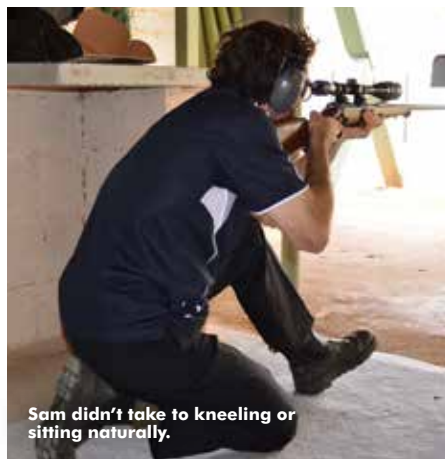
It's incredible how strange it feels to go from a warm-up shot in a supported prone position to having to stand up and steady yourself with nothing to lean on. My score of 91 for standing was probably better than I deserved (even though it is nothing to write home about) since I was consistently

all over the target, but a score I was happy to take.

The dreaded sitting

Throughout the prone and standing position I had done reasonably well for a beginner, but things went downhill when it came time to sit down. I just couldn't get comfortable or maintain any sort of balance. My flexibility was the main issue and it felt like I was always falling backwards - I need to stretch my hamstrings more! After a few shots that failed to score, I gave up sitting and switched to kneeling. Surprisingly, I performed a little better, but this was probably more of a reflection of my incompetency while sitting rather than my competency while kneeling.

To make matters worse, at this point I started thinking about the thousands of people who could be reading this story, adding extra unwanted pressure. My final



Sam didn't take to kneeling or sitting naturally.



Falling backwards a little while sitting.

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score for sitting/kneeling came out at a measly 74. This was less than my standing position which I believe is quite unusual and leaves a lot of room for improvement. The shots that failed to score had a devastating effect on my overall tally.

What I learned

What would otherwise be a simple task becomes almost impossible as my body betrayed me, causing me to wobble around which meant becoming frustrated, causing more wobbling. And since I was wobbling so much I would get tired and it quickly became a vicious circle. The few times I did manage to stay balanced I shot good scores and everything seemed easy. Unfortunately though, I spent most of my time uncomfortable, off-balance and unstable.

THE POSITIONS

Prone: The shooter lies on the surface of the shooting station or a shooting mat. The rifle is supported by both hands and the shoulder only, with the shooter's forearm forming an angle that must not be less than 30 degrees.

Standing: The shooter stands on both feet without support of any kind for either rifle or shooter, with no part of the body or limbs touching the ground or any other object except the soles of the boots/shoes.

Sitting/kneeling: The shooter sits on the surface of the shooting station, with no part of the body or limbs touching any support or object. The less common option in 3P is kneeling, which has a right-handed shooter kneeling so only the sole of the left boot and the lower part of the right leg, including the foot and knee, are touching the ground.



Discovering what positionings would be most effective for my body type and flexibility level will see my scores improve dramatically. Beyond this, the next most important factor in 3P shooting seems to be judging wind speed and direction. One eye should be on the flags monitoring the wind, while the other is on the cross-hairs. The wind can easily make the difference between an inner ring and the outer rings. Of course, this is less important for me at this point as I'm still trying to hit anywhere inside the rings!

Conclusion

As the name suggests, 3P shooting is all about the positions and I quickly learnt that if you can nail those positions, your shooting will be accurate and successful. On the other hand, if you're like me and find it tricky to get into and maintain a strong and secure position, you will struggle - and struggle I did.

3P is a challenging discipline and I had a lot of fun trying it out. While I might not take it up regularly, I would gladly participate in another 3P competition. My fellow competitors were great to work with and the whole club was very welcoming.

One thing I wish I'd known before I signed up for 3P competition is it's



Rod's offers some words of wisdom.

considered one of the most challenging disciplines. Who would have thought having to remain perfectly still for 20 shots would be so difficult? Not me apparently! The other shooters in the competition told me most people take up Field Rifle before progressing to 3P, as it really is challenging.

For patient shooters who value accuracy and consistency above all else, 3P is a great discipline and I recommend you give it a try if you haven't already. In the meantime, I'll be attending yoga classes to work on my lack of flexibility and will see you next month to tell you about my trials and tribulations with Field Rifle. ●



This looks okay but there's plenty of room for improvement.

Helping pack up after a competition is appreciated by everyone at the club.