



TACTICS & TRAINING

The Top 10 Reasons Why You Should Shoot IDPA

by mike briggs | September 24th, 2010

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It's the fastest-growing shooting sport for a lot of reasons.

By Mike Briggs

The International Defensive Pistol Association (IDPA) is America's fastest-growing practical shooting discipline. With more than 12,000 members since its inception in 1996, the IDPA has risen to fill the self-defense niche on today's shooting-sports menu. So what exactly is IDPA?



IDPA National Champion Dave Sevigny demonstrates his winning form.

To quote directly from the rule book: “Defensive Pistol shooting as a sport is quite simply the use of practical equipment, including full-charge service ammunition, to solve simulated ‘real world’ self-defense scenarios.”

Shooting an IDPA match is a little like a round of golf. You show up with your equipment (clubs and balls or guns and ammo), which you use to negotiate a course. Lowest score (strokes in golf and seconds in IDPA) wins. To finish the analogy, it is important to note that a round of golf is different from a golf lesson, just as an IDPA match is different from firearms instruction. Ideally, an IDPA match is an opportunity to practice your gun-handling skills in a competitive yet friendly environment.

In a relatively short time, IDPA shooting has really taken off. While this is no small accomplishment, IDPA membership represents less than one percent of law-abiding Americans who legally carry a concealed handgun for self-defense, not to mention the millions who keep a gun in the house to protect their families. Given these numbers you can see why IDPA has the potential for astronomical growth. So why hasn't IDPA grown faster?

~~One of the more pervasive knocks on IDPA is that it is only a sport and its rules are inconsistent with pure tactical pistol training. Those who espouse this opinion dismiss IDPA as a game that could lead participants down the road to bad~~

defensive habits.

Mike Dalton, a police officer and IDPA Master, had this to say on the matter: “To suggest that one is better off not competing because it will ruin their self-defense skills is ridiculous. If you can’t shoot fast and accurately under pressure, you are not likely to do well in a real-life gunfight. Sometimes individuals who failed to achieve their desired goals choose to blame the contest rather than their ability. Next time you hear or read something from one of these critics, consider what the individual has accomplished in shooting competition. The answer will likely be little or nothing.”

Significantly, several famous gunfight survivors have praised competitive shooting. For example, when I attended the 1997 Inaugural IDPA Tournament and Conference in Columbia, Missouri, retired NYPD gunfighter Jim Cirillo gave a very pro-IDPA keynote address.

Furthermore, if competitive shooting is so harmful, why are more and more elite government and military units hiring top practical shooters? They are being hired to teach the skills and techniques they’ve developed from years and years of competitive shooting.

With this as background, here (in random order) are my top 10 reasons why you should give IDPA a try.

1. IMPROVE YOUR GUN-HANDLING SKILLS

This is the bread and butter of the IDPA experience. Various gun-handling/self-defense skills are woven into the scenarios. For example: drawing from

holster, shooting on the move, reloading, weak-hand/strong-hand shooting,

Cooper’s Rules

1. Treat all guns as if they are loaded.
2. Never let the muzzle of a gun point at anything you do not want to destroy.
3. Keep your finger off the trigger until your sights are aligned with the target.
4. Know your target and what is beyond your target.



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transition from one shooting position to another, engaging threat targets from cover, retrieving your gun from a drawer, integration of a flashlight, shooting from inside a car and more.

2. SAFETY

Safety is the one element that permeates everything you do in IDPA (including the skills listed above). If you didn't have a concept of how to safely handle a handgun before, you will develop one pronto. And that's a good thing. Jeff Cooper's four rules (see inset) are more than 50 years old, but they still hold true today. They are the etiquette of IDPA, and obeying them is an indication of your character.

At our club, Pioneer Sportsmen in Dunbarton, New Hampshire, we have new shooters go through a safety orientation before they shoot their first IDPA match. Along with the safety rules, we also check their equipment to make sure it functions in a safe manner and go over basic IDPA rules. We hold this class with a lot of patience, and all questions are encouraged and answered. Several have commented, "It's like a free lesson!"

3. EQUIPMENT REALITY CHECK

This alone can be worth the price of admission (\$15). I wish I had a buck for every pet carry gun that I've seen choke on an IDPA match. The look of disbelief on the faces of some of these gun owners as they clear jam after jam is sobering. I have a theory about this. I think sometimes people put up with a jam or two when they're practicing alone. They just shrug it off and hope it will go away. In other words, they are in denial. However, when they are shooting an IDPA match with the clock running and people watching, those little jams are magnified. In most cases this experience is enough to motivate shooters to deal with the problem (usually either a dirty gun, bad magazines or sloppy hand-loaded ammo).



Reactive targets make your shooting experience more interesting. Several popular ones include the gravity turner (left), pepper popper (center) and swinger.

Guns and ammo aren't the only equipment problems. We see floppy beaded belts that couldn't hold a gun and holster when they were bought on the Indian reservation 30 years ago. We also see holsters and mag pouches that look like they should be worn by a couple of guys looking for Dr. Livingston. The good news is that this stuff gets sorted out in the safe environment of a range rather than on the unforgiving street.

For example: We have a Vermont state police officer who started attending our matches a few years ago. Now, our friend is a big man—

I mean total-eclipse-of-the-sun big. He used his duty gun (a high-quality semiauto) to shoot the matches. He had gone through his departmental training and also qualified with this gun.

Lo and behold, under the pressure and sustained use of a typical IDPA match, his large hands were literally smothering the gun's slide. The result was a gun that wouldn't function. So he took this information back to his department, and it issued him a larger pistol. Problem solved. Do you think our friend got his \$15's worth?



Props like this hallway add a little realism to an IDPA scenario.

4. AN INTERESTING ASSORTMENT OF TARGETS TO ENGAGE

Tired of that stationary target you've been blasting away at session after session? IDPA encourages the use of targets that react when hit, move toward you, cross in front of you, swing back and forth, appear and then disappear, etc. Sound like fun?

5. YOU WILL BE BETTER PREPARED IF YOU DECIDE TO ATTEND A FIREARM TRAINING SCHOOL

As I've already said, shooting an IDPA match shouldn't be viewed as an alternative to seeking quality firearms training. Ideally, you should try to do both. So here's the scoop: If you can make Marksman on the 90-round IDPA Classification Course (for details go to the main menu at www.idpa.com, and click on IDPA Classifier Course of Fire), you will be at a higher skill level than most of your classmates in a basic Level I pistol course. So why is this important? It builds confidence. Instead of worrying about how you're going to perform, you can relax and get the most out of your class.

6. LEARN ABOUT TIME

The essence of IDPA is time. Virtually everything you do is on the clock. You gradually learn how long it takes you to do various tasks, and then you try to do them faster. I call this "time compression."

Before I go on, let me give you an example: The Tueller Drill is the study of the time it takes a person at rest to cover 21 feet and deliver a fatal injury with a knife. The answer depends on the condition of the attacker.

Tests have clocked a fit person accomplishing this task in less than 1.5 seconds. Why is this important? Because it starts getting you thinking about what you can do with your 1.5 seconds to counter the attack. If you cannot draw and hit a stationary target at 21 feet in less than 1.5 seconds, you'll have to have a Plan B. These situations also put you under a certain amount of pressure, and learning how to function under



Semiautos must fit into the IDPA "box." Major

pressure is a good thing. Therefore, time is a dynamic aspect of the defensive mindset, and IDPA helps you experience it. (An important tool that I recommend is the electronic timer. It should have a delayed-start capability and a par-time mode.)

7. DEVELOP SPEED-SHOOTING SKILLS

I define speed shooting as the ability to shoot fast and accurately (I view with suspicion anyone who says that these skills are irrelevant). IDPA provides its participants with a format that enhances the development of these skills.

More than 40 years ago Jeff Cooper published his own list entitled The 10 Principles of Combat Shooting, which included the following: “A combat pistol must go into action with great speed, and no standard is fast enough. The faster, the better.” IDPA shooting is a direct return to the kind of equipment and matches Cooper used to revolutionize combat shooting. If you think of defensive pistol shooting or combat shooting as a martial art, the ability to shoot fast and accurately is akin to the ability to deliver fast and accurate punches or kicks.

For instance, in “Volume 5: Winning IDPA Techniques” of his excellent Practical Shooting DVD series, IDPA National Champion Matt Burkett demonstrates his speed-shooting ability. At 21 feet, starting with his hands at his sides and his gun in a holster, he is shown engaging an IDPA silhouette target with two shots to the body and one shot to the head (a Mozambique Drill) in 1.48 seconds. By the way, he also gets perfect hits at that speed.



(Left Photo) Custom Defensive Pistols in .45 ACP: Kimber Eclipse Target II (top), Springfield Armory GSP (middle) and Colt C.C.O. (Right photo) IDPA revolvers: S&W .45 ACP Mountain Gun (top), Ruger GP-100 .357 Mag (middle) and S&W 65 .357 Mag.

8. INTERESTING COURSES OF FIRE

The Mozambique Drill described above is an example of a Speed Shoot, designed to improve your ability to shoot fast and accurately. IDPA uses two other categories in its courses of fire, namely Standards and Scenarios. Standards are rudimentary exercises that test a wide range of handgun skills. The IDPA Classification Course that I mentioned earlier is a perfect example of a Standards Match.

Last but not least, we have scenarios, the heart and soul of IDPA shooting. Scenarios are used to simulate various life-threatening encounters. Avoidance has failed; you are given the choice of either defending yourself and your family or suffering great bodily harm. A scenario stage could be built around a car jacking, home invasion or finding yourself caught in the middle of a convenience-store holdup, to name a few.

9. THE OPPORTUNITY TO RUB SHOULDERS WITH THE BEST OF THE BEST

Earlier I compared IDPA shooting to the game of golf. If you do play golf, how would you like to play 18 holes with Tiger Woods? Sure, you'd get your tail kicked, but wouldn't it be fun? Maybe you could come close to equaling his score on one of the holes. Well, I'll let you in on a little secret: You can have that experience at an IDPA match.



Top trainers are encouraging their students to participate in IDPA competition. Massad Ayoob (center) shows off the awards his advanced class won at the New England Defensive Pistol Championships.

That's right, you can enter and shoot in the same match with legends like Rob Leatham, Dave Sevigny, Jerry Miculek and Todd Jarrett. There's more. These guys are really nice gentlemen who are always glad to meet new shooters and answer a question (just don't bother them in the middle of their backswing).

10. FRIENDSHIP AND FUN

While you're taking in all of this cool stuff, you'll be simultaneously making friends and memories that last a lifetime. Over the past 17 years of competitive shooting, I've made many new friends, and the reason why is exemplified by the atmosphere of fellowship and camaraderie that surrounds the IDPA experience.

Bottom line: It's a hell of a lot of fun. If you've been sitting on the fence, not sure if you want to get involved in IDPA, I hope this list is enough to nudge you into giving it a try.

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