



Photo of Melvin Gildow by Pat Kelley.

Old Dogs Learning New Tricks

USPSA's FIRST Area-Level 3-Gun Championships

BY PAT KELLEY, A-14401

April 13th and 14th marked the next direction in USPSA 3-Gun competitions: the Area-level 3-Gun championship. One hundred and one shooters flocked to Bend, Ore., for this historic event, bringing with them perspectives on 3-gun competition from all over the West. Shooters from California to Washington shared notes and built friendships as they enjoyed this unique trophy-only event.

Background:

The Area 1 3-Gun Championships blossomed from the minds of two weary travelers on the road home from the 2001 Back-to-Back Nationals. Mike McCarter and Tom Chambers opted to drive 36 hours from western

Oregon to Barry after the Sept. 11 attacks shut down air travel. That much time gave them plenty of time to talk, to share ideas, and to dream. Originally their plan called for a regional 3-Gun event, but once the ball got rolling, it grew like a snowball. People were signing up right and left, until finally Area Director Bruce Gary contacted the pair and asked, "Why don't we make it the Area 1 3-Gun championships?"

Gary squared things with USPSA, and Chambers and McCarter found themselves in the fast lane to USPSA history.

As it happens, launching this match was a lot easier said than done. What range in Oregon could host the match? With plans for 150 shooters and nine stages, plus a side shoot for each gun, a

range that big just wasn't available. The COSSA (Central Oregon Shooting Sports Association) range was available, but it only had a couple of bays. Sure, it had plenty of acreage for the rifle events, but six pistol bays and some open ground does not a major range make! As the dream grew, a plan started to take shape.

Within a few months of their return, and with a lot of help from a small group of hard-core volunteers, the COSSA range was transformed. Ninety days before the Area 1 3-Gun Championships were to be held, the ground was cut, ripped, and piled high to turn six bays into 20! This range, still under construction, will host the USPSA Race Gun Nationals this fall. If the first 90 days of 2002 are any indication, we will have an excellent new

venue for the traveling Nationals very soon!

Match Day

With representatives from the USPSA home office looking on, McCarter, Chambers, and their crew showed a legion of shooters why three guns are better than one. Nine squads battled nine stages (three for each gun) and all that Mother Nature and Tom Chambers (who designed all the stages) could throw at them. While Tom did a good job, Mrs. Nature really made her presence known. Saturday gave us cool temperatures (around 40 degrees), mild winds (blowing sand), sunshine breaks, and a 90-minute rain squall. Despite what turned into a two-hour rain delay on Saturday, the match still ran close to schedule. Sunday looked better as we left the hotel the next morning. Bright sunshine and beautiful blue skies greeted us that morning, only to find 20 to 40 mile per hour winds slashing across the range! Poppers fell constantly, props blew over – what a challenge for shooters and match crew alike! For those few at-

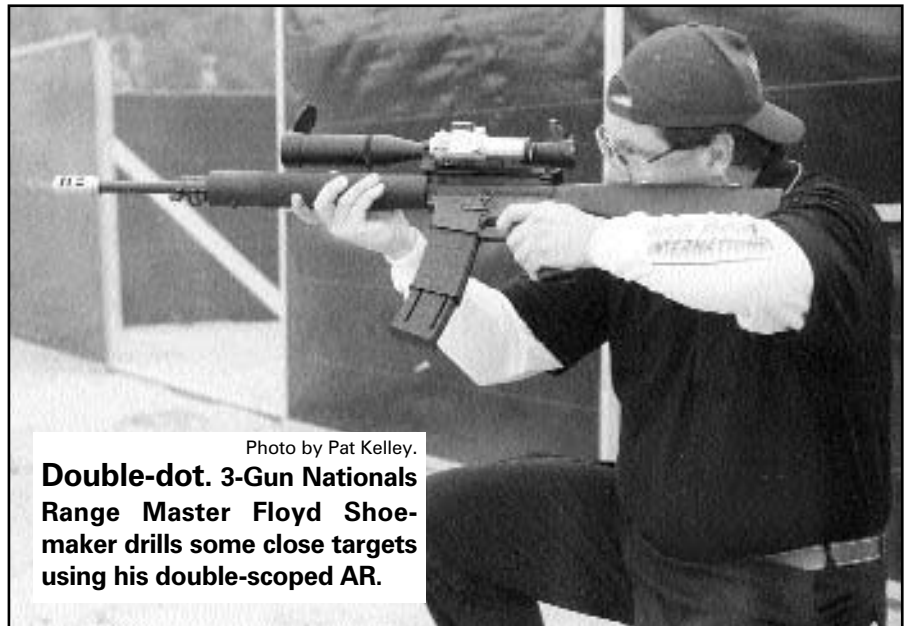


Photo by Pat Kelley.

Double-dot. 3-Gun Nationals Range Master Floyd Shoemaker drills some close targets using his double-scoped AR.

tempting the long-range rifle stage, this did not bode well!

The longest rifle shots appeared on rifle stage #1, “Oh say can you see?” where four self-resetting US poppers (painted green, arrgh!) were set at a reasonable 235 yards. Each popper had to be engaged twice. That 235 yards was reasonable until you fac-

tored in blowing dust and bullet-deflecting winds — then things get interesting! More than a few shooters with iron sights gave up after the second magazine had emptied with some of those GREEN poppers still unscathed. I hated those green poppers! I hit them all, but the green was very tough to see over iron sights.

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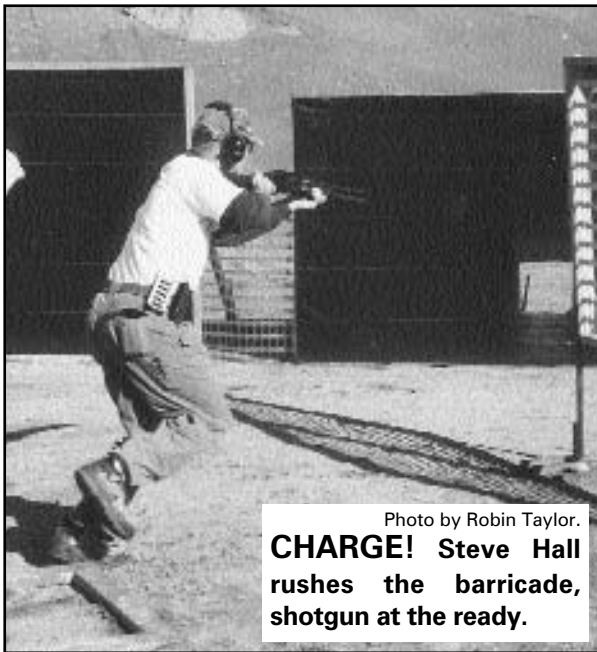


Photo by Robin Taylor.
CHARGE! Steve Hall
rushes the barricade,
shotgun at the ready.

Design-wise, the match stages were straightforward, with no shooter traps or overly difficult shots (at least not in windless conditions). A number of swingers added flavor to the rifle, pistol and shotgun stages, and the rifle stages in particular showed a lot of near-to-far variety, thanks to the generous use of that self-resetting steel.

With all pistol divisions represented, it was neat to see competitors solve the various shooting problems according to their choice of equipment. Six, 7, 8 or 10 rounds, DA, SA, DAO, or Saf-Action, everyone got a chance to see how their gun, gear and ability would stack up in comparison to others.

Shotgunners were expected to be able to reload fast and make use of their sights. Two of the three shotgun stages put a premium on your reloading skills while the nine-shot all-slug stage slowed shooters down enough that a reload would not be needed. A buzz circulated about a possible DQ hazard on that stage (“We’re Solid!”) but it turned out to be little more than shooter error. Still, when our squad (No. 2) came up to the stage, competitors were shooting over a barricade wall in order not to shoot a target through a port provided. This was to avoid the possibility of hanging up on the side of the port in the haste to get

down range. A couple of shooters in our squad shaved a number of seconds off the fast time using the port provided without coming close to any unsafe condition.

On the Open side of the match, the battle for the 3-Gun aggregate came down to Joe Desimone and Adam Sahlberg. What a great story here! Joe, a long time USPSA shooter (he qualifies as a senior) with a list of major match credits and a real penchant for 3-gunning, was expected to place well if not win. Joe’s accomplishments are numerous, and reputation formidable. Just in the 3-gun world, Joe has placed 3rd, 4th, and 5th at National matches ranging as far back as the 1991 3-Gun Nationals in Marysville, Wash. Joe is always a threat to win the overall at any match he enters. He frequently wins stages and gives all comers a run for their money.

Adam, on the other hand, is still considered a junior by USPSA standards. He may be only 18 but he is a card-carrying Open Master with plenty of major match experience. His youthful exuberance and natural skill at arms seem to carry him to Top Junior finishes match after match without the benefit of much practice. Why no practice? He’s too busy. Adam will both graduate high school and receive his AA degree from Spokane Falls Community College in June.

Was this a battle of “old age and treachery overcoming youth and skill?” Hardly. Both competitors are highly skilled and know the tricks of the trade. Joe may have an edge with his considerable match experience but Adam plays just as hard capitalizing on his own creative approach

to solving stages.

When the final scores were tallied, Joe Desimone, edged out Adam Sahlberg by less than two percentage points! Congratulations to Joe on winning the first ever Area 1 3-Gun Championship.

For the Limited match, the high wind situation on stage 1 caused big problems for some of the shooters – and I count myself among them. My good friends Jim Wall, David Neth and I compared our mistakes and misfortunes throughout the day and were prepared to chalk this one up to experience. Heck, Jim Sullivan had me by 40 percentage points on rifle stage #1 and I was in second place! Well, the large lady had not yet sung, and as it turned out, I won the Limited match title. Jim and David were close behind at 98.1 percent and 94 percent respectively. It was a great match for a first effort and I will be at the second annual match. I hope you will be there too.



Photo supplied by Pat Kelley.
Limited match winner Patrick Kelley drove a Glock 35 on the way to victory.