



Talbot on target! Handgun Metallic Silhouette

Communications Officer Sam Talbot continues his quest to shoot the SSAA disciplines, this month setting his sights on Handgun Metallic Silhouette.



Left to right are pig, Sam, ram, chicken, turkey.

This month I asked my colleague and pistol enthusiast Kate Fantinel to take me handgun shooting. I assumed she'd take me to an indoor range where we'd shoot 9mm handguns at paper targets. I could not have been more wrong. Instead, we travelled to the South Australian Handgun Metallic Silhouette Championships where we shot centrefire handguns among a variety of interesting firearms.

At first I was a little hesitant as my only previous experience with handguns was shooting air pistols a couple of times as a junior. But I was quickly relieved to

discover that handgun shooting really isn't much different from shooting a shotgun or rifle. In fact, holding a handgun feels like a natural blend between the two long arms - and it's a lot of fun.

Like other silhouette disciplines, Handgun Metallic Silhouette (HMS) is straightforward - try to knock down a target with each shot, much like a carnival game. The main complicating factor in the discipline is the wide array of firearms, matches and categories.

How it works

HMS uses both rimfire and centrefire

revolvers and pistols to knock down metal animal-shaped targets (silhouettes). These targets, beginning with the closest, are chickens, pigs, turkeys and rams. The targets are placed on steel stands in banks of five and set at a variety of known distances. Within a certain timeframe, competitors try to knock over a target with each shot. Whether they hit or miss, competitors move on to the next target from left to right, totalling 10 shots at 10 targets.

The firearms used must fall into one of four categories: Production, Revolver, Standing and Unlimited, and there are three

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official matches: Big Bore, Smallbore and Field Pistol, with each match having its own categories.

As you'll see, there are quite a few matches and categories to consider when shooting HMS, however the basic principles stay the same (knock down the targets). The main difference is the type of firearm as well as what sights can be used and from what position the category is shot.

Matches

Big Bore matches use centrefire handguns to knock down almost life-sized targets placed as follows: chickens at 50m, pigs at 100m, turkeys at 150m and rams at 200m. Big Bore matches are broken into several main categories for competition: Production, Revolver, Standing, Unlimited, Unlimited Standing, Unlimited Any Sight, Unlimited Half Scale and Unlimited Any Sight Half Scale.

Smallbore matches use .22 Long Rifle ammunition and rimfire handguns and the targets are placed at half the distance of Big Bore; chickens at 25m, pigs 50m, turkeys 75m and rams 100m. To compensate for the closer distances, targets are scaled down to three-eighths of the size used in Big Bore, which some people say makes Smallbore technically more difficult. There's also a 50m Rimfire match using one-fifth-scale targets which is popular at clubs with restricted ranges. Smallbore uses the same categories as Big Bore except it uses fifth scale instead of half scale where appropriate.

Field Pistol matches may also be run at clubs limited to 100m ranges. While using centrefire handguns the match is shot at Smallbore match distances, although it uses heavier targets than Smallbore. Field Pistol features just two categories - Production and Production Any Sight - both fired from the standing position only.

Categories

Production: This is the mainstay of HMS as it's where shooters can most

Don't hurt the animals!

People using ammunition that destroys parts of the silhouettes will not be looked on favourably. In fact, competitors can be barred or disqualified from a competition if their handgun cartridge load damages the targets. The maximum allowable bullet penetration is 1/8" on mild steel targets and 1/16" on tempered steel targets, or nearest metric equivalent(s). The silhouettes are not cheap to make or repair.



Lining up a shot complete with elbow pad and blast shield on leg.

easily compete on an even footing as far as equipment goes. The handgun must be used complete in form, finish and mechanical function as manufactured, with very few modifications allowed. The barrel length must not exceed 10.75" (273mm) and the weight of the handgun with all accessories must not exceed 4lb (1.8kg) unloaded. All types of actions are permitted except for bolt-action.

Revolver: As the name suggests, this handgun must be a revolver but also meet the production category rules. The handgun must be loaded with five rounds and fired as a revolver, although the same handgun may be loaded singly if later used in the Unlimited category.

Standing: Unsurprisingly, the standing category requires competitors to shoot standing up (as opposed to the Creedmoor position - more on that later). The firearm must also meet the production category rules and may be a single-shot, revolver or self-loader. The handgun may be held with one or both hands but with no support to the shooting arm between the wrist and shoulder.

Unlimited categories: This is where things change quite a bit. In Unlimited categories, the shooter's imagination can practically run wild as far as handgun selection is concerned. The only restrictions affecting an Unlimited handgun >

The Creedmoor

The Creedmoor position requires shooters lay on their back, prop their head up with one hand and rest the firearm on the side of their lower leg.



Des explains how to align the sights on the handgun.

Spotted!

A good spotter is very useful as they sit beside you and can indicate where your shot hit the silhouette. Rather than trying to verbally explain this since the firing line is loud and shooters must concentrate, it's most commonly done with a small picture of the target and magnet. With the best competitors regularly shooting 40/40, a good spotter can make the difference between winning and losing a shoot-off.

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are a barrel length and sight radius limit of 15" (381mm) and maximum weight of 6lb (2.7kg). There's no restriction on calibre or action type and many of the centrefire bolt-action handguns are chambered in rifle calibres.

As always, your local club will help determine which classes your firearm fits and how to shoot each of them. As you can see though, there's plenty of room to specialise or branch out, especially in the unlimited categories where hand reloading can become as much a part of the challenge as the shooting.

What you need

Besides ammunition and firearms, good quality hearing protection is essential for HMS. This is especially the case if using larger loads, as the shorter barrels mean noise level is particularly high. Eye protection is also recommended or required at some ranges whether you're shooting or spotting. An elbow guard or pad is usually worn when shooting from the Creedmoor position as well as a leg guard or blast shield.

As you move higher into competition the need for speciality loads may arise, as finding the right balance between enough power to knock over a silhouette and recoil can be crucial to success. After all, there are few things more frustrating than hitting a target and not having it fall over (it only counts as a hit if it falls over) because the projectile didn't have enough energy behind it.

Competition

I didn't shoot in full competition as it was the state championships but I did try a few handguns. The President of SA Handgun Metallic Silhouette club, Alan 'Des'

From the left: Remington XP-100 scoped, Freedom Arms revolver, Remington XP-100 open sights, Thompson Contender (Anschutz) and Wichita (left-handed).



Des spots for Sam.



Sam gets a feel for how much force is needed to knock over the 50lb target. This is why a large calibre is essential for this discipline.

Deslandes, was keen to show me Big Bore shooting which I was more than happy to try.

My first set of targets were to be chickens in the standing category. This meant shooting 50m with a Thompson Contender in .357. Des said with its 10" interchangeable barrel it would make an excellent production handgun for a beginner and you can probably find one for about \$800. "The Contender can take you all the way from beginner to international grade," said Des.

Since I was in the standing position, neither my hands or arms could be in contact with my body or clothing. Experienced shooters will bring the firearm close to their face for better accuracy but, being unfamiliar with the gun's recoil, I elected to give it a healthy distance. Some shooters leave the bare minimum distance of recoil between their eye and the firearm but, as tempting as it was to improve my accuracy, I decided not to risk a black eye.

The Contender felt quite natural to use and the aiming principles were similar to a shotgun. The front- and rear-sights need to be lined up and your focus should be on the front-sight. Having to pull back the hammer was a bit of new experience but I quickly became used to it.

After 10 shots at the chickens, six remained standing giving a score of 4/10. Even though multiple competitors were scoring 40/40 I was pretty pleased with myself. Buoyed with confidence it was time to move on to the unlimited category and try the Remington XP-100.

For my second run of silhouettes I shot at the rams a full 200m away. Since I was

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shooting in the unlimited category I was no longer required to shoot standing. Everything that isn't the standing position allows shooters to use the 'freestyle' position, which basically means whatever you like except for artificial supports. What this actually means though is using the Creedmoor position. At first it looks funny but it's quite effective and I felt balanced and steady almost straight away.

The ammunition in the XP-100 was .35 Remington and I must say the recoil surprised me on first pulling the trigger - it certainly had more kick than I was used to shooting .22 rifles. Unlike a shotgun which you can tuck into your shoulder, a handgun in the Creedmoor position will naturally recoil upwards quite a bit - an exhilarating experience the first time you feel it.

Perhaps it was adrenaline but I managed only one ram from my 10 shots, yet it was still an immensely satisfying feeling. The boom of the handgun followed by a moment's silence cut short by a gentle ping and the silhouette flopping backwards was a real highlight of the day.

Conclusion

There's no doubt obtaining an H-licence takes considerably more effort than just an A & B licence, however handgun shooting can be a very enjoyable and challenging form of our sport. Des says his club typically starts beginners with rimfire matches so they can learn the basics before progressing.

"Handloading is essential in Big Bore matches which can make it challenging for



The Thompson is a great production gun for a beginner.

beginners to get started, let alone the challenge of finding the right balance between recoil and maintaining enough velocity to knock the silhouette over," said Des. "But there's so much camaraderie at the range and we share all our reloading knowledge so anyone can get up to speed relatively quickly."

HMS presents a unique and satisfying

form of competition that allows shooters to compete in very different ways while remaining under the one discipline. It's common for competitors to shoot in multiple categories or matches or even all of them at a single competition. If handgun shooting is something you've always wanted to try, I highly recommend giving HMS a go. ●



Sam is distracted while Des explains the fundamentals.



Sam feels more recoil than he's used to.