

The Los Angeles Silhouette Club

The Masters And Its Guns The Masters International Shooting Championship By Larry Stuhlman

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There will always be a special place in my heart for this match. Its home for the last 18 years has been at beautiful PASA Park in Barry, Illinois. It is held the first week in August, and has drawn the top shooters from every conceivable shooting style known to man. They soon find out though, that being the best at just one particular form of handgun shooting just doesn't quite cut it. It requires lots of practice, dependable equipment, and hands-on knowledge of multiple shooting disciplines. Roll this all together with a top-notch Range Officer staff, a relaxed and friendly park atmosphere, and down home cooking that would make Grandma envious, and you have the Masters International Shooting Championship.



In order to accommodate all shooting skill levels, competition classes are divided into Professional, Sportsman (amateur), and Stock. There is also a Ladies category and a Junior division (under 18) for our shooters of tomorrow. Novice shooters are welcomed annually by additional prize incentives and the Masters Bring-A-Buddy program. If an existing Masters competitor can persuade a friend or fellow shooter to enter, he can shoot the

match for one half the standard entry fee in his Category for the first year only. This new shooter is eligible for all awards, trophies, and prizes just as if he had paid full price. In an effort to bring in more new shooters, or only to satisfy some of the competitors' desire to just "shoot more," the Stock Class was added to the Masters venue. The Stock Class is for Sportsmen shooters only with prizes the same as the regular Unlimited Class Masters competition. A Stock Class gun means an ordinary store-bought, factory production; regular over-the-counter gun with tuned-up original equipment parts only, no add-ons or accessories. Optical sights can be used for only two Events in Stock Class. This way a competitor that likes to play hard can run once with his high end, open class custom guns, then shoot again with his stock guns.

The Masters is a combination of three basic types of handgun shooting; Bullseye, Speed Shooting, and Metallic Silhouette. These three "Events" weigh equally into your total score. The first one we will cover is the Precision Event. This event uses the Camp Perry or the Olympic style Bullseye format. It is a test of the shooter's basic marksmanship abilities and is fired one handed, unsupported, in the classic Bullseye stance. It requires the competitor to shoot 45 shots at 45 total targets, using five shot strings, at 25 to 50 meters distances. Each string is under different time constraints ranging from 10 seconds

to 120 seconds. One phase is shot in "duel sequence". With your start position at International ready, a timer beep gives you 3 seconds to raise your gun and pull the trigger on a 25 meter target. You then go back to your rest and wait seven seconds for the next beep. This is repeated for 5 total shots to complete the string. The Precision Event uses Biathlon style steel reactive targets. When the target falls, a colored cover plate comes up to cover the hole. This way the shooter immediately knows if his hit was good and the spectators can keep track of their favorite shooter as it happens.

Popular guns for this event include Pardini, Hammerli, Smith & Wesson model 41, and Bennelli for the open class and Ruger, High Standard, or Browning for stock. The most important part is to find one that fits you and the way that you shoot. Since optics can be used here, the popular electronic red dot sight or the standard crosshair scope of various magnifications is seen on almost every gun on the line. These help squeeze as much pinpoint accuracy as possible out of your firearm.

The next stage, known as the Long Range Event, is modeled after the IHMSA handgun metallic silhouette competition. Like the precision event, there are 45 shots allowed to hit 45 targets. Only these metal plates are much larger, heavier, and a whole lot farther away. The plates come in 6", 9", and 12" diameter and are set at distances ranging from 75 to 200 meters. This is a very visually impressive match to watch. The neat rows of brightly painted fluorescent pink and green targets of different sizes set against the natural green valley



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of PASA before the covered twelve bay firing line is quite a sight. Then, when the start beep sounds, the air comes alive with the blast of a dozen guns firing and the clanging of metal plates as they are knocked from their stands. Long range shooting is usually very relaxed and centered mainly on accuracy, but the shorter time restrictions of each string at the Masters put everything in a whole different light. The first of three phases of Long Range requires you to shoot from a standing position at 10 targets 75 and 100 meters away, engaged at alternating distances, in 90 seconds. Then you shoot at five targets, set at alternating heights, in 60 seconds. The second phase can be shot from the freestyle shooting position of your choice. There, the same target engagement structure is used, but at distances of 100 to 200 meters. The 60 second string is at 200 meters and the staggered plates are a mere 6" size.



This should look familiar to silhouette shooters

Hitting all five of these is an accomplishment in itself. The last phase, also similar in structure, alternates from 150 to 200 meters. After all that, the last 60 second string of 9" plates at 150 meters must be engaged, once again, from a standing position. Sounds intense? It is!

The guns most commonly used are bolt action, single shot handguns in 6mm caliber or

higher. Good examples of these are the Savage Striker, Remington XP-100, or Ultra Lite Arms. Sometimes grips are modified to front, mid, or rear grip configuration, depending on the shooter's preference. Thompson Center Contenders with their multiple calibers are also excellent choices as well as some big bore revolvers in 44 Magnum or maybe Smith & Wesson's new 500 S&W Magnum revolver. Handgun scopes using between 4 to 10 power or sometimes a rifle scope with even more magnification are used, depending on the particular gun's setup. This event has sparked more imaginative gunsmithing amongst competitors than perhaps any other match in history. This is possibly one of the reasons for the popularity of the Stock Class in the last few years. It helps bring the focal point of the competition back from an equipment race to a truer test of a shooter's skill.

The fitting finish to peak the excitement at the Masters is the spectators' favorite part of the match, the Action Event. This is the fast paced, quick draw, split second competition that will bring out the best or the worst in a shooter. There is no perfect score as in Precision or Long Range. It is simply the fastest time wins. For those who have never seen this event, the shooter must draw his gun at the start beep from a surrender position and knock over five steel plates with a maximum six shots. There are three



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separate reactive target arrays steel plates of various sizes and shapes. The target array designs are usually changed every 3-4 years just to give it a new look and not get into "the same thing every year" rut like the Bianchi Cup. You are allowed three passes at each array. If you have a blow out or just don't shoot a string like you know you can, there is one "do over" throw out pass available to the competitor. The only stipulation is you get that new time whether you did better or worse. The shooter's time from his nine attempts are added together and his percentage of the fastest time is his score. There are also procedural penalties to consider. Two seconds will be added to your score for any plate left standing or any extra shot over the six allowed per string. So the desire to draw and hose must be tempered with control so as not to go over the edge.

Most guns used in Practical Shooting or the Steel Challenge would be good to go in the Action Event. Calibers from 9mm to .45 ACP with a power factor of 125 or more are acceptable. The gun list here could be extensive but John Browning's 1911 semi-automatic design and all of its clones are the most prevalent. There are also many Smith & Wesson revolvers along with Taurus, Glock, Sig, and many other Service type guns that are appearing once again because of Stock Class.

On the last day after the dust has cleared and the new Master has been crowned, its time to unwind and have some shoot-off fun. First is the Local Hero Shoot-off for the Sportsmen that shoot, but also serve as our beloved Range Officers and support staff of the Masters. This is followed by the High 16 Shoot-off where the best of the best square off Man on Man for final bragging' rights.

Past Masters winners include Alan Fulford-2, Frank Glenn-2, Brian Enos, Ken Tapp,

Merle Edington, and Wayne Bowker. But you couldn't talk about the Masters without mentioning its most prolific champion, Doug Koenig. Doug has come away with 10 top place wins in 18 years of the match. Among his many individual records Doug has done the one thing that the Masters creators never thought would be possible, score 100% in all three events. So if you have the idea of being the next Masters champion, Doug Koenig is the man to beat.

Throughout the course of the Masters there are also outstanding Rifle, Rimfire Rifle, and Shotgun side matches that can be attended during the competitors free time, all of which have separate entry and prize schedules.

There it is! The Masters is a fun but challenging shooting competition open to all types and levels of ability. Guns can range from high-end custom machines, to the good ol' plinkers and tin can shooters that you have lying around in your cabinet. With a little initiative and some good old-fashioned practice, anything is possible. Which brings us to the inevitable question; Are you ready to shoot the Masters?

Larry Stuhlman

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