

The Los Angeles Silhouette Club

The Best

By: Jim Taylor

Quite often I receive inquiries asking, "What is the best..." ... sights, grips, gun... whatever. I get the idea from these questions that many shooters are preoccupied with having "the best". While I certainly advocate having the best equipment that you can afford, I sometimes wonder about the mindset we have gotten into. Often, behind the desire to have "the best" is the desire to be able to win or come out First in whatever contest we are in. While that is not *wrong* in itself, the idea that *having the best equipment will help us win **IS!***

NOTE: THE BEST EQUIPMENT DOES NOT GUARANTEE A "WIN"!

When it comes to Handgun Hunting and Competition Target Shooting it certainly helps to have good equipment. "THE BEST" however does not mean you will win, place, or show. I know of people who consistently won matches simply because of being a better shot than everyone else. And I have seen people who lost matches decide that they had better trade their gun in on a better one, when all along what they needed was to practice more.

Some years ago I won several Hunters Pistol Matches using my old standard Ruger .45 Long Colt with standard sights. Not because it was better, but because the people I was shooting against were less practiced at it than I was. And... they were intimidated easily. Before the match while folks were sighting in I made some offhand long-range shots that were fairly tough and scared some of the better shots. They tried so hard they "blew" several stages.

I have friends who have old, antiquated rifles. No scopes. The finish on the gun is long gone. They get their deer every year. Or whatever game they are hunting. Because *they* are hunters. They rely first of all on themselves.

My wife won Combat Matches using an S&W Model 10 .38 Special, shooting against other ladies who used high-capacity autoloaders. The reason she won? She never had one miss all day. Some of the women were mighty fast. But... I don't care how fast you can shoot. If all you do is **miss real fast** it don't count.

See? What I am saying is *the person* is THE MOST IMPORTANT part of the equation. And it is the one we often leave out. I have seen people lose simply because of their attitude. I once shot a combat match against a local law enforcement officer. I used my Single Action Ruger .45 and he used his hi-capacity Glock .40 wonder gun. The course of fire was: from the holster at the whistle, draw, knock down 4 "pepper poppers" and then shoot a stop target. Whoever got their 4 and then knocked down the Stop target won.

I beat him several times using my old slow antiquated single action. He could shoot faster and fired a lot more shots than I did, but he was not connecting. When asked by a friend why he could not beat that "guy with the old gun" he answered, "That guy intimidates me." I did not ask him but I did wonder what he would do if he ever ran across someone who was intent upon hurting or killing him. THAT is real intimidation!

And therein lies part of the problem. A lot of *Armchair Gunfighters* have never been in a fistfight, let alone have someone shoot at them or try to carve them with a knife. If you have never stood toe to toe with someone and looked him in the eye and knew he was going to do his best to beat the crap out of you in the next few minutes... how do you think you will act when someone comes at you with a deadly weapon... and you can tell they are intent upon doing you serious harm? That is one reason the reaction of most people is, "I can't believe this is happening!" and "Why did they do this?" and on and on. Those kinds of questions only prove that these people have never faced the reality of the ugly things man can do to man.

Often, realizing that he has no mindset to deal with those kinds of situations, modern man tends to fall back on technology. It is the "I want the best..." syndrome. The truth is, FIRST OF ALL, we need to **BE the best internally**. Possessing a *will* to fight for what is right. A *will* that does not give up in the face of overwhelming odds against you. A *will* that kicks, bites, scratches and fights back to the last bit of consciousness. SECONDLY we need to have enough *internal motivation* to **practice consistently** so that we do our best with what we are using. You've all heard the old expression, "Beware the man with one gun."? The reason for it was, if all he has is one, then all he is shooting is it and most likely he is familiar with it and good with it.

Winners and Losers

There was a gunfight in the old town of Florence, Arizona in the last century. One of the men had the best equipment of the time, a Colt .45. The other man carried a small caliber gun. When they met the man with the .45 pulled his gun and shot the other man in the chest, missing his heart by an inch or two. That man in turn pulled his little gun and shot his attacker 4 or 5 times and killed him. And, even though nearly heart-shot... he survived!

When I worked for the Department of Corrections we had an inmate who had been in a gunfight with several Policemen. While they had the best equipment he had only a cheap .32 automatic. They came into a bar after him and in the gunfight - for he resisted - he shot both of them. He would have gotten away but a ricochet bounced into his head and slowed him down considerably. He carried a large dent in his skull and of course, it was looked upon with pride by the prison population. I am not making light of fine Officers of the law being gunned down. My point is, the best equipment does not assure you of winning!! (Neither does being on the right side.)

Most of the time it is the *person* who is better, not the equipment. Oh, they may use the best that is available. (or they may not) But it is the person themselves that makes the difference.

In a town I used to live in resided a man who considered himself a bad man. (in the old-time sense = tough, mean, hard) One night in bar he was pushing his way around and someone braced him. He whipped out his Buck folder and stuck it in this man's chest. The guy backed up, pulled the knife out of his own chest and carved up the guy who stuck him so badly that he died. It was ruled Self Defense. The first guy only *thought* he was a bad man.

The Rest of the Story: It Pays to be Lucky!

Every one in Fort Worth knew that Jim Courtwright and Luke Short were going to fight. It was only a matter of time. And the money in town was bet on Jim. Able to draw and shoot at lightning speed with either hand he was known in those days as a "ring-tail whizzer with red-striped wheels". Neither of the two men were the kind to back up at all. On the evening of Feb.8, 1887 they came together on the street and began to argue. In the course of events both men pulled their guns. Luke Short fired first and missed Jim Courtwright by a foot (even though standing arms-length apart) except for the thumb on Courtwright's gun hand. Luke Short's "miss" took Courtwright's thumb off. As Courtwright went to shift the gun to his other hand Short stepped in and shot him 3 times, killing him.

That he was not a good shot Luke Short acknowledged. He once said the reason he used the .45 Colt was that if he "...*missed the first shot the blast would set his opponents clothes on fire and distract them long enough for him to shoot again...*"!! Get this... he is talking about missing at arm's length!!

But, he was a gunman. It takes something to stand toe to toe with a man, look him in the eye and be prepared to take as good as is given. Sometimes you would rather be lucky than good.

Don't Misunderstand Me

I am not against replacement sights, new things, experimenting with this or that. What I want to remind you of is this: It is the PERSON who does the winning, not necessarily the equipment.

Get the best you can afford. Use what pleases you and fits your personality, your needs and your desires. But **PRACTICE** with it. *Get good with it.* Use it until it is Second Nature to you. Then when you make that great shot on the buck of your dreams and someone says, "Wow, what a neat gun." you will smile and say, "Yes, it works pretty good." - knowing all along that it was *you* who worked pretty good.

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