

Equipment: Facts and Fallacies

By Anthony Finn

As you know, when you are at a shoot there is always time to sit around and talk about rifles, scopes, ammo and loads etc. Everyone has their favourites and is happy to share their ideas and experiences with others. This is generally very interesting and informative but may be confusing to the newcomer who doesn't understand why anyone would "Index their case" and "Turn their necks" trying to find an extra "1/4 of a Minute"

My aim in writing this is to try to dispel some myths about what is needed to shoot good scores. I am not claiming to know it all, rather I wish to pass on what I have learned from those that have taught me and from my own mistakes. It is primarily aimed at newer Silhouette shooters but we all need to be reminded occasionally that Rifle Metallic Silhouette is a test of the shooter's skill not the cost of the equipment. I will base article this on Rimfire to simplify things (for the writer).

The most common misunderstanding shooters make is that they need the most expensive rifle, scope and ammo to shoot big scores. Wrong! It's true that good equipment helps but you still have to learn to shoot it.

Rifles:

I occasionally have people say to me something like, "I can't shoot better scores because I only have this old Brno (or Stirling, Norinco etc.) and you blokes have these flash, heavy barrel target rifles".

This is not necessarily true; I have vivid memory of being convincingly beaten in a shoot-off for a World Championship Medal by a fellow with a Brno. I was using a heavy barrel German Target/Silhouette rifle. The simple fact is he could shoot his rifle better than I could shoot mine.

The lesson is simple; You can't buy scores, you must earn them by training and practicing with your rifle until you can shoot it well.

It is important that your rifle will:

- Shoot reasonably accurately (eg. 1 - 1.5 MOA is fine)
- Be reliable and consistent
- Function safely and smoothly.
- Fit you properly.

It is not important that your rifle:

- Is a particular brand or model.
- Is a particular weight, style, colour.

What rifle do I use? A hunting rifle, Anschutz 1710 FWT. It is a lightweight fibreglass stocked, standard factory rifle with a 2-pound trigger. I use it for both "Heavy Rifle" and Hunting Rifle" events and I have spent hundreds of hours shooting and practicing with it and, as a result, it feels natural and I can shoot it well.

Scopes:

The main attributes for a suitable scope for Silhouette are:

- Target turrets (you can do without them, but it's hard work).
- It must be repeatable in its adjustment of Elevation and Windage.
- Sufficient magnification to clearly see the fall of each shot (I recommend 12X as a minimum, but more on that later).

Clear and bright to discern the target properly (if you can't see it, you can't shoot it) There is no need to race out and spend a fortune on a scope, practice with the best one (as in most suitable) you have until you feel that more power or a better quality target image will allow you to shoot better. Try looking through some of the other shooters different types of scopes. Most shooters will be happy to let "new chums" have a go with their rifles because we all needed help when we started out, didn't we?

There is one brand and style of scope that is used worldwide by the majority of Silhouette shooters. The Leupold Target scopes in 12x, 24x, 36x and 6.5 - 20 variable power scopes with target turrets. Why? Because they have proven to meet the above requirements (and more) and have a lifetime warranty even if you are not the original purchaser. There are other fine scopes that will do the job but Leupold is a safe choice that will work and no, I am not sponsored by them (unfortunately). These scopes are not cheap but, because of the lifetime warranty, you only need to buy it once.

I should remind you again that a good (or expensive) scope will not automatically mean big scores. Practicing correct technique will bring better scores.

Magnification:

What is the correct scope magnification or power to use? This is not easy to answer as it is largely a personal choice but, how will you know what will suit you? This is where a variable power scope is great because you can try different power settings until you find a compromise between target image clarity/magnification and the increased perception of your wobble (rifle & image movement). Some people use 6 power and swear by it while others scoff at anything less than 36 power.

I use a variable and shoot Chickens and Pigs at about 13-14 power and Turkeys and Rams at 16 power because that is what I find comfortable for me. I recently used a 36-power scope on an air rifle and found it quite difficult at first but still shot the same scores I would normally expect, so maybe the power you use doesn't make any difference anyway. I recommend you try different things and see what suits you, start off with less power (eg. 12 - 14) and work up (if you need to) as your "hold" gets better.

Crosshair or Dot?

This is another personal choice issue. The target dot is a popular choice because it gives a clear aiming point whilst the traditional crosshair or duplex style is well known and people are familiar with it. Another factor is the suitability for other disciplines or hunting the rifle may be used for. There are several sizes of dots

available, 1/8", 3/8", 1/2" and 5/8" to name a few so try some different types and see what you like.

Trigger:

The common thinking seems to be that you need a super light trigger to shoot well. This is not necessarily true; in fact it can be a hindrance when you are standing up shooting. I know of people that have set their triggers so light that they are scared to touch them until the dot is on the target and then snatch at it possibly upsetting the rifle's balance and causing a miss. A good crisp trigger that will break in the same way each time and is a little heavier in weight (within reason) is likely to be of more benefit to most people. You will find excellent shooters that use light triggers and excellent shooters that use heavier triggers. Again, the key is practise and familiarity.

Ammunition:

The most expensive ammo must shoot the best in my rifle right? Wrong, luckily that doesn't have to be the case. Rimfire rifles are strange things, it seems each one likes different ammo and the price or perceived quality has little to do with it. The best idea is to buy a packet of several different types/brands and try them in your rifle. You may find the \$3.00 Winchester shoots as well as the \$20.00 Eley. In any event, if the \$3.00 stuff shoots 5/8" groups at 50 metres and the \$20.00 stuff shoots 1/2" groups then there is no real benefit when you are standing up because we can't hold good enough to get an advantage. For example, my best scores and some of my National Records have been shot with \$2.30 / packet ammo.

So, to sum up:

- You can't buy scores.
- Learn to shoot the rifle you have before upgrading unnecessarily.
- There are no short cuts, training and practice of correct techniques is the way to success.

- Silhouette is a test of the shooter not the equipment.
- Enjoy the success gained by the effort you have put in.
- Shoot for the fun of it.