

42 The Case for Combat Pistol Matches

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Photo by Ed Leavitt

"Combat" pistol matches get more than their fair share of criticism of the "shooting these games will get you killed" variety, usually from those who've never fired them, sometimes from those who do. However, I believe a serious case can be made – for those of the self-defense-oriented handgun "martial artist" persuasion – that competing on a regular basis in USPSA/IPSC or IDPA is the best training you can get, for the following reasons:

THE GUNS

Most people "just know" you need a highly specialized, extremely expensive .38 Super compgun to fire IPSC. This is untrue and always has been.

There are six gun-type-based divisions of competition in USPSA (the United States Practical Shooting Association is the active body of IPSC in the US). In all but one of these – Open – you *can't* use a compgun. For self-defense practice, the two divisions most applicable would be Production (for non-single action autos) and Single Stack (for single-stack 1911s). In both divisions, restrictive rules on gun modification ensure the piece must be street appropriate, and holster/mag pouches must be concealment oriented and carried behind the hips. Production and Single Stack rules mimic IDPA. If you want to compete with a self-defense appropriate handgun out of realistic concealed carry gear, USPSA and IDPA are for you.

IMPROVED GUN HANDLING SKILLS

Fire a USPSA/IDPA match at a good club, you'll be exposed to shooters who possess a skill level with a gun their hands you wouldn't believe possible if you hadn't seen it with your own eyes. Once you KNOW that skill level exists, the door opens to your own improvement. It's much more difficult to chart new territory in your own skill level than it is to do something you've already seen done. No one knows more about how to fire

a handgun fast and well than serious, highly skilled combat pistol competitors. Frankly, in my opinion, any self-defense-oriented handgunner who honestly believes he has nothing to learn from a USPSA Master/Grand Master or IDPA Master class shooter is a frickin' idiot.

Competing in USPSA/IDPA forces shooters to do things they might never have done otherwise: ultra-fast draws from the holster, learning how to deliver multiple, rapid-fire center hits on target in an extremely short time frame (a very useful skill to have in a gunfight), multiple-target work, shooting while moving, one-hand-only shooting (both left and right hand), fast mag changes, etc. You'll do this with the example and – if you're self-confi-

dent enough to ask for it – aid of some extremely good shooters who've already spent years figuring out how to do all this stuff very, very well.

MOVEMENT

On conventional pistol ranges you're limited to standing bolt upright, in one spot, doing slow fire on a single target. In a defensive emergency



In the "real world," engaging your opponents with accurate aimed fire while moving to cover is a very useful skill to have in your bag of tricks.

we tend to react like we've trained, which means under stress your reaction will be to draw your gun, stand bolt upright in the open, and return fire. This is a good way to get yourself killed. It's like we've built ourselves a little box out of which, under stress, we simply can't move.

By contrast USPSA/IDPA stages (with the exception of some "standards" exercises designed as tests of pure gun handling skill) usually *require* movement. On most stages you have to move to a certain point before you can begin engaging targets, then move again to engage more. This gets you in the habit of moving with a gun in your hand, even in the opening moments of an engagement. It breaks you out of the box.

Many USPSA/IDPA stages will either out-and-out require engaging targets while moving, or the opportunity is there to run a much faster time if you possess the ability to shoot accurately while