Story and Photo by Duane Thomas

The United States Practical Shooting Association (USPSA), the governing body of the International Practical Shooting Confederation (IPSC) in the US, will soon implement a provisional division called Single Stack, in which competitors must fire a single-stack 1911 with holster and mag pouches located behind the hips. In order to appreciate just how important this is, you need to understand a little about the history of IPSC.

When proto-IPSC began it was very much a single-stack 1911 .45 vs. Browning Hi-Power 9mm game. Some folks figured the 14-shot capacity and lighter recoil of the 9mm Hi-Power could offset the heavier recoil and eight-shot capacity of the 1911 .45. (In short order eight-round 1911 .45 mags arose to shoehorn one more cartridge into a standard-length tube.) The 1911 swiftly came to dominate combat pistol competition, partly due to its Major caliber but mostly it was a matter of durability. For the first time we had people firing, literally, 100,000 rounds a year and the 1911 was the only gun 30 years ago that could stand up to it.

Time passed, the desire for better match guns fueled an explosion in technology. First came muzzle-flip-reducing compensators in the 1980s, then in the early 90s electronic red dot sights and ultra high-cap magazines (think in terms of 28 rounds of 38 Super). As always, technology influenced course design. Suddenly we had 50-round courses of fire. Because we had the magazine capacity, we wanted to use it. Likewise, stages with 25-yard head shots – because with dot-sight guns it could be done, comparatively easily. An iron-sighted single-stack 1911 was no longer competitive. The gun to have was a multi-thousand-dollar, polymer-framed, modular 1911 with a “big stick” high-cap magazine, dot sight and compensator. Highly refined, with finicky reliability, and so bulky it’s useless for anything but firing an IPSC match.

Let me make it very clear I’m not going into that tired old “IPSC competition guns bear no resemblance to real-world self-defense pieces” song and dance. Some people think all IPSC shooters use raceguns, which is simply untrue. Even at the height of racegun popularity in early 1990s, only about 30 percent of IPSC shooters used them. Today that percentage is even smaller.

Holster rules have always been fairly freestyle, in time evolving to a system where you could position the holster anywhere and in any fashion, as long as it was affixed to a belt around the waist. As the guns moved further away from street-appropriate pieces, so too did the holsters, until they were so skeletonized they almost weren’t there.

So IPSC up until the mid-1990s was, with very few restrictions, a freestyle sport equipment-wise. Unlike some of my fellow “martial artists” I don’t condemn that. A lot of good came out of it (though that’s a topic for another article). Eventually, there were enough complaints from those wanting a venue in IPSC to fire less-specialized guns that USPSA introduced what was at first called Stock

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