



Saul Kirsch

# Thinking Practical Shooting

A Guide to Outstanding Match Performance

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*Dedicated to my parents  
who were always there  
to encourage me to achieve my goals.*

*And to my wife, Judith  
for understanding and supporting  
my passion for this sport.*

## Foreword

Competition shooting has been part of my life for the past 20 years or so. It all began when I was 12 years old. My family and I spent a holiday weekend at a resort offering many outdoor activities, including archery. That attracted me like a magnet, and needless to say, I never once went horseback riding or rafting. It was my first time on a shooting range of any kind – and I was hooked! I spent the entire vacation learning to shoot a bow, and discovered the immense satisfaction of achieving a well-executed shot. Target shooting, unlike many other activities, offers you immediate feedback. The hole is right there in the bull's-eye for everyone to see. Well, usually it's only you – but that is enough!

We returned from our vacation and I had no doubt that I was going to pursue this activity. There was no archery club in the neighborhood, but there was an Olympic small-caliber range. So I took up Olympic air rifle shooting, all I was allowed to do at that age. I shot Olympic rifle for 10 years, and found it both extremely difficult and addictive. I qualified for the Israeli National Junior team at age 15, and then went on to shoot for the Israeli Olympic team. During my military service I spent over 40 hours a week on a shooting range, training and coaching.

I did not achieve the same international success in Olympic shooting as I have in Practical shooting. I won national level matches, but no major international titles. But I do believe that those years of training and competing in Olympic shooting events greatly contributed to my later success in IPSC, a totally different shooting discipline.

My move from Olympic to Practical shooting began when a friend invited me to a match that was part pistol, part rifle. I owned but had never competed with a CZ-75 pistol, and this was an opportunity. The rifle stages were to be shot with an M-1, a gun I was familiar with. So I figured – why not?

That match was an eye-opener. The IPSC crowd is very different from the Olympic shooters I grew up with, and I was amazed to see how those guys could shoot a pistol. Back then, to me, aiming meant seeing a perfect sight picture for at least a good part of a second. These shooters were firing shots in a fraction of that time – and hitting targets! That was my first taste of IPSC competition, and I loved it.

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## Introduction

I had been mulling over the concept of this book for months, and shared my thoughts with some friends. “Great idea!” they all said. “You should definitely do that. What will the book be about?”

“Practical shooting, of course,” I replied, “everything except technique.” This continually brought raised eyebrows. “You plan to write an entire book about IPSC shooting and never mention technique? No draws, no reloads, no shooting on the move?”

“Yes,” I replied, “that’s the plan.”

I believe with complete conviction that there is much more to a successful performance than technique alone, and I know most top level shooters would agree. But if you ask anyone to explain the other factors in Practical shooting, they immediately dive into the warm waters of technique, and do not emerge until the lesson is over. Let’s face it – technique is easier to teach, easier to grasp, and improvement at most levels can be seen and felt very quickly on the practice range.

The same applies to published materials. A great deal of quality information is out there on the proper execution of Practical shooting, but very few books or DVDs cover the other elements of the sport.

Practical shooting includes knowing how to deal with pressure, how to prepare for a big event, and how to train effectively. Understanding the rules, following the scoring, and knowing how to interact with Range Officers and Match Officials all affect your performance.

The top shooters usually learn these things the hard way, through years of experience and dozens of competitions. *Nothing beats experience*, the saying goes, and that may well be true. But I believe that progress can be accelerated if you have access to the right information, and can implement it properly.

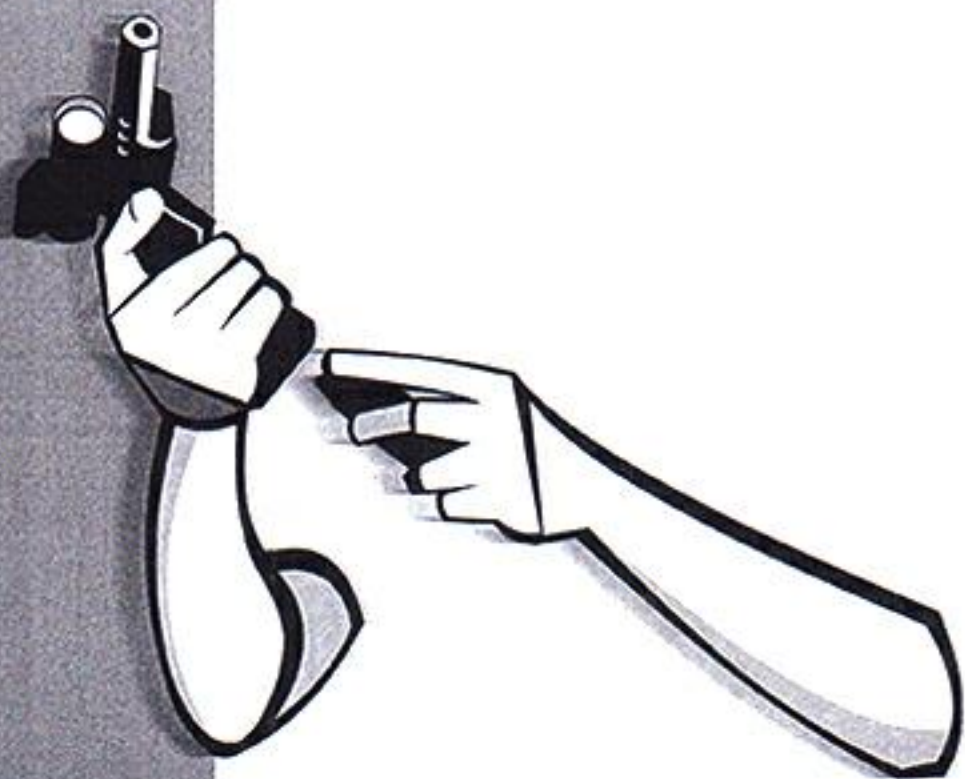
Practical shooting is probably the most diversified of the shooting disciplines, and as such, one of the more complex to master. It is no coincidence that many top shooters stay up there for years. It just takes so long for newcomers to learn all they need to know in order to defeat the champions.

Great Practical shooting encompasses much more than just the ability to trigger fast and hit targets, move well between positions, or shoot great prone or kneeling. I am not suggesting for one moment that you disregard technique entirely! No, not at all. Particularly as you learn the game, you should seek the best coaching and instruction possible to ensure your technical foundation is solid and correct.

But I am saying you should always keep in mind that technique is only the foundation – it is not the entire structure. In the following pages we will examine the other elements of this challenging sport.

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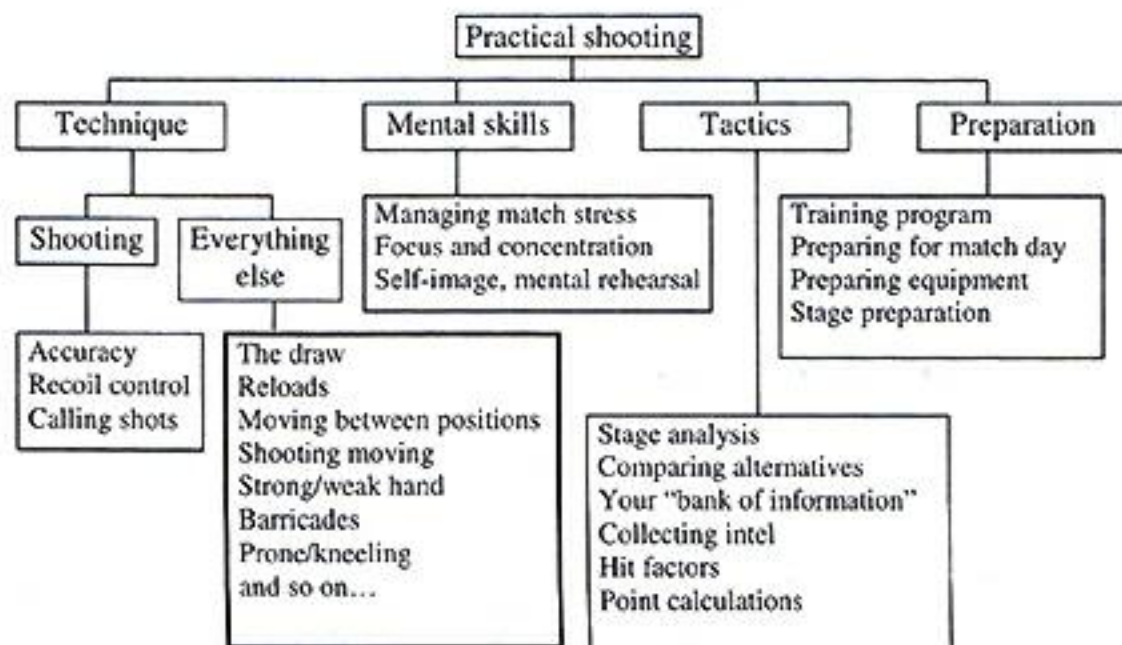
## The Basics of Practical Shooting



## Elements of Practical Shooting

My training as an engineer may perhaps be the reason why I like to analyze Practical shooting and break it down into components that are easily understood and practiced. In my opinion, the smaller the elements you can identify and understand, the more effective your training. Keeping things simple while doing lots of repetitions is the best way to make progress, and climb the learning curve.

The following chart is a visual representation of what I consider to be the main elements of Practical shooting:



The list in each subsection is by no means complete, and will be discussed in more detail in later chapters. This book aims to cover everything except the topics marked in the bold square. In other words, everything except the elements of technique.

Let's expand a little on each section of this chart.

## Technique

Good technique is necessary for successful IPSC shooting. Of course, opinions vary as to the correct way of making a reload, drawing the gun, or moving into a shooting position. In this book it is not my intention to go into the technical aspects of shooting. Those are more efficiently explained in videos and pictures, and some great coaching tapes from some of the best shooters in the world are available. I recommend you view them. Getting the right coaching can often save months in your learning curve, and allow you to progress much faster.

I do, however, recommend that you question everything. Just because a coach is also a world class shooter does not mean he has all the answers, or is teaching you a technique that is best for you. What works for one person does not always work for another. We all have our own individual style of shooting and particular physical build. When considering a new technique, whatever its source, always ask yourself, "Why do this? What is the gain?" If you cannot find a logical reason that convinces you doing it this way is better – why do it?

But if you do see logic in a new technique, give it some time before rejecting it. Everything you do that is new will always feel strange and often worse than what you are already doing. If it makes sense – give it a chance. Do not be afraid to experiment with your technique. It is often the fastest road to progress.

An old coaching saying goes, *Keep on doing what you've always done, and you will keep on getting the results you've always had.* If you want to move forward, a change is sometimes the right move. Keep in mind that most changes are easily reversed. You can usually go back if necessary.

When examining technique in Practical shooting, I see a division between the skills required to actually shoot a pistol accurately at high speed, and everything else. I also take this approach when working on technique, in my own practice sessions, and when coaching.

## The actual shooting

Shooting a handgun fast is not really difficult. Take any beginner to the range, give him some basic training and a bucket of bullets, and he will be able to shoot 2-3 rounds per second without any problem. Shooting accurately is not all that difficult either. Some good coaching, some practice, and you're there. However, shooting a handgun fast and accurately is a skill we Practical shooters spend

years trying to perfect. Speed and accuracy in shooting are conflicting requirements, and that is the challenge.

When analyzing high speed shooting, I believe you can isolate a few individual skills that need to be developed:

- Accuracy
- Recoil control
- Calling your shots

These technical elements of shooting will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

### **Everything else**

Under this heading I include the many skills and abilities an IPSC shooter needs to have in order to excel in this sport. This includes everything besides actually “shooting the gun”. Skills such as drawing from various start positions, loading the gun during a draw, reloading, moving between or out of positions, setting up in a new position, shooting on the move, shooting strong hand or weak hand, shooting around barricades, shooting in prone or kneeling positions, and on and on. The list is long, and that is precisely what makes IPSC the fascinating sport it is. A good shooter needs to learn, practice, and master many diversified skills.

It is important to analyze your shooting and know if you have a solid technical ability in all these fields. If not – you know what to practice. Avoid the trap of constantly training what you are already good at, just because it is more fun.

### **Mental skills**

Everyone agrees that mental skills are as important, if not more so, than technical skills. And yet many shooters do nothing to develop or improve them. They are then surprised and disappointed when they are unable to meet their own expectations in a big match. We will discuss this aspect of IPSC shooting in detail in this book.

### **Tactics**

Tactics is another aspect making IPSC a unique shooting discipline. All other shooting sports are very repetitive in nature: you come to the range, you set up your equipment, always facing the same target at the same distance, always standing at the same height, and so on. Don't get me wrong – this doesn't make Olympic shooting easy. It isn't, but it is repetitive by definition.

IPSC is quite different. Here each stage is unique. You never see the same stage twice, and you need to decide on the spot how to shoot it. This is your decision alone, and one that influences the outcome of your performance. Refer to the chapters on Tactics and Training for more information.

### **Preparation**

Matches are usually not won or lost on the day of competition. They are determined long before, based on the quality of preparation done by the top competitors. Your training program affects how rapidly and efficiently you progress. Preparing your equipment allows you to have a problem-free match (or not). Your mental preparation for a stage or a match greatly influences your performance.

A clever saying says it all: *Success is never accidental. It is a prepared-for event!*



Saul Kirsch is a top international IPSC shooter with extensive world-wide competition experience. Over the past 10 years he has won numerous level III matches and the European Steel Challenge twice. He was placed second at the European IPSC Championships and fifth overall at the 2002 World Shoot. Saul is a qualified sports instructor and accomplished coach. Amongst his students are former and current

Practical shooting champions of Israel, Germany, Italy, Austria, Denmark, Greece, and the Netherlands.

In this, his second book, Saul shares with his readers 20 years of competition experience and know-how. His unique background, first as an Olympic rifle shooter and then as a Practical shooting competitor, gives him a profound understanding of the key elements required to excel under the pressure of competition.

In his clear, friendly style, Saul explains many of the complex issues affecting match performance. Topics include accuracy and recoil control, understanding IPSC scoring, the mental process of peak performance, visualization, match preparation, match and stage tactics, managing match stress, physical training and nutrition, goal setting, building a training program, and many more.

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