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Too Fast

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Not long ago, I attended the demonstration of a pneumatic target system designed for pistol training. A crowd of police officers also gathered to see this new device. We all watched as pneumatically-actuated steel plates popped up and down from behind a steel sill. As you might imagine, this system allowed the operator to pop targets up and down in sequence, and for adjustable amounts of exposure time.

The manufacturer had a well-known, competitive shooter on hand to demonstrate his system. Ever the showman, the competition shooter performed several shooting exhibitions, using a typical hyper-tricked-out, race-gun/monstrosity and utterly impractical, competition leather gear. In addition, like all pistol competitors these days, he wore satin pajamas full of assorted, commercial messages. While entertaining, I wondered what the purpose of this exhibition was, other than pure amusement. When I put this question to the manufacturer, he replied that he wanted to show us all that his system can train police officers to shoot "really fast."

"Why is that important?" I asked. "Well, don't you want to be able to shoot fast?" was his exasperated reply. He went on by pointing out that his hired pretty-boy could consistently shoot plates which were exposed for a mere three-quarters of a second, from a range of eight meters, all from the ready position.

"I'm not sure I'm making myself clear," I continued, "but I need to point out that your exhibition shooter, although starting from the ready position, has his finger in contact with the trigger all the time, even when he was not on target. Further, his signal to shoot is ANY movement of the target. Again, this is all entertaining, but it is NOT training."

I reminded him that, in all legitimate, defensive firearms training, we teach students to keep trigger fingers in register until (1) there is a legitimate threat, (2) the sights are aligned on the target, and (3) the shooter has made the decision to fire.

I continued, "It's indeed dramatic to be able to hit a plate in under a second from the ready position, but I DON'T THINK ANY OF US CAN EVEN ACCESS, MUCH LESS ACCURATELY EVALUATE, A THREAT THAT FAST, and training people to shoot things simply because they move, is not something that will be found in any legitimate defensive firearms training curriculum. Being able to neutralize a lethal threat quickly is surely an important skill, but incorporating unsafe, indeed reckless, habits into one's protocol in an effort to shoot 'really fast' is an obvious misdeed."

Not surprisingly, the manufacturer ignored my comments and went on with his demonstration as if nothing had happened.

Lesson: SLOW DOWN AND HIT! Don't be mesmerized, or even particularly impressed, by pajama-wearing trick/exhibition shooters. They are entertainers, not fighters. They know nothing about fighting and don't even carry guns.

Our colleagues at the FBI recently re-discovered, painfully, that the " fingers-on-triggers-at-inappropriate-times" syndrome is the source of no end of grief! How many catastrophes will it take for us to cement this lesson into our being?

Legitimate training is more than just ego-massaging masturbation. We are preparing officers for the fight of their lives! There are two kinds of pain: the (1) Pain of Discipline, and the (2) Pain of Regret. You can avoid one, but not both!

"The grave is a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace."

John