

## Rimfire Sporter – Part I

# Rimfire Sporter Shooting – Part I

## Objectives – Rifles & Equipment – Safe Range Operations – Course of Fire

*By Gary Anderson, DCM Emeritus*



*Above, 17-year-old Ryan Ward from Greenville, NC, displays the sitting position and typical equipment and clothing that are part of Rimfire Sporter shooting. This is an ideal shooting discipline for junior smallbore rifle programs because the rifles are readily available, the required skills are easy to teach and organizing competitions is relatively straightforward.*

Rimfire Sporter is still a new shooting sports discipline, but it has already become one of America's fastest growing shooting games because it is accessible, affordable and offers a uniquely challenging course of fire. Rimfire Sporter was developed as an alternative to traditional smallbore target competitions where high costs and stifling equipment complexity now make it prohibitive for new shooters to get started. Rimfire Sporter is ideally suited for getting junior shooters into target shooting because its rifles are readily available in almost every community, no special equipment is necessary or even allowed and almost any safe outdoor

range can be used for Rimfire Sporter matches.

This two-part **On the Mark** article provides a detailed description of Rimfire Sporter and how shooting clubs can incorporate it into their junior programs. It provides practical information and answers to questions for two specific groups:

1. Shooting club instructors: What do I need to know and teach to start a Rimfire Sporter program in our club and get juniors off to a great start?
2. Youth and their parents: What do we need to learn and practice to enjoy shooting Rimfire Sporter and progress in it?



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*Rimfire Sporter takes its name from the rifles that are used: .22 cal. rimfire rifles that do not weigh more than 7.5 lbs. and that are already owned by most gun owners are the featured equipment in this fast growing shooting game.*

This is a primer on Rimfire Sporter that describes its basic rules, equipment and course of fire. Part two in the next issue of **On the Mark** will examine the marksmanship skills new shooters must learn and practice as well as how to organize Rimfire Sporter competitions and compete in them. A specific goal of these articles is to encourage shooting clubs with no current junior rifle program to consider starting a Rimfire Sporter program.

### What is Rimfire Sporter Shooting?

Rimfire Sporter takes its name from the rifles used. A founding concept was to make this a game everyone could shoot by letting them use smallbore plinking, rabbit or squirrel rifles that most gun owners already own. Anyone who owned one of these rifles could shoot it in a Rimfire Sporter match without having to buy a special rifle and equipment. Rimfire Sporter shooters practice this game either as a lifetime recreational activity where they can enjoy the fun and camaraderie of target shooting for many years or as a starter discipline to prepare them for participation in other target events.

The rules were crafted so all types of smallbore rifles could be used, whether they are semi-automatics or manually operated. To keep conditions equal, shooters with manually operated rifles get a little extra time in rapid-fire series. There are separate classes for telescopic and open sighted rifles. Range officers give shooters with tube magazines sufficient time to load. To make sure special match rifles are not brought in to turn this game into an equipment race, rifles are limited to 7.5 pounds, must have triggers that lift at least 3.0 pounds and must be configured as standard sporter rifles. To keep equipment costs down and make Rimfire Sporter even more accessible, specialized shooting jackets or other performance-enhancing equipment are not allowed.

When Rimfire Sporter was created, a decision was made to use paper targets, not steel or other types of targets, for three reasons. Paper targets with progressively more difficult scoring rings offer the best method of evaluating real marksmanship skill. Second, shooting on paper targets is the most effective way to teach shooting skills; paper targets show all shots, not just hits, and offer the best possibilities for corrective instruction. Third, paper targets are the least costly and safest way to set up shooting ranges to accommodate large numbers of shooters.



*At the 2014 Eastern CMP Games, 15-year-old Sam Payne from Kingston, GA, fired a near perfect 599 x 600. Payne competes in Rimfire Sporter matches as a member of the Bartow 4-H S.A.F.E. club team.*



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The Rimfire Sporter course of fire was modeled after the highpower rifle National Match Course. The objective was to test a variety of rifle marksmanship skills with a course of fire that new and young shooters could complete while still providing a truly challenging test for the best shooters. Three positions, prone, sitting or kneeling and standing are used. The course includes both slow-fire and rapid-fire stages for each position. Rapid-fire series start from a standing ready position to test shooter skills in quickly getting into position and orienting it on the target. Most Rimfire Sporter matches are shot outdoors where climate conditions and wind are also a factor. The 16 years of its history has shown that even the newest and youngest shooters can get 60 hits in 60 shots while no match winner has yet posted a perfect 600 x 600. But, a few have now come close.

Since the first Rimfire Sporter match was held at the Wolf Creek Olympic Range near Atlanta in 1998, this game has grown to become one of the most popular shooting disciplines in the country. The CMP became the national governing and rule-making body in 2001. The first National Rimfire Sporter Match was held at Camp Perry during the 2002 National Matches. Today, this is the largest smallbore rifle championship in the USA with over 400 individual competitors. Clubs all over the country offer 150 CMP-sanctioned Rimfire Sporter clinics and matches each year. Many other matches are conducted locally on an informal basis.

### Rimfire Sporter Rifles and Equipment

The starting point for Rimfire Sporter shooting is having a legal rifle. Most shooters start with rimfires they already own. All types of rifle actions are used. Semi-auto and bolt action rifles with clip-magazines are the most common, but lever and pump actions are not unusual. Short rapid-fire time limits mandate the choice of rifles with magazines. Detachable clips are preferred, although tube magazines are not uncommon.

**Reliable Function.** A critical factor in rifle selection is making sure rifles are in good condition and function reliably. There are no refires or extra time allowed in rapid-fire series, so a rifle that does not feed cartridges or cycle reliably can be very costly. Rifles must be properly cleaned and checked for proper function with the ammunition to be fired.

**Rifle Restrictions.** Restrictions for rifles are few and simple. Rifles must weight 7.5 pounds or less with sights on and slings off. Triggers must be capable of



*Here is all the equipment needed to shoot Rimfire Sporter: 1) a rifle with telescopic or open sights, 2) a sling, 3) a shooting mat, 4) an ordinary glove, 5) a spotting scope and stand and 6) ammunition, plus eye and hearing protection.*

lifting a 3.0 pound weight when cocked. Rifles may have a Monte Carlo cheek-piece, but may not have an adjustable cheek-piece or adjustable butt-plate. Sling swivels on the fore-end must be fixed and non-adjustable.

**Cartridges.** All rifles must be chambered for standard .22 caliber rimfire long rifle cartridges. To keep conditions equal, magnum rimfire cartridges or other rimfire calibers such as .17s are not allowed.

**Sights.** Rifles are divided into "T" and "O" classes according to the type of sights they have. T-Class rifles may have telescopes with a maximum of 6 power; variable power scopes must be taped at 6X or lower. O-Class rifles must have traditional open sights with a "U" or "V" rear sight notch and a post or bead front sight. Since rifles with aperture sights are not common, they are usually placed in the T-Class. Match sponsors, however, have the option of offering an aperture sight class if there are sufficient entries.

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**Tactical Rimfires.** A third, Tactical Rimfire Class, was added in 2011 to allow shooters with modern military rifles chambered for .22 cal. rimfire cartridges to be used. Tactical rifles must comply with the 7.5 pound weight and 3.0 pound trigger requirements. Tactical Rimfires may have telescopic or aperture sights.

**Shooters Clothing.** No specialized clothing is required or allowed. Shooting jackets are not permitted. Up to two sweatshirts may be worn, but most shooters, in fact, shoot in the comfort of an ordinary T-shirt. An ordinary work or sports glove can be worn on the hand that supports the rifle, but special shooting gloves are not permitted. All competitors should have personal safety equipment that includes hearing protection and eye protection.

**Other Equipment.** There are only three necessary and relatively inexpensive items of equipment, a sling, spotting scope and shooting mat. In the first years of Rimfire Sporter, many shooters did not use slings, but today almost all have learned how much slings improve scores. Slings may not be wider than 1 ¼ in. Web or military type leather slings may be used. Padded slings or slings with asymmetrical shaping are not permitted. It is possible to see bullet holes at 50 yards with a 6X scope, but O class and most T class shooters will want to have a spotting scope beside them so they can check their shots and groups. A ground cloth can be used in lieu of a shooting mat.

### Foundational Knowledge

Before anyone goes to a range for dry or live firing, they must receive instruction in safe gun handling rules and know how to clear, load and unload the rifles they will fire. This knowledge is the foundation for all shooting range activities. It underscores the highest priority commitment target shooters place on safety and their common goal of “zero accidents.”

#### Safe Gun Handling Rules for Shooting Ranges.

It all starts here. The so-called “cardinal rules of safe gun handling” apply in every gun handling circumstance, but they have been especially adapted for target shooting. The first safety rule focuses on muzzle control; on target ranges that means keeping muzzles pointed up or down while carrying rifles and pointed up or downrange while handling them on the firing line. The second safety rule highlights gun actions; on target ranges gun actions are always kept open with an ECI inserted. The third safety rule centers on the trigger; rifles must always be handled with the index finger outside of the trigger guard; in



*Rimfire Sporter competitors can now shoot modern military rifles in a Tactical Rimfire class.*

### SAFE GUN HANDLING RULES FOR SHOOTING RANGES

- 1. MUZZLE.** Keep gun muzzles pointed in a safe direction: up, down or downrange!
- 2. ACTION.** Keep gun actions open with ECIs inserted until ready to shoot!
- 3. TRIGGER.** Keep fingers off of triggers until aiming at the target begins.

target shooting the finger must not contact the trigger until aiming at the target begins.

**ECIs.** The Empty Chamber Indicator or ECI is a mandatory item of safety equipment. When properly inserted in the rifle chamber, the ECI demonstrates that the rifle is cleared. ECIs have a short probe that fits in the chamber and a visible yellow flag that projects out



*A cleared Rimfire Sporter rifle with an ECI inserted*



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### RIMFIRE SPORTER LOADING PROCEDURE

Step	When:	Action
1	Range Officer announces first/next series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Semi-auto rifle: Close bolt on an empty chamber</li> <li>Manually operated rifle: Open bolt</li> </ul>
2	Range Officer gives <b>LOAD</b> command	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Detachable magazine: Insert magazine charged with 5 rounds in rifle</li> <li>Tube magazine: Load 5 rounds in tube</li> </ul>
3	Range Officer gives <b>START</b> command and competitor has assumed a firing position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Semi-auto rifle: Cycle bolt/action to chamber the first round</li> <li>Manually operated rifle: Close action to chamber the first round</li> </ul>
Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Clips may be pre-charged with 5 rounds only, but they may not contact the rifle until the <b>LOAD</b> command is given.</i></li> <li><i>All firing series must begin with an empty chamber; a cartridge may not be loaded in the rifle chamber until after the <b>START</b> command <u>and</u> the competitor is in the proper firing position.</i></li> </ul>	

from the side of the rifle so it can easily be seen. As soon as a rifle is taken from a vehicle, its action must be opened and an ECI inserted, even if the rifle is carried in a case. ECIs may not be removed until rifles are on the firing line and the Range Officer starts the preparation and firing times.

**Cleared Rifles.** Every shooter must know how to clear the rifle they use. A cleared rifle has 1) an open action, 2) an empty chamber (must be visually confirmed), 3) its magazine removed or empty (fixed magazines) and 4) an ECI inserted. Clearing must be done every time a rifle is removed from a vehicle on the range and immediately after every firing stage.

**Loading Procedure.** Loading in Rimfire Sporter is done from the magazine for both slow-fire and rapid-fire. This is because many rimfire rifles do not have bolt hold-open devices and/or cannot be loaded one round at a time. The chart above describes the three steps in proper loading procedure.

### Safe Range Procedures

Before new shooters go to the range it is essential to brief them on the firing procedures they are expected to follow. Range procedures for Rimfire Sporter events are similar to procedures for other shooting events, but there

are also a few important differences.

**Firing Line, Firing Points and Relays.** Every range has a firing line that delineates the forward positions of the firing points. No one can go forward of the firing line until firing is complete and the Range Officer clears the firing line. Shooters are assigned to fire on specific firing points on the firing line. If there are more shooters than there are firing points, shooters are divided into two or more relays. The assignment of shooters to specific relays and firing points is called "squadding."

**Carrying and Handling.** Rifles may be "carried" from a vehicle to the range if they are cleared and have ECIs inserted. Rifles may not, however, be "handled" anywhere except on the firing line. Handling is defined as anything involving preparations for firing such as removing the ECI, closing an action, shouldering or pointing a rifle or putting a sling on that is attached to the rifle.

**Call to the Firing Line.** When it is time for a new relay to start, the Range Officer will call the shooters on that relay to the firing line. This is a shooter's authorization to carry his/her rifle and equipment to the assigned firing point and begin preparations to fire. After arriving at the firing line, shooters may handle their rifles, but they may not remove ECIs or close rifle actions. They may put on slings and get into their firing positions.

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*Ready for the rapid-fire START command – a clip with 5 rounds is inserted, but the bolt remains open until the shooter is down in position.*

**Preparation Periods.** After one minute, the Range Officer will announce **YOUR PREPARATION PERIOD BEGINS NOW**. During this time, competitors must finish getting ready to shoot. During preparation periods, they may remove ECIs and dry fire, but they may never load their rifles before the **LOAD** command. The first preparation period before the sighting stage is three minutes. Preparation periods for the six record stages last one minute.

**LOAD and START Commands.** At the end of the preparation period, the Range Officer will announce **YOUR PREPARATION PERIOD HAS ENDED**. For

slow-fire stages the Range Officer will then give the command **LOAD**. For rapid-fire series, the Range Officer will instruct shooters to stand and then give the **LOAD** command. All competitors must follow loading procedures that require chambers to remain empty until after the **START** command. After getting into position and chambering the first round, they may shoulder their rifles and fire the first five shots in the stage. In slow-fire stages, shooters must load a second clip with five rounds or another five rounds in tube magazines and continue shooting. As soon as a firing stage or series is completed, shooters must open rifle actions, remove detachable magazines, insert ECIs and place their cleared rifles on their mats.

**STOP and UNLOAD Commands.** At the end of the time limit or after all competitors have finished firing, the Range Officer will command **STOP . . . UNLOAD**. Upon hearing the **STOP** command, no further attempt to fire a shot is permitted and any shots fired after this command cannot be counted. Unfired cartridges must be removed from the rifle after the **UNLOAD** command.

**Clearing the Line.** The final step in completing a firing stage is to clear the line. To do this a Range Officer must visually check every rifle to be sure it is cleared with an ECI inserted and grounded on the firing line. After that the Range Officer can give instructions for starting the next stage, sending competitors downrange to score or change targets or removing rifles and equipment from the firing line.

**Rimfire Sporter Course of Fire**

Stage	Distance	Type of Fire	Firing Position	Number of Shots	Time Limit
Sighting	50 yards	Slow	Prone or supported prone	Unlimited	5 minutes
1	50 yards	Slow	Prone	10	10 minutes
2	50 yards	Rapid	Prone	10, fired in 2 series of 5	Semi-auto-25 sec. Manual-30 sec.
3	50 yards	Slow	Sitting or Kneeling	10	10 minutes
4	50 yards	Rapid	Sitting or Kneeling	10, fired in 2 series of 5	Semi-auto-25 sec. Manual-30 sec.
5	25 yards	Slow	Standing	10	10 minutes
6	25 yards	Rapid	Standing	10, fired in 2 series of 5	Semi-auto-25 sec. Manual-30 sec.

### The Rimfire Sporter Course of Fire

The Rimfire Sporter course of fire includes one sighting stage and six competition stages fired at distances of 50 and 25 yards. Firing is done in three positions with one slow-fire or precision stage and one rapid-fire stage in each. Each rapid-fire stage consists of two series of five-shots each. The chart provides course of fire details.

#### Rimfire Sporter Target.

The target for this event was selected to 1) offer generous scoring rings all the way out to an 18 in. one ring so that



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*Targets for all seven Rimfire Sporter stages in this match were mounted on highpower rifle target boards (The match stage labels were added to the photo for instructional purposes). This system allows all stages to be fired before competitors must go downrange to score and mount new targets.*

new shooters could get hits on their shots and 2) still have a ten-ring that is small enough to challenge the best shooters. The scoring ring dimensions on the 50 meter international pistol target met these requirements perfectly and the 50-yard version of that target was adopted. Its 1.75 in. ten-ring is 3.5 MOA in diameter. In comparison, the ten-ring on the 200 yard highpower rifle target is also 3.5 MOA in diameter. The one change that was made was to print the 10 and X rings white to provide an aiming point for telescope sights. 50 foot reductions of this target are available so clubs can shoot Rimfire Sporter indoors. Purchase these targets from the CMP (<http://www.thecmp.org/Clubs/Targets.htm>).

**Sighting Stage.** This stage can be fired in any position; a support can even be used. Most competitors, nevertheless, fire sighters in the prone position, the

first competition position. The purpose of the sighting stage is for shooters to sight in their rifles and warm up for the competition stages. During sighters, it is especially important to use a spotting scope or the telescope to check if shots are going on call and the shot group is centered. Sight adjustments can be made on telescopic sights. Shooters with open sights may need to adjust their aiming points.

**Slow-Fire Stages.** Competition in each of the three positions begins with a 10 minute, 10-shot slow-fire stage. The object in these stages is to take enough time on each shot to make the best possible shots. Shot locations should be checked with a scope after each shot and additional sight or aiming point adjustments should be made to keep shot groups centered.

**Rapid-Fire Stages.** In Rimfire Sporter, every slow-fire stage is followed by a rapid-fire stage. After a one-minute preparation period, shooters are instructed to stand to begin each five-shot rapid-fire series. Time limits for each five-shot series are 30 seconds for manually-operated rifles and 25 seconds for semi-automatic rifles. After the Range Officer commands shooters to **LOAD**, there are two **START** commands, five seconds apart. Range Officers must pay careful attention to making sure semi-autos start with bolts closed on empty chambers while all other rifles start with actions open.

The first **START** command is for shooters with manually-operated rifles, the second for shooters with semi-autos. After hearing the proper **START** command, shooters must get down into position. After they are in position, they can cycle or close their bolts to chamber their first rounds. Then they can shoulder their rifles, adjust their positions to get their sights pointing naturally at their targets and begin shooting. It takes 10-15 seconds to assume and orient the position; shooters then have two to three seconds to fire each shot. Shooters with manually-operated rifles have an additional second per shot to cycle their actions. With low-recoil .22 rimfires, that is more than enough time to fire a series of accurate shots. The **STOP** command is given for all competitors at the end of 25 and 30 seconds. If a shot is fired after **STOP**, the highest value



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shot on that target must be nullified. After a one-minute pause, shooters are again instructed to stand to start the second 5-shot series.

**Sitting or Kneeling Position.** The rules actually say that the third and fourth stages of the course of fire can be fired in “sitting or kneeling” just as shooters have that same choice in highpower rifle competitions. Nevertheless, virtually all shooters prefer the sitting position because it is inherently more stable. The only exceptions may be junior shooters who have lots of experience in kneeling and none in sitting.

**Standing Ready Position.** In the standing ready position, competitors must hold their rifles down from the shoulder with the toe of the butt below the belt line.

**We hope this article has encouraged more club leaders and instructors, parents and young shooters to think about trying Rimfire Sporter. “Rimfire Sporter Shooting – Part II” in the next issue of *On the Mark* will cover the shooting techniques and firing positions used in Rimfire Sporter. It will also cover how to start a junior Rimfire Sporter program and organize competitions.**



*Rimfire Sporter is a perfect shooting sports activity for families. Fathers and daughters, mothers and sons can all enjoy shooting this event together without the family having to make a huge investment in equipment.*

### About the Author

Gary Anderson, Director of Civilian Marksmanship Emeritus, retired as the full-time CMP Director at the close of 2009. He continues to work with CMP as the senior marksmanship instructor. He won two Olympic gold medals, seven World Championships and 16 National Championships during his competition career. He is a Vice President of the International Shooting Sports Federation, the President of USA Shooting, a former Nebraska State Senator and was one of the two Olympic Games Technical Delegates for Shooting during the 2012 Olympic Games in London. In June, 2012, the International Olympic Committee awarded Gary Anderson the IOC's highest honor, the Olympic Order “for outstanding services to the Olympic Movement.”

*Photo courtesy of the ISSF.*

