

## 2015 ACTION THAMES VALLEY SUPER LEAGUE: a greenhorn's report

by David Mamea

It's my first away shoot. Despite offers of GPS coordinates or travelling in convoy, I'm confident I can find my way from West Auckland to the Thames Valley Pistol Club with just print-outs of Google Maps' driving directions and satellite imagery. I'm going to navigate the way I like to shoot: no optics or electronics — just my sure-I'll-give-it-a-go attitude and failing eyesight. Despite two wrong turns and swallowing my pride and asking for directions, I'm only a few minutes late.

Ian Coates, Thames Valley Pistol Club doyen and Pistol New Zealand Action Section Director, is running the show and takes my registration payment. When I proudly tell him that I learned the difference between Production and Metallic classes only a week earlier (I'm shooting the latter), he sensibly checks that I'm holster qualified.

A clear morning sky promises a hot and sunny February day as we are briefed. There are seventeen competitors from the Thames Valley, Hamilton and Auckland clubs, including four ungraded shooters (of which I'm one). I'm squadded with international reps Brent Millard and Tiffany Piper, along with APC clubmates Grant Williams and Murray Steedman. Briefing over, four squads are loosed onto the ranges, with four matches making up the shoot.

The practical match is just like the one at the home club range but it makes no difference to my nerves: in each string, my first shot out of the holster goes high and wide before I remember the front sight. Afterwards, I look at my targets, taking in the expanse of cardboard between what hits I've made: It could be worse, I tell myself, at least I touched paper a few times.

The Crawford Barricade match differs from the usual barricade match: a string in this match is three shots from each side of the barricade, rather than the usual six from just one side of the barricade. It's unsettling at first, transitioning from one side to the other — I trust that good training and drilling ensures my trigger finger is resting against the frame as I switch from one side of the barricade to the other — but the time constraint and required movement add a frisson of excitement. (I also get to wear my shooting glove for the first time and don't think once about skinning my knuckles.)

By the time of the plates match, I've calmed enough to drop at least half of them on each string. I'm doing much better than my last club match so I'm feeling pretty good. I'm enjoying myself, too.

The final match is the Texas Mover. Like the Crawford Barricade, it differs from the usual mover event: instead of a total of eight six-second strings over four distances, there are just two strings at ten and fifteen-yard distances — and each string is 33 seconds long. Once that target starts moving and has travelled one way, you have three seconds to do a compulsory reload before it reappears, travelling the other way, then three seconds to reload before it appears again, then one last reload for its final return journey. It is awesome, tremendous fun.

Ian hands out the awards in a warm haze of competitive camaraderie before a barbecue lunch. Tiffany pips her father Karl for overall winner, fellow Aucklanders Roger Parris and Chris Skewes

round out the top four with Thames Valley's Allen Alley and Richard Munt close behind, and Peter Hansen and Jay Bellamy fly the Hamilton Pistol Club flag in the top ten. The Thames Valley Pistol Club is thanked for organising and hosting the event.

I commit the dates for upcoming shoots to memory. I am so there, man. Who cares if my targets required the least patching? I'm doing my bit for the planet. So what if I'm probably using the wrong pistol for action shooting? I'm a slow learner (and I want to find out first-hand why). Like the wrong turns and asking for help on my way to the shoot, this sport is about learning and improving. And I'm learning heaps.

*699 words including title and byline*