

RIFLES

SASS rules say the rifle must have a lever or slide action, with an external hammer, and be in a pistol caliber. The most common rifles are made by Winchester (or replicas) or Marlin. The model names for these guns are designated by the year of release, with one exception—the Henry. The Winchester rifles are: the Henry, the Model 1866, Model 1873, Model 1892, and Model 1894. There is only one model of Marlin that is used—the Model 1894. With the Winchester models, as they progress from the Henry (and Models 1866 and 1873) to the 1894, the actions get more complicated. The more complicated actions also require more force on the lever in order to function properly. *Note: the Henry and Models 1866 and 1873 have the same basic action.*

Most shooters get their rifles in the same caliber as their revolvers. This makes it much easier at the loading table since there is only one caliber of ammunition to deal with. If you've ever put a .45 Colt in a .44 WCF (44-40) then you know what I mean!

As with revolvers, the short barreled rifles handle a little quicker than the longer barrels. At your local gun shop, make sure to try out the action on each of the different types of rifles, then get the one you like the best.

Lastly, the stock of the rifle may need to be cut down to fit better. See a gunsmith if you have any questions about fit.

Competitive Note: The Winchester Models 1866 and 1873 as well as the Marlin 1894 are the most popular among the top shooters. These rifles can be made very slick and fast. The Winchester 1892 and 1894 have many more movable parts and do not lend themselves to the fast shooting of the others.

CONFIDENCE AND FUNDAMENTALS

As with the revolvers, learning the correct fundamentals and developing confidence in your rifle and your ability to shoot it are vitally important to becoming the best CAST™ shooter you can be. As with revolvers, a good place to start is a complete disassembly and cleaning of your rifle. This will help you to become comfortable with the function and cleaning of the firearm. The drills listed below are designed to help you achieve complete confidence in shooting and learn the correct fundamentals.

Dry Fire Practice

Dry fire practice is one of the most effective means of training you can do. While range time is needed to ensure that you haven't picked up any bad habits, the time you spend on dry fire practice (especially transitions and target acquisition) can really make a big difference in your scores.

In order to perform the dry fire drills, you will need some small targets (I use small sheets of paper taped to the wall), snap caps, your gun leather (belt, holsters, shotgun belt or slide), and no distractions.

There is no trick to shooting a lever action rifle well. It takes concentration, a solid grip, a good stance, and use of sights. These fundamentals will be discussed below.

Grip

Before we start, make sure there is no ammunition in the area, and your rifle is not loaded.

Pick up and shoulder your rifle. Your front hand is probably in a very natural and comfortable position. We're not going to change that. Now answer this, "what is your front hand doing?" The correct answer is "pulling the rifle into my shoulder and holding it there tightly." If that's not what it's doing, then take a few minutes and practice shouldering your rifle with your front hand pulling it into your shoulder and holding it there tightly.



Cathy Lex (Pittsburgh's Wild Irish Rose) has the right grip.

You should be able to hold the rifle to your shoulder with your front hand and not need your strong hand on the gun at all. In addition, the front hand has to hold it stable throughout the levering action. That can't be done unless it is actively pulling the gun into your shoulder.

Now, shoulder the rifle again. Your front hand is pulling it into your shoulder, right? Where is your strong hand and how is it positioned? Your strong hand should have the forefinger on the trigger and the rest of your fingers in the lever. Depending on the size of your hand, you may or may not need your little finger in there too.

Where is your thumb? Since your front hand is pulling the gun into your shoulder, you don't need to hold the gun with the strong hand. Your thumb should NOT be wrapped around the stock; instead it should be resting on the top of your hand or against the receiver. Putting your thumb over the top of the stock doesn't add anything, and will slow you down.

Shoulder the rifle again, levering it in the process. Did you get your front hand in position and is it pulling the gun into your shoulder? Is your strong hand set correctly with your

thumb lying across the top of your hand, forefinger on the trigger, and rest of the fingers in the lever?

One last note about levering the action; think about the motion as forward and back, not down and up. The forward and back motion will disturb the sights less than a down and up motion.

Practice this several times until it becomes natural and automatic.

Stance

Before we start, make sure there is no ammunition in the area, and your rifle is not loaded.

Shoulder your rifle (you are holding it the way we discussed, right?). Are you standing up straight or are you in an athletic posture? Is your cheek tight to the stock so you can look down the barrel and see both sights?

You should be in an athletic posture with your feet about shoulder width apart, weight distributed evenly between your feet, knees slightly bent, and ready for anything. This position helps your body to absorb recoil while keeping the rifle under control. This is the same basic stance used for the revolvers.



Jeff Moser (Three Finger Jake) has a balanced stance.

Your cheek should be tight to the stock so you can look down the barrel and see the sights. Otherwise, you'll probably find you are shooting over the targets. Set up to and aim at a target. Lower the rifle and relax. Close your eyes and bring the gun up to position. Open your eyes. Are you on target? If not, shift your feet until the rifle is on target. Lower it again, close your eyes, and bring it up to position. Open your eyes. You should be on target. If not, shift around and try it again. This is your natural point of aim. This position should be the one that you use when you pick up your rifle from a staged position.

Practice your stance until it becomes natural and automatic. You are using the grip that we discussed, right?

Sighting

Before we start, make sure there is no ammunition in the area, and your rifle is not loaded.

Sighting the rifle is similar to the revolvers, that is, if the rear sight is a v-notch or square notch. However, most rear rifle sights are of the buckhorn or semi-buckhorn variety. In this case, you want to center the top of the front sight (or the bead) within the arms of the buckhorn. If the top of the front sight (or the bead) is so positioned and is centered on the target, then you'll hit it. As with the pistols:

FOCUS ON THE FRONT SIGHT!

Put a target up on the wall and practice sighting your rifle. As before, use a slip of paper with a one-inch orange dot. With the rifle, you want to center the top of the front sight (or the bead) on the target. Make sure to keep your cheek firmly against the stock. If your cheek creeps off of the stock, your shots will start to go high.

Practice shouldering your rifle and sighting on a target, make sure to use the stance and grip discussed above. Practice until sighting the rifle, the grip, and the stance become natural and automatic.

LIVE FIRE PRACTICE

This drill is designed to improve your targeting confidence and ingrain the fundamentals. Practicing this drill will help you to learn exactly where your rifle prints in relation to point of aim (POA) and help you learn to call your shots. Once you can call your shots, you will be able to shoot any target with confidence.

Set your timer for a delayed start and clip it to your belt. It doesn't matter how long it



Todd Hodnett (Handlebar Doc) sighting his rifle.



Heather Landers (Lass Cahl) has an athletic stance.

takes to make each shot, the timer is just there to give you a starting signal.

1. Set up a paper target (I like to use paper plates for this) at 30 yards (90 feet). Load your rifle with 10 rounds with the hammer on an empty chamber.
2. Start your timer and grip the rifle as we discussed earlier.
3. Take the stance that we worked on earlier.
4. At the buzzer, lever your rifle and very carefully align the sights to the target.
5. Very slowly squeeze the trigger with the pad of your index finger while focusing on the **front sight**. The target should appear blurry. Make sure to squeeze straight back while maintaining the sight picture. After the shot, maintain the sight picture through the recoil.
6. Repeat for the other 9 shots in your rifle.

After the 10 shots, you should have a fairly tight group. If you don't, then you need to work on shooting fundamentals. Check your grip and stance. Make sure your stance feels natural and your grip is secure. Make sure your sight picture is exactly the same from shot to shot. If you continue to have trouble, seek out a shooting instructor for guidance.

If you have a fairly tight group, it will either be exactly where you aimed or some distance from the orange dot. If it's not on the orange dot, then its location on the target will be an indication of how far off the POA is from the point of impact (POI). You may need to drift the rear sight or adjust its elevation to make the adjustment. Move the rear sight in the direction you want to move the shots. Go slow and check frequently until the shots are exactly where you are aiming.

Modified Dot Drill

The Dot Drill that you learned earlier when working with your revolvers can also be done with your rifle.

This drill teaches several things, among them are: patience, trigger control, follow through, and sighting. It's a boring and tedious drill but is very important for learning the fundamentals. Make sure to practice this for at least 30 minutes at the beginning of each practice session. I can't emphasize the importance of this drill enough.

Start with a target up at 20 yards. Load your rifle with 10 rounds and stage on a table. Set your timer for a delayed start and clip it to your belt. It doesn't matter how long it takes to make each shot, the timer is just there to give you a starting signal.

1. Start your time and set up to retrieve your rifle.
2. At the beep, retrieve your rifle, lever, shoulder, and aim at your target.
3. Break the shot (squeeze the trigger and wait for the shot).
4. Watch the front sight rise with recoil and return to the target.
5. Release the trigger.
6. Stage back on the table.
7. Repeat for ten shots total.

After the ten shots, if you have a two-inch group on the target then you have practiced proper trigger control. Spend at least 30 minutes on this drill at the beginning of each rifle practice session.

BUILDING SPEED

As with the revolvers, you can't build speed without knowing exactly how fast you can work your rifle. As most rifles have two-piece firing pins and are not safe to dry fire, the drills listed below are for live fire.

Single Target Drill

1. Set up a big target at 15 yards.
2. Set your timer for a three second delayed start and clip it to your belt.
3. Load up your rifle with 10 rounds.
4. Start your timer and assume a "ready" position. That is, rifle shouldered and on target, but not yet levered.
5. At the beep, lever your rifle and fire 10 rounds as fast as you can at the target. Record the time and the number of misses.



Clyde Harrison (Easy Rider) working on shooting faster.

Repeat this drill 3 or 4 times and keep track of misses and times. Be willing to take a few misses.

Now, do it again and try to hit the target, but keep going at full speed. Keep your eye on the front sight, but still be willing to take a few misses. Again, record your times and the number of misses. Repeat this 3 or 4 times.

Do it again, but this time, make sure to hit the target every shot. Again record your times and misses.

As you repeat this drill through several different practice sessions, you'll find your times decreasing and find yourself getting more comfortable at a faster pace.

Double Target Drill

When you alternate between targets, the gun should follow your eyes. After you fire your first shot, snap your eyes to the next target, picking a very tight spot in the center. Swing

your rifle over until you acquire the front sight on the spot you were focused on. Move your focus to the front sight making sure to maintain aim. Then break the shot. Don't forget to lever during the target transition.

1. Set up two big targets at 15 yards.
2. Set your timer for a three second delayed start and clip it to your belt.
3. Load up your rifle with 10 rounds.
4. Start your timer and assume a "ready" position. That is, rifle shouldered and on target, but not yet levered.
5. At the beep, lever your rifle and fire 10 rounds as fast as you can, alternating between the targets. Record the time and the number of misses.

Repeat this drill 3 or 4 times and keep track of misses and times. Be willing to take a few misses.

Now, do it again and try to hit the targets, but keep going at full speed. Keep your eye on the front sight, but still be willing to take a few misses. Again, record your times and the number of misses. Repeat this 3 or 4 times.

Do it again, but this time, make sure to hit the targets every shot. Again record your times and misses.

As you repeat this drill through several different practice sessions, you'll find your times decreasing and find yourself getting more comfortable at a faster pace.

Authors Note, Added October 2007: Let's talk about the front hand for a moment. I mentioned earlier that we weren't going to move it. Maybe we are. I also mentioned that the purpose of the front hand is to pull the rifle back into the shoulder. In order to facilitate that, it helps to have something to hold on to, and to make sure your hand goes to the same place each time.

The front of the fore-stock is a perfect handle. The spot where it rounds over to meet the barrel and magazine tube. If that's too far out, find the farthest spot out that's comfortable (this facilitates stability) and put a couple of brass tacks in to use as a marker. This is a legal external modification.

Personally, and based on my particular size, I use a 20 inch rifle. The shorter forearm gives me a perfect handle on the end-cap. The 24 inch rifle has a longer forearm.