

Target Rifle Shooting Equipment – Top to Toe

The following guide is intended to help you achieve better performance with your shooting. It is based on the author's experience of what has been tried and worked (and what was tried and failed). It is a statement of opinion and there are numerous alternatives depending on your level of interest and budget.

The great thing about shooting is the variety and the different disciplines that can be followed depending on your interest. You will however find that there are common threads so what works for serious target rifle work will help you on a Service Rifle shoot as well (comfort, position, trigger control and sight picture).

This is about the equipment you can use and its benefits as well as some tips along the way.

Equipment

Where to start – The subject could fill a book!

The basic goal of your shooting kit is to be comfortable. If something is not quite right it will be in the back of your mind and will become a distraction. A distracted shooter lets a poor shot go (in TR one dropped shot and its game over). You must be totally focused on your shooting and nothing should be allowed to distract you from this.

Headgear – loads of options and many don't wear any at all. You see all sorts of fancy hats on the ranges and it's a matter of choice. In choosing your hat you must ask yourself the following questions:-

Will it shade me from the Sun / Rain / Snow / Cold etc?

Some of the hats on show would be left at home if the owners had given the matter some thought. The best hats are the proper shooting hats with a long peak that will go over the rear sight with flaps on either side. These stop low sun getting in you eyes and allow you to focus just on your target (and the odd wind flag) and nothing else. In the summer a handkerchief can be used in the back to cover the back of you neck and over you ears. This stops sun burn and your ears filling up with sweat under your ear muffs. Anyone who has shot the Bisley Imperial in July will tell you that some years the biggest problem is dealing with the heat.

Baseball caps seem like a good idea until the bill catches your sight and bashes you in the head when you pull the trigger. That is a good way to get your sight to move and to develop a flinch. – get the proper shooting hat or at least one with a soft brim.

Jacket – A proper supportive shooting jacket is essential for decent shooting. They are expensive (and can shrink in the cupboard over the winter). When looking for a shooting jacket consider the following:-

It must be supportive (across the shoulders)

It must fit

It must be within NRA regulations (watch out if you get a US Creedmoor jacket – adjustable front straps)

It must have strap or hook to retain your single point sling.

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Whilst on the subject of a jacket you need to pay particular attention to the elbow pads. These should not be smooth and also should not have so much padding they become 'bouncy' (Strap on pads like the old A J Parker ones are prone to this)

The pad is one of the most important parts and ideally they should have a rough, patterned or stippled finish. This should allow you to lock your elbow onto your shooting mat.

Failure to have the correct pads or having them worn smooth is that two things happen

- 1) You are in the aim and you can feel your elbow starting to slip. You try to compensate by tensing and your shot goes wide.
- 2) You pull the trigger and your whole position moves, again throwing the shot.

Jackets are a matter to budget but the best makes are Tucker, Kurt Thune and Truttman. The choice is yours but you re unlikely to see anyone in the Queens final in an old Buttstop or Belstaff one. Tucker make a cheaper double canvass jacket that is a more reasonable option. If you are having it made to measure (always the best option) get the left sleeve made a bit longer to give you a bit more protection between your wrist and glove as this is a pressure point where the sling can get painful if leaned on too hard. Don't compromise on a jacket - it's for shooting. If it is exceptionally cold or wet then have a normal waterproof coat to hand. Put your jacket on to shoot and put your other one on afterwards.

Layers of clothing under the jacket– thin soft layers of clothing are best. Avoid anything that will chafe or crease under your jacket and cause your pulse to be picked up through your sling. A number of shooters will wear the same clothes summer and winter under their jacket to keep an even thickness but this can be too hot some years so it's up to you.

Trousers – up to you but remember that denim is hot in the summer and takes ages to dry when it gets wet. Walking trousers are probably the best option. Shorts are fine in the summer but you can burn if you are not careful. You can put sun cream on your legs and in the Bisley summer dust bowl a breath of wind gives you an even covering of grit. If you have a plastic faced mat then this can get hot and if you leave it in the sun for a while it can be a trifle warm so beware.

Waterproof trousers should always be to hand in the British weather as well as a cape poncho or specialist waterproof shooting overcoat (see a Carmichael Bat cape).

To quote Billy Connolly – there is no such thing as bad weather just the wrong clothes.

Boots /shoes/ flip flops

Whatever you like but remember the first bit? – be comfortable. Grass is damp in the morning and dries out later. A change of footwear mid day adds to comfort and prevents that feeling on a detail that seems to be taking forever that you are starting to roast (or the steady seepage of water).

Other essentials

Shooting Mat

Get one with a heavily stippled surface that will lock your elbows and prevent slippage. Smooth surfaces are fine for casual shooting or you can lie in the dirt if you want. Carmichael

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sell very good mats that are not too thick (non bouncy) and are cotton faced so you don't get too hot in the summer.

Mats do tend to pool water in the rain but this is unavoidable. You can get an elbows only mat and have the remainder of your body on the grass and this will prevent the puddle formation. Shooting Glove for your left hand (or if you are a south paw the hand you don't use to pull the trigger). Get a decent well fitted and padded example with long enough fingers so that the tips of your fingers do not touch the end of the finger inside the glove.

A shooting glove is to insulate the interface between your hand and the stock to prevent pulse moving your aim. It also will provide some padding as you tend to lean heavily into the hand stop of your rifle and after a while this can become painful. The rifle should rest on your hand and you should not grip the stock. Tensing up and closing your hand generally result in a high shot.

Need Glasses?

If you do invest in shooting frames (or better still, look at laser eye treatment) as these will allow you to position the glasses so you look through the centre of the lens. Ordinary glasses are likely to steam up and the worst time especially in the wet (another good reason for a decent hat)

No matter how good your wet weather drill is you will get water in your back sight in the rain and this transfers to your glasses on pulling the trigger.

Sling - Get a single point sling and make sure it is a good fit to your hand stop and is tight enough – difficult to describe how to do this but if it's so tight you can barely get the rifle into your shoulder then it's probably about right.

Two points or military slings are for service rifle and not Target Rifle. A sling can be set up so it does not move and you get the required consistency from shot to shot and shoot to shoot. You do not want to be messing about with your sling at the start of the shoot when everyone else wants to be getting going.

Ear defenders – plugs or muffs

Wear one or other or both. They all have advantages and disadvantages – plugs are not as good but are more comfortable in the summer when it's hot. Electronic earmuffs allow you to hear what others are saying to you during the shoot and for this there is a price to pay.

With electronic ear muffs it is best to turn them off when you start shooting. If you must leave them on then only as long as it takes to sort out the first sighters and if there are to be any conversions. **THEN TURN THEM OFF.**

You will end up listening to all the chatter going on around you and you will be distracted. On a personal rant here,. Please shut up on the firing point and behind it. It is a huge distraction of all those around you. The only thing you should say during a shoot is the score, Inner 4, V bull, first on, second on, all out etc. Nothing else, no really, nothing else unless you need to call the RO for a message. If you want to chat then do it all after the shoot and off the point.

Scope and Stand

Another essential and this does not mean binoculars or a naval telescope from days of Trafalgar. A scope has two uses. The first and most obvious is to check your score and that of

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the shooter you are marking for. It is also essential for viewing the direction of the mirage if there is little or indistinguishable wind (there is never no wind – trust me).

A scope should have sufficient magnification and a stand that is quick to set up and will not move when you blow on it.

One of the best is a Kowa Scope with an Ewing stand but that's pricey set up.

Other odds and ends you can have to hand.

A Shooting Box to keep all the gear in.

It is an unfortunate circular event that you get a box, fill it with gear, decide it's too heavy to cart around and take half of it out again.

You don't need a box; you can have a carrier bag!

A weather writer that is a useful alternative to a bag and a box

Your box needs to be large enough to keep all your stuff in and not too heavy that you can't move it when full. It should be capable of having some sort of flaps to keep out the rain etc keeping your ammunition dry. The NRA have rules on the size of box's that can be placed on the point so before you build a caravan sized item check the size restrictions first. (For this and all the other NRA rules and regulations buy a Bisley Bible.)

Bits of cloth or towelling – mop up rain or sweat. Chamois leather is good for keeping rain off the action and sights for longer than a cloth – get one from a garage.

A £1 coin in your box – if you need to challenge for a higher value in an NRA comp then it costs you £1 if you loose so have some cash. It is also possible to have £2.00 and if the shoot is that bad you can buy an ice cream instead. If the shoot was even worse than that then retire to the club house bar and try again another day.

Score Cards pens and pencils (available in all good offices). This is list is not about keeping a score card but these are an essential record of sight settings and conditions. They can be purchased from gun shops or Fulton's and it is essential to have a set to hand for all shoots. Score cards can be photocopied for the particularly tight. Frankly it is about the only thing you can save on with shooting as a hobby. If you are filling in score cards then have several pencils and a pen or two in your shooting box.

The NRA have at times insisted that when marking other shooters score cards the final score is filled in with a pen (note not a pencil) to prevent the final score being 'amended' so a pen should be to hand.

Whilst on the subject of score cards, you are often required to fill in your fellow shooters' cards in a competition. This is always fun to watch novices trying to sort this out. I am sure this is one reason why people seem to be so scared of entering a competition.

Just remember this – you mark the card of the person who shoots after you.

The shooting order at Bisley is a maximum of three to a target and these are to the LEFT of the numbered peg.

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The shooting sequence is:-

First Firer No 1 on the immediate left of the peg goes first.

Second firer No 2 in the middle goes next

Third firer No 3 is the one on the far left from the peg

Card marking sequence

No 1 marks no 2's card

No 2 marks no 3's card

No 3 marks no 1's card

Remember Again - you mark the card of the person who shoots after you.

Right, we have wandered off the extra kit subject

Other things to have to hand

Breech flag

Ammo container

Box to keep your sights on when not shooting.

Wind calculator – old fashioned I know but an essential.

I was told it would take 3 years to learn to shoot the gun and 7 to learn to read the wind. You can have all the kit in the world and if you can't read the wind then forget it.

I am sure you have all heard stories from those who shoot at 100 yards only and say TR is boring as all the shots from their old converted Mauser / P14/ Sportco etc shoot a group the size of a lady bird – yes? Well I bet you never see them walk away from an NRA comp under proper TR conditions with a 50.10 at 300 yards let alone 600 or 1000. Correct wind judgement is a must and is a skill that can only be learned through practice.

Whilst I am drifting off the subject again a word about ammo. Buy the best you can afford and RG sniper black spot is a long way from the best. Unfortunately in the Imperial meeting you are issued good quality RG but it is nowhere near as good as something like Lapua or Carmichael.

So you have all you kit in a pile the size of a mountain and you now have to get it around with you.

What you need have is:-

Rifle

Shooting Box

Mat

Scope

Jacket

All your odds and ends should be in the box or in the gun slip. Carry the mat, jacket and scope. Wear the alternative jacket if the conditions dictate.

Make sure you have all you need with you and check again when you get to behind the firing point when you still have time to do something about it. Do not wait until message one is passed and you realise that your bolt is still in the car. This leads neatly into the need to get to the point in good time before your detail starts (10 to 15 minutes) so you have time to iron out any potential disasters.

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Once you have checked your kit then you should not spend the time gossiping but you should be looking at the wind flags and starting to figure out what it is doing. You need to establish Angle and speed.

When you are called to the point sort your kit out promptly and do the following in any order but the following is a reasonable way to start:-

- Set your scope pointing roughly towards the target (on the left for a right handed shooter)
- Lay your mat down at an angle so you can lie on it (try to avoid any firing point with holes or depressions in it if you get the chance) You need to be able to look through your scope by moving you head only (that's why you need to get a decent scope and stand) – no stretching as it will move your shooting position. Use your left eye (reverse for left handers) to look through the scope as it is a short focus and your right eye will be a longer focus looking through your sights.
- Place your box on your right so you can get at your stuff.
- To hand you should have your ammo, score card, pencils and wind calculator
- Exchange score cards with whoever you are marking for.
- Sounds obvious but make sure you get both your elbows on the stippled part of your mat.
- Get your gun and clip your sling on
- Get into the shooting position and close your eyes (go on try it) get comfortable pointing as if you where about to take a shot (you should still have you breech flag in and in no circumstances should you be loaded)
- Open your eyes and see if you are pointing at your target. No? shuffle your position and try it again until you are lying comfortably and pointing at your target (make sure the target you are pointing at has a number that is the same as the peg to your Right)
- You need by now to have decided what the wind is doing and make the necessary sight adjustments. (you will need to do this again before each shot)
- If you are ready to rock then wait for message 1 and the command to commence.
- Enjoy the shoot.

