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GENERAL ADVICE

New: Work up loads with Swiss powder. You'll get a big argument over whether Swiss or Goex is better. Personally, I use both. That being said, you will have Swiss available in Europe. You might have Goex. Maybe. Don't bet on it.

Learn the event names - the events are commonly referred to by name, and if you don't know them, you'll get lost.

Learn the rules, too. Some International rules vary wildly from American practice. For example, you must load the revolver chambers in a 5-5-3 sequence at a Zone or World Championship. In the United States, there are no such restrictions - and many shooters will use one great-shooting chamber to produce the best scores.

If you can afford to buy the guns, get good originals. There are usually fewer shooters in the original category of each event, so the odds of making it onto the team are much better. The exception to this are the matchlock events - there are actually more original Japanese guns floating around than there are replica European-styled guns that are worth shooting.

New: This is more true than ever. There are a lot of openings for original guns.

Start the qualification sequence early. You should start sending tag target scores immediately after the last World Championship is over. Three weeks before the Zones is decidedly not the time to send in the tag targets. You want to be on top of the preliminary qualifications list and stay there.

Start saving for the trip early. These trips are expensive - often around \$2,000 per person - and while we hope to raise more money in the future, the Good Old Days when World Championships were all-expenses-paid trips will probably never be seen again.

Invest in good luggage. KK Air makes cases that are a bit heavy, but stout as a brick - and they are willing to do custom work to fit oversized rifles. The wheeled cases are highly recommended, but I would not bother with the duffel bag covers for them. The ones I had slipped, and got torn up.

If you are headed to a World Championship, take **every** gun you qualified to try out with, even if you aren't officially scheduled to shoot that gun at the Worlds. There are often last-second openings, and having the gun available can get you a crack at a medal that you might not have expected. Come to think of it, my first World Championship medal came that way....

COMINAZZO

Cominazzo is by far the most frustrating event. Smoothbore firearms can shoot very accurately, but are unbelievably fickle and unforgiving. Add to this the ignition problems of a flintlock, and you wind up with a recipe for frustration.

Buying an original gun for this event is very, very tricky. Buy nothing without seeing it first. There are a lot of officer's pistols, horse pistols, etc., that are passed off as honest-to-goodness duelling pistols by sellers

who don't know any different. A good gun will not be above .60 caliber, and preferably smaller. Barrel length should be at least 8 inches, and you want a relatively thick barrel for good balance.

In reproductions, the Hege-Manton is the gold standard for this event. Great gun, but currently out of production. Buy one if you find one. Of guns currently being built, the Pedersoli LePage is the most often seen. Helmut Mohr is making a very nice replica of a [Boutet dueller](#), and Mohr is a long-time competitor. Andy Baumkircher makes a Durs Egg repro that is fantastic, but if you have to ask the price..... Remember that a competition gun MUST be a smoothbore, although it is nice to have a rifled barrel for training.

Most shooters are using very heavy (30-40 grains 3Fg) loads in this event. Sounds like a .44 Magnum with full-house loads.

KUCHENREUTER

Kuchenreuter has one very sneaky characteristic - you are NOT allowed to use a revolver in this event. This is in contravention of American practice, where a percussion revolver is invariably legal for use in events for single-shot percussion pistols.

Originals are relatively easy to come by. Keep your eyes peeled, hit the antique arms shows and auctions. You are looking for guns of .55 caliber or less, with a strong preference for the smaller bores. Set triggers are preferred. Don't turn up your nose at the oddball makers and the mass-produced target pistols (Hopkins & Allen, etc.). You can often pick up some great shooters at a reasonable price - although I'll admit that shooting a gun from a recognized maker has a lovely feel to it.

Replicas? The traditional standard has been the Hege-Siber, in .33 caliber. Sweet piece, and very reasonably priced. Pedersoli makes several pistols that will shoot well if the locks are tuned up. The LePage offers the advantage of letting a shooter set up his guns for Kuchenreuter and Cominazzo identically - useful if you have problems switching between guns. The Pedersoli Mang reproduction shoots great, if you have the arm strength to handle it. Ditto for the Pedersoli Kuchenreuter replica.

However, the new wave in the replicas are underhammers, which offer significantly faster lock time. The cream of the crop are the Billinghurst and O-66 replicas made by Andy Baumkircher. Superb workmanship, and fantastic triggers, but expensive. Baumkircher is reportedly working with Hege on a production gun that would be less expensive. Tilo Dedinski, in Germany, is also making good underhammer pistols. There's also a new Feinwerkbau underhammer pistol, another replica Billinghurst underhammer gun, which is getting good reviews. Be advised that the Pedersoli Carlton is of questionable historical legitimacy.

COLT & MARIETTE

The great irony of the revolver events is that the Colt revolvers are NEVER seen in them. The open-top design of a Colt just does not shoot as straight as a solid-frame Remington, Rogers & Spencer, or Adams.

The great bugaboo is the loading rules, which demand that five chambers be used. No loading one shot at a time in the one chamber that actually aligns with the barrel, as is common in the United States (an old trick to compensate for misaligned repro cylinders).

Original guns are usually the 1863 Remington, with a smattering of Rogers & Spencer revolvers, and the occasional Whitney, Adams, or Tranter. The Remington is notoriously accurate, and enough were made to enable shooters to pick up a good gun at a reasonable price - at least on this side of the Atlantic. I understand that the Europeans have a much harder time procuring originals.

As to replicas, the Hege-Remington has proven to be THE gun. These guns are actually made by Feinwerkbau, so the quality is usually outstanding. There has been some slippage in trigger quality in the last few years, but the German shooters (a discriminating and well-heeled bunch) are putting pressure on Hege to get quality back up to snuff. If you can find an older Hege-Remington in good shape at a reasonable price, buy it.

A major rival to the Hege-Remington is the Feinwerkbau Rogers & Spencer. They made these revolvers for a while, then stopped, but have resumed production. These are exquisitely made pieces, but very expensive. But if you prefer the R&S design and grips to the Remington, the Feinwerkbau is the way to go for this event. The FWB also has the advantage of a better dealer network - the major importers of FWB target air guns can get the black powder arms without too much fuss.

The other option is an Italian revolver - and most of those are problematic. It's best to examine several revolvers, and find one that has the chambers aligned with the bore (use a borelight to check alignment. I was loaned a Pedersoli Remington repro at the 2002 Worlds, and found the inherent accuracy to be quite good. It could have used a good trigger job, but the basic gun had a lot of potential.

Otherwise, be ready to spend a LOT of time and money gunsmithing a repro revolver. The North-South Skirmish Association has most of the information on how to do this - and who can do this well. The late Tom Ball could do excellent work. Tom Rush can do good accuracy jobs, but the triggers I've seen from him were lacking - I would want something much lighter and crisper.

MATCHLOCK

Probably the most unusual events in MLAIC competition are those for matchlocks. Rope-burners are almost unheard of in the United States, and only a handful of people shoot them.

On the other hand, they are a lot of fun to shoot - quite aside from the ability to totally freak people out at the practice range.

Original matchlocks are almost always Japanese. Japanese guns have several exotic characteristics, such as not having a shoulder stock. Instead, Japanese guns have a pistol grip that is held to the cheek. This is not as steady as a European-style shoulder stock, but works. And with original European guns in shootable condition being scarcer than hen's teeth, the Japanese guns compete against each other in the original categories.

Replica guns are very hard to get. Hege used to have a nice replica of a Dutch target matchlock, but it has been out of production for several years. I shoot a Hege, and it's very good - but terribly long and heavy. The best of a bad set of options at this time seems to build one yourself. Barrels and stocks can be done - the biggest problem is getting hold of a lock. If you see a good reproduction European matchlock for sale, buy it.

Newer: There is a [French outfit](#) making replica matchlocks that are of good quality. We saw those at the 2006 World Championships, and they were quite nice. A little pricey, but of good quality and made by a firm that caters to good shooters.

As for shooting technique, there are several tricks that I have found useful.

First, keep the match as far away from the powder as possible. You are required to use a safety container for the burning end of the match - a soft drink can is the normal option. Drain the can, cut a small vent hole in the side, and put the match in the top. You load with the match in the can, prime, close the pan cover, then put the match into the gun for firing.

Second, load quickly. Thirty minutes is a long time with a pistol, but with a matchlock, you will be pressed for time to get off thirteen shots. I've found it worthwhile to dispense with spotting shots through the scope after the first one or two rounds.

Third, keep the priming powder to a minimum. You'll get faster ignition that way. I normally put about a match-head sized group in, then spread the powder evenly in the pan. That way, the very first coal that hits anywhere in the pan will ignite the charge.

Finally, enjoy yourself. The matchlock shooters tend to have a much more laid-back attitude than some of the rifle and pistol shooters. After all, this is supposed to be fun!

New: The matchlock pistol event, Tanzutsu, has taken off. Scores with the replica guns are approaching those shot with the flintlocks very closely. Scores with the originals.....well, let's say that if you could put ten shots to the black, you can win a medal. On the other hand, the Ancient and Honorable Order of the Original Matchlock Pistol Shooters is about as laid-back a crowd as you can find.

Newer: Tanzutsu scores have reached parity with the flintlock. It's gotten VERY competitive out there. Original matchlock is still laid-back.....and developing traditions of its own, such as trying to get a group photo at the World and Zone Championships.