

Airguns - Doorway to a Lifetime of Successful Shooting

By: Bob Soldivera



My grandfather taught me to shoot when I was seven years old. In those days, most of Staten Island was vacant land and finding a safe place to shoot was simple. Just take the old .22 off the gun rack, pick up a box of ammo at the local hardware store and set up targets in the backyard.

As time passed, urban sprawl forced the development of private gun clubs or commercial ranges, and today, if you live in an urban or suburban area, and you don't have an indoor range nearby, chances are, you don't have a place to shoot. The backyards are gone and so are most of the grandfathers who took the time and had the skill to teach another generation how to shoot. So organizations like Boy Scouts of America, 4-H, the National Rifle Association, the YMCA, the National Shooting Sports Foundation, Learning for Life, the NWTJ Jakes Program, Jaycees, the Future Farmers of America, IHEA and a cadre of volunteer certified instructors have come forward to fill the gap. While grandpa did a great job, most of the junior training programs offered today are better organized and more thorough. As to finding a safe place to shoot, there is hope!

Pellet and BB guns can be used safely in much more confined spaces than firearms. Even if you live in a city like New York, using a pellet or BB gun, you can safely enjoy shooting. You can set up an airgun range in your home or garage or basement. Here's how I did it.

At the end of a hallway in my home, there is a storage closet for inens. Open the closet door and remove the towels from the

fourth shelf and there is my pellet trap. I place a small high intensity desk light on the front and to the side on the same shelf and I am ready to go. Now and then, a guest shooter, not me, might miss the trap, so I installed a piece of 18 gauge sheet metal, cut to size, that covers the wall section in the closet behind the trap.

Perhaps a portable system would be more suitable in your situation. Building a portable range is simple and very inexpensive. If there is concern about damaging a finished wall, place a piece of plywood three-foot square by a half inch thick against the wall. Then set your Crosman model 0850 pellet trap on top of a cardboard box (approximately twelve inches high) and you will have a safe, functional airgun range. The plywood can be stored under the bed or alongside the refrigerator.

If the shooter is a novice, start shooting from a distance of fifteen feet and use a TQ7 target, which has a large bull's eye. As proficiency increases, the firing line can be moved back to the official distance of 10 meters (33 feet.) For your information, the official Olympic 10 meter air rifle target is the AR 5/1, or AR 5/5, or AR 5/10, with a 10-ring the size of the head of a pin.

Today's airguns are better than ever and pellets are a fraction of the cost of firearms ammunition. And shooting airguns is a great way to learn the basics of safe shooting and sharpen your shooting skills. In fact, the state agencies that oversee hunter education recommend the use of airguns in the classroom as a training aid for firearms safety and marksmanship.

I support this recommendation. In addition to numerous education courses, there are a variety of training manuals available through the National Rifle Association, the Boy Scouts of America, and several other groups and state agencies. BSA equipment stores have riflery merit badge books that are ideal for the beginner.

Fundamentally, there are just a few basic rules for good marksmanship and safe gun handling. The shooter should be familiar with the parts and function of the gun. When introducing a new shooter to the sport, always use a rifle rather than a pistol. A rifle is much easier to handle safely, and the long sight radius will translate to more accurate beginner performance. And using an airgun makes teaching a beginner much easier.

When you use an airgun, there are some basic rules to follow, such as: the muzzle should always (and I stress “always”) be pointed in a safe direction. Keep your finger off the trigger until the muzzle is pointed at the target and you’re ready to fire. Make sure that the target area and beyond is safe, become the 1, 2, and 3 for safe shooting for everyone.

After the mechanics and safety aspects of shooting are mastered, the mechanics of firing the shot is the next order of business. You must align the sights or “zero” the gun, to ensure

that what you aim at is what you hit. Adjusting the sights of an airgun is not difficult. Just remember a simple rule: if you want to lower the point of impact, lower the rear sight. If you want to move the point of impact to the right, move the rear sight to the right.

When zeroing a gun, also called sighting in, it’s a good idea to sit at a table or lie on the floor and rest the “fore-end” (front part of the stock) on a sand bag or bag of rice or the like. Note: the sights must be readjusted when you move closer or further away from the target. The point of impact changes as the distance changes.

When using a paper target with a black bull’s eye, it is a good idea to adjust the sights so that the top of the front sight is touching the bottom of the bull’s eye and the impact point is in the center of the black. This is called a “six o’clock hold.” The reason for using a six o’clock hold is, the front and rear sights on most guns are black and it is very difficult to differentiate between the black bull’s eye, the black front sight and the black rear sight.

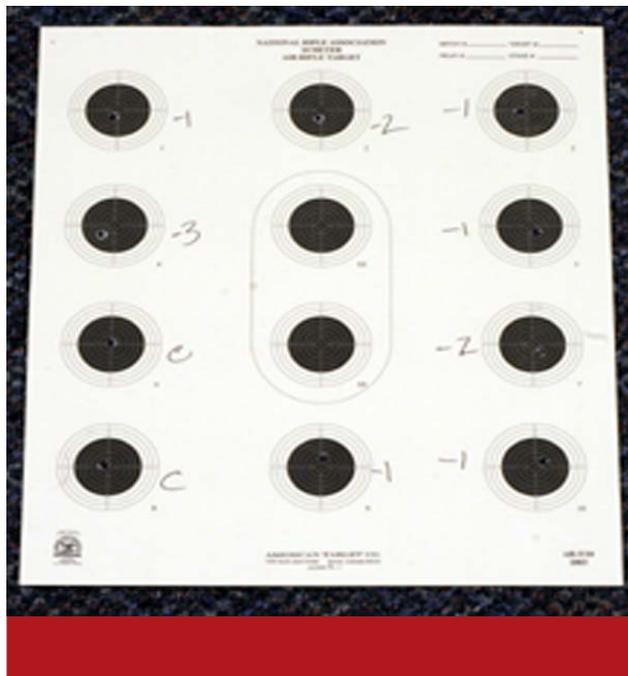
When choosing between BB’s and pellets, BB’s are less expensive than pellets, however, pellets are inherently more



accurate when used in a rifled barrel and will cut a nice, clean hole in a tag target.

There are also differences in targets. I recommend tag targets. Tag target material is thicker than the type of paper you use in your printer or copy machine. The material is more rigid, allowing a wad-cutter pellet to cut a clean, round hole. It is usually composed of 25 percent sulphite and 75 percent ground wood, resembling a lightweight pressed cardboard.

Among the many preparation exercises beginners need to do, establishing their dominant eye is among the most important. Since the dominant eye is a key factor in aligning, and since aligning the front sight in the rear sight is fundamental to scoring well, it is essential that you identify your dominant eye. Here's



an easy way to do it. Cut a 1" hole, either round or square, in the center of a plain white 8-1/2" x 11" piece of paper. Hold the paper at arm's length, gripping the paper with both hands at the top corners. With both eyes open, look through the hole at an object approximately 15 to 20 feet away. Then, without losing sight of the object, bring the paper toward the face. When the paper reaches your face, if you're looking through the hole with your right eye, you are right eye dominant and you should shoot right handed with the butt of the rifle in your right shoulder.

So how do you get started actually shooting? First, put on a pair of safety glasses. Now you're ready to shoot. I suggest you start by resting the fore-end of the air rifle on a sand bag, so that you can focus on the sequence of firing the shot. Place the butt of the air rifle as high as possible between the shoulder joint and the chest. You should be able to comfortably rest the entire weight of your head on the cheek piece of the stock and look through the rear sight at the front sight without tilting your head to the side.

Using conventional open sights, with a "U," "V," or square-shaped notch in the rear and some form of post or bead front sight, adjust the position of your face on the stock until the front sight appears to be centered in the rear sight and the top of the

front sight is level with the top of the rear sight. When you have it, you have proper "sight alignment." Adjust your position (not just the gun) so that the bull's eye appears to be sitting on top of the front sight, like a pumpkin sitting on top of a fence post. You now have sight alignment and you're ready to shoot.

Let your breath out to a comfortable point and "stop breathing." Position the index finger gently on the trigger. The trigger should touch the finger between the tip and first joint. When gun and body movement is minimized and the sight picture is reasonably stabilized, apply rearward steady pressure to the trigger. Focus on the front sight, not on squeezing the trigger. Anticipation will cause you to jerk the trigger. That will result in a poorly placed shot. After the rifle discharges, remain perfectly still for a second or two.

Everyone, regardless of age, size, or sex, can participate in shooting sports. And there are a wide variety of disciplines to choose from. You don't need to be part of a team, and, when done properly, you'd be hard pressed to find an activity that is safer and more fun than shooting.

Part of the reason for the rapid growth in shooting sports is the number of organizations providing an open door for young people to shooting. They run the gambit from Boy Scouts and 4-H to the Future Farmers of American and the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF.) Each group has specialized programs to teach and develop the skills of young shooters. There are even disabled shooters programs for people from eight to 80.

Are these programs successful? At the recent Future Farmers of America national meeting in Louisville, Crosman,

NSSF, and the NRA cycled more than 5,000 shooters through a live fire, target shooting experience. It was the clear winner of all the participation events at the meeting, which drew more than 43,000 FFA members from all over the country.

At the most recent Boy Scout Jamboree, Crosman and I again cycled more than 23,000 out of 50,000 Boy Scouts through a similar program. The Boy Scouts also sponsor Bikathlon® events all over the country to raise funds for their activities. The event, one of my ideas for Crosman, is a combination of cycling and shooting. The format is similar to the Olympic biathlon.

The list of organizations and programs goes on and on. The 4-H National Championship, Postal Competitions, the Crosman / Explorer National Championship, the Scholastic Rifle Program, the Challenge program, Disabled Shooting programs, the Scholastic Clay Target Program, and JAKES events are but a few. Needless to say, there's something for everyone in shooting, but it all starts with an airgun and a good instructor. There's no substitute for a solid foundation to build shooting skills.

Bottom line - airgun shooting is fun, safe and affordable. In my opinion, the airgun is the way to start a great hobby that can become a lifetime sport.

Bob Soldivera, an Air Force and music business veteran, has been part of the shooting education landscape for three decades. He is an NRA Certified Training Counselor and a Certified International Rifle Coach. He is a member of the Venturing BSA National Committee and Sub-Committee Chairman for Shooting Sports. Soldivera authored the shooting sports standards, criteria and text of the Venturing Ranger Award. He is a frequent editorial contributor to shooting sports magazines.



A Lifelong Sport

By: Sarah Bowers

I was 10 years old the first time my dad brought me out to shoot a .22 long rifle. Although it was over 90 degrees outside, I shivered with excitement the whole way there. But once we started shooting, I became more and more comfortable with the rifle. It was hard at first, but as I shot more regularly, all of the steps I had been practicing—loading, sight alignment, sight picture, breath control, trigger control, and follow-through—all drifted into my subconscious. I made mistakes, and had to learn some things the hard way, but I soon began to love practicing and, eventually, competing.

My first match was the Idaho Smallbore Sectionals in Nampa. Despite the fact that I was still new to my sport, it was good for me to compete so I could learn from the other competitors. I started to learn how to control my nervousness and to block out the noise and movement around me. Although I've defeated the shivers, I still get butterflies in my stomach every time I arrive at the range for a match. But once I get my equipment set-up and get down into the first position of the day, everything seems to disappear except for that small dot 50 feet away. No spectators, no fellow competitors, not even the small "click" when the rifle goes off, gets in the way of my concentration.

Having a good coach and mentor has been important to my journey as a shooter. I am fortunate to have my dad, Terry Bowers, for a coach, along with a former Army Marksmanship Unit member, Mr. Don Curtis of Vale, Oregon. They are both very knowledgeable, patient, and encouraging. They have shared what they've learned along the way, helping me become a much better shooter. Our club, the Snake River Sportsmen based in Ontario, Oregon is full of men and women eager to help new shooters learn the sport.

I've met a lot of very good shooters as I've competed around the state, and whenever I talk to them, I learn something new. Shooters are friendly people – open and eager to share what they've learned through years of experience. They are also some of the best sportsmen I've ever met. An accidental cross-fire by a top competitor at the Oregon State Games in 2006 meant I would be taking home the gold medal in smallbore prone, beating both Don Curtis and Mike Elway, two of the best shooters in the state. The looks on their faces said it all – they were happy for me and offered their hearty congratulations in front of the entire group. Both of these men are very dedicated to giving young people a hand up in the shooting sports; they were proud that a junior shooter (and a girl at that) would be taking home the gold. That day they showed me what it means to be a good sportsman, and I try to follow their example every time I compete.

I've also discovered opportunities to serve the community through the shooting sports. My family and I volunteer to help with our local Friends of the NRA banquet and fundraiser every year. In doing so, I have the chance to give back to the people and organizations that helped me to become a successful shooter. I've also met a lot of people who are committed to preserving our Second Amendment rights.

Shooting has been a good choice for me. I can decide how much time to spend on it based on my own personal goals and



schedule, and it's a sport I can look forward to enjoying for the rest of my life. If you've been trying to find a sport that's right for you, I highly recommend one of the shooting disciplines. From smallbore and high-power rifle to trap, skeet, and pistol, there's something for everyone. You'll have a blast just looking for your favorite! Whether your goal is to compete or just to have fun, shooting is a great way to meet new people, travel, and simply have a great time. See you at the range!



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USA Young Eagles

By: J.J. Jackson, Manager, USA Young Eagles

The USA Young Eagles sport shooting team, 22 young men and women ranging in age from 16 to 24, is readying itself for a consolidated competition schedule this summer that will have the fledgling group once again in search of victory. The USA Young Eagles have the opportunity to compete internationally once every four years. In its three past competitions, the team has brought home gold or silver and expectations are high again this year.

All of the group's 2007 competitions are scheduled for August. In preparation for the International Long Range Championships, the Young Eagles will first compete in the U.S. National Matches in Camp Perry, Ohio. They will then travel to Ottawa, Ontario's Connaught Ranges to participate in the Canadian Fullbore Rifle Championships (CFRC). It is there in Ontario that the Young Eagles will split up into their under 21 and under 25 teams and spend a full day competing in the International Long Range Championships. Team manager J.J. Jackson says the team will keep a grueling pace; members each fire at distances of 300 and 600 yards as well as 800 and 900 meters in a single day.

This year's USA Young Eagles hail from coast to coast – including California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. The total cost of travel and match fees for the group is estimated at \$95,000. Young Eagles supply their own equipment, rifles, and ammunition, and raise some of the money themselves. Corporate sponsors and supporters include: Hodgdon Powders, Lapua, LVA Corporate Communications, Porter Precision Products, *Precision Shooting Magazine*, Savage Arms, Second Amendment Sisters, Sierra Bulletsmiths, and Sinclair.

For more information or to make a donation to support the team, please visit: www.usaunder25team.org. All donations are tax deductible through PALMA Promotions, Inc., a volunteer, non-profit organization (specifically, an IRS certified non-profit, 501(c)(3), Amateur Sports Organization) which was founded in 1993 with the sole purpose to foster and promote National and International Long Range Rifle competition and to create an increased awareness of this world class sport.



