

Two students approach a vehicle and engage the shoot/no-shoot targets inside it.



ADVANCED

BY JOE TORRE

HANDGUN TA



Scott Reitz demonstrates a close-quarter shooting technique.

One of the least appreciated needs in firearms training is the need for advanced tactical training for patrol officers. While SWAT and other specialized teams in a police department are often thought of first when opportunities arise for advanced training, if you think about it, the patrol officer is in some ways the person who needs it the most.

By the time SWAT arrives on-scene, the area has been secured and intelligence has been gathered on the number of suspects, the number of hostages and the general situation. But as the first responder, the patrol officer has none of these advantages. Often, he is entering a situation blind or with information from the dispatcher that is



left: Range drills were designed to duplicate the unpredictability and uncertainty of the street. Students ran from one distance to another and fired a different way from a different position each time...

above: ...and did pushups in between strings of fire.



left: Students engage shoot/no-shoot targets that are only illuminated by the blinking lights of their cruisers. A car vs. car competition added some stress to the drill. **above:** While the blocking vehicle suppresses the threat, the rescue vehicle pulls between the blocking vehicle and the downed officer, rescuing and evacuating him from the area.

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either sketchy or misleading. And all too often, the tactical tools given to these officers at the Academy are not sufficient for the task at hand.

To address this need, International Tactical Training Seminars of Los Angeles, California offers a three-day, law enforcement only Advanced Handgun Course tailored for patrol officers. S.W.A.T. recently attended this class, hosted by the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Department. Twenty law enforcement officers from all over the west coast attended the course.

ITTS Senior Instructor Scott Reitz—a twenty-seven-year veteran of the LAPD—taught the class. His resume includes twenty-three years with the elite Metro Division, including ten

years as a SWAT operator. He now serves as Metro Division's primary firearms and tactics instructor and as an expert witness in police defense cases. He has "been there and done that."

RANGE DRILLS

Scott Reitz doesn't believe that square range training adequately prepares officers for the situations they'll encounter on the streets. The typical range drill is done in daylight, at known distances, and rehearses the same technique over and over: "From the five-yard line, draw and shoot a controlled pair, center mass. Fire! And again..." While these drills are good for providing the repetitions needed to develop basic shooting skills, they are

too predictable to be useful on the street.

"Never in my twenty-seven years at LAPD, whether on routine patrol, during the L.A. riots or anywhere else, have I seen five consecutive suspects engage a police officer at the same distance, in the same way, one right after another. Yet, that's the way most range drills are practiced," says Reitz.

Instead, after basic warm-up drills, Reitz likes to mix-and-match his drills in rapid succession, varying the drill, the distance and the task each time, so that the officer never knows what's coming next. These drills run something like this:

"From the three-yard line, draw and shoot two rounds center mass from the

weapon retention position. Go!"

"Back to the seven-yard line. Draw and make one headshot. Go!"

"Back to the fifteen-yard line, fire two shots center mass standing, then one head shot from braced kneeling. Go!"

"Run up to the ten-yard line and do twenty pushups. Go!"

"Run up to the five-yard line and make one headshot using only your support hand. Go!"

"Run back to the twenty-five yard line and make two center mass hits from prone. Go!"

"Place an empty magazine in your weapon. Run up to the five-yard line and fire two headshots (forcing a speed reload). Go!"

On and on they went. Reitz ran these drills for five to six minutes non-stop, varying the techniques, shooting positions, firing hands, distances and reactions—all in a completely safe manner. Reitz designed these drills to simulate the stress and uncertainty of the street, and it looked like they worked. As an added bonus, the students got a good aerobic work out!

OFFICER RESCUE DRILLS

Here's another real-world scenario you don't get to practice on the range every day—officer down/officer rescue drills. Performing the drill requires two police cars and five officers with all their gear.

Simulating a downed officer, one officer lies on the ground approximately fifty yards away from a variety of steel and paper targets. When the call comes in that there's an officer down, four officers get into two separate cars, with the second officer in each car sitting in the back seat behind the driver.

As the blocking vehicle pulls up between the downed officer and the targets the officers exit the vehicle, take up firing positions behind the car and engage the targets, providing cover for the second car.

The second (rescue) car pulls up between the downed officer and the blocking vehicle. The officers exit and grab the downed officer, push him into the back seat, and evacuate. While leaving, the rescue car blasts its horn so the officers from the blocking vehicle know that the downed officer is safe, and they're clear to disengage.

Throughout the drills, several common problems emerged. Often, the officers in the blocking vehicle didn't hear the horn from the rescue vehicle and



ITTS Lead Instructor Scott Reitz demonstrates the effect of a 12 gauge rifled slug on a car door.

kept firing at the threats instead of evacuating the area. They were so focused on the threats that they got tunnel vision and tuned out their surroundings. Reitz says this is very common, which is why he recommends simple, monosyllabic commands such as, "Go! Go! Go!" from the rescue team in addition to the horn.

A second common problem was that the downed officer's equipment, holsters and other gear often got in the way, causing the insertion into the rescue vehicle to take much longer than necessary. Reitz says that sometimes holsters and guns even get shorn off in this drill. When possible, the best way to get the downed officer in the back seat is to push him in on his side, not on his back.

Finally, it's imperative that the downed officer be *pushed* into the back seat, not *pulled* in. If the rescuing officer goes in the back seat first and pulls him in, the downed officer often winds up on top of him, pinning the rescuer under his weight. If the driver gets hit, all three officers are in jeopardy.

These drills went on for the better part of the afternoon. Everyone in the class took turns in the blocking vehicle, the rescue vehicle and being the downed officer. In each scenario, Reitz threw variations into the mix such as having one of the rescuing officers getting "hit", resulting in two downed officers. Or one of the drivers gets wounded so his partner has to immediately take over as driver. Reitz kept the students guessing by varying the drills. The students had to think on their feet at all times.

The above is a signature characteris-

tic of Reitz's training: to feed students different challenges and force them to think and solve problems under stress. Real-life gunfights are not only about the mechanics of shooting, but also about sound decision-making. By focusing on problem-solving scenarios, Reitz's long-time students acquire a whole tool kit of experiences to draw from in real world situations.

VEHICLE TAKEDOWNS

Approaching a vehicle on foot with your partner and firing live rounds at 3-D targets through windows and car doors in shoot/no-shoot situations is an eye-opening experience.

This block of instruction started with a demonstration of how various types of ammunition do or do not penetrate windshields, side windows, doors and engine blocks. There was a variety of ordnance in the class, everything from 9mm to .40 and .45 caliber handguns, to buckshot and rifled slugs, and even a .308 tactical rifle. An out-of-service Ford Taurus was used as a dummy and we learned some interesting things.

Shooting through windshields tends to cause the bullet jacket to separate from the lead core. This results in two projectiles instead of one—neither of which hit the point of aim. Side and rear windows shatter in place and take on a milky color that you can't see through after the first shot.

Side doors are surprisingly sturdy as bullets and buckshot tend to get stopped by the gears and other mechanical devices that operate the windows. Only one of four .45 rounds fired at point blank range managed to penetrate a side door. Buckshot doesn't

penetrate very well either, as the pellets flatten out on impact. Slugs were much better at penetration, with two out of three slugs piercing the side door.

The engine block stopped everything—including the .308. The disks in disk brakes are also very good at stopping incoming rounds too, so the best place to seek cover around a vehicle is on the side of the car behind the engine near the wheels.

After the firepower demo, students went through a variety of drills in which they approached a vehicle on foot, staying in an "L" formation so as not to get in each other's line of fire, and then engaged 3D targets inside in shoot/no-shoot scenarios. No two scenarios were the same—just like on the streets.

One common problem with this drill is what Reitz calls "sympathetic shooting." Some very nervous officers approach a vehicle, not knowing who's inside, and one officer fires. For some reason, as soon as that happens everyone else starts firing too, even though they don't know what they're shooting at—or why—and often keep firing until they're out of ammo. Reitz warned against this in the pre-drill briefings, and coached the officers throughout the drill to prevent this reflex from taking over.

NIGHT SHOOT

Unlike most law enforcement night shooting which is done only with a flashlight, Reitz teaches four progressively difficult methods of night shooting.

The drill started with two police cars pulling up to a set of targets, four officers getting out and using their cars' headlights for illumination while firing at the targets. A "car vs. car" competition to shoot all the bad guys without hitting any good guys added some stress to the drill.

Once everyone ran through that exercise, the drill was repeated, only this time using their handguns with their SureFire lights (which Reitz swears by).

The third round of night shooting drills involved shooting under the flashing lights of the patrol cars. The targets flickered under the blinking lights, making the drill like trying to shoot someone in a disco! At his Los Angeles facility, Reitz even turns on the car's sirens to add more distraction and realism to this drill, but that wasn't allowed on the range we were on.

Finally, in the last round, the students tried their hand at shooting with *no* light, using only their Trijicon night sights, which Reitz also strongly recommends.

The night shoot provided the officers in the class with a variety of techniques to use in a variety of lighting conditions; all tailor-made to simulate conditions a patrol officer might find himself in. The officers in the class were pumped!

The officers I spoke to all raved about the class and got a lot out of it. Many paid for the course out of their own pockets because they know they need the training but haven't received it from their departments—even after many years of service.

One of the things they really valued was how "state-of-the-art" the training was. ITTS' training is constantly being refined based on what's happening on the streets *today*. In the twenty-one months prior to this course, twenty-seven of Reitz's former students had been involved in real gunfights. After each incident Reitz debriefed them to determine what worked and what didn't. Based on those after-action accounts, he adapted his tactics and drills so he stays ahead of the game. Reitz is constantly in "research and development" mode.

Despite the high-speed training though, ITTS has a flawless safety record: None of their students has ever been seriously injured (hot brass down the shirt collar doesn't count), and they've never had a negligent dis-

charge. Safety at the Santa Clara range was impeccable.

If you're an officer in a high crime area, or a sheriff's deputy operating alone, or a police tactics instructor, ITTS' three-day Advanced Handgun Tactics course is highly recommended. After all, why should the SWAT guys have all the fun? ☺

[Editor's Note: Although the subject of this article pertained to a course offered only to law enforcement officers, ITTS offers many classes to qualified individuals who don't wear a badge. S.W.A.T. can recommend these classes without hesitation.]

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