

Timer Operator Considerations and Guidelines

“What most shooters would like to experience”

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Introduction:

We, like many of you, have had the good fortune to have attended hundreds of SASS Cowboy Action Shooting events. These events have ranged from local club shoots with fewer than twelve shooters through State, Regional, National and World Championships with hundreds of shooters. In all these shoots we have witnessed numerous “Timer/Operators” (T/O) with several approaches to “safely assist the shooter through the course of fire”. Some are good and some are not so good. The most notable of the ‘not so good’ are the T/O’s that argue with spotters, take significant time to “train” the shooter after the stage, fail to read the time and YELL the stage time to the scorekeeper and loud enough for the shooter to hear, take way too long to poll the spotters, hold up the shooting line and next shooter for an inordinate time, and plain not pay any attention to the posse concept of getting through a shoot.

The most obvious distinction between them seems (apparent to me) to be quite a disparity in how well they do this complex activity. There seems also to be quite a disparity in just plain how they do it. Some are very efficient, effective, considerate, rigorous, and successful; some are grossly inadequate! Those that are grossly inadequate fail to count the number of shots fired, fail to keep track of which targets have been engaged, fail to see that firearms have been re-staged empty, safely and correctly, fail to protect the timer/clock, fail to see that the shooter is properly prepared to start the stage, fail to poll the spotters, fail to call significant penalties, argue with spotters and safety officers, and fail to guide the shooter toward the unloading table. This gross inadequacy goes even beyond the list mentioned above.

In contrast, the ‘successful’ T/O attends to all those listed activities of the stage and individual shooter. Rather than peck away and what isn’t good in a T/O, we’d like to offer a guideline approach to what seems to be a successful T/O.

A “Good T/O”:

Confirms the stage is Set and Safe

Confirms spotters are present and attentive, then

Calls the shooter to the line in a timely manner

Asks, then checks, the shooter for proper equipment and supplies (may be an expediter)

Enough shotshells, possible reload with another firearm
Pistols holstered and un-lashed
Confirm rifle ammo count
Properly placed/worn equipment (holsters, spurs, chaps etc.)
Properly staged firearms (in the rack, on the table, etc.)
Eye and ear protection
Properly positioned to start per stage instructions (Prop in hand, hands at ...etc.)
Confirms spotters are attentive and properly positioned for the condition of the shooter (right or left-handed, black powder, Classic Cowboy, B-Western, Gunfighter etc)
[BTW, while the shooter is coming to the line and staging the guns all of the above takes about seven to twelve seconds]
Asks shooter to say the 'line' or asks if "ready"
Delivers "Shooter Standby" in a consistent tone and volume
Hits the buzzer with a consistent delay between standby and "Beep"
Stays positioned to assist the shooter away from pitfalls and excessive muzzle swinging
Remains close enough to verbally 'coach' the shooter through the sequence and around the props
Remains close enough to STOP the shooter if a major infraction occurs either by their own mistake or a condition on the range.
Counts all the shots from each firearm as it is fired
Follows each firearm through the prescribed sequence to guard against "P's" and to enjoin the shooter with the correct target after a temporary distracting malfunction in mid stage
Remains close enough to be able to gather a malfunctioning firearm that can not be safely re-staged
Confirms, as best they can, that a re-staged firearm is safely positioned
Confirms, as best they can, that a re-staged firearm is "Open and Empty"
Clearly informs the shooter that a re-staged firearm is 'faulted' (empty left on the carrier, not properly staged as instructed...etc.)
Watches, as best they can, that the pistols are completely and safely holstered
Positions themselves to see, and call, 'fallers/KD's' and announce whether they are down or not
Stops the shooter at the end of the stage sequence and clearly, and sufficiently loudly, announces the time so others, including the scorekeeper, can hear it
Directs the shooter towards the unloading table and, **as soon as the range is clear...**
Declares the range is safe to pick brass and set targets, if that is the range procedure at the time
Clearly and consistently calls all observed penalties
Confirms any observed penalties with other range/stage officials
Polls the Spotters for misses and any other penalties
Approaches the scorekeeper and restates the time and shows the timer face to the scorekeeper to confirm the call, and announces any misses and penalties **and watches as the score is recorded.**
Determines the range is Set and Safe
Calls the next shooter to the line
Start at the top of the list again.....

In the event that a discrepancy occurs during the stage:

With a malfunction of a firearm act to, or confirm that it is, safely re-staged or removed by another safety officer. Either be certain that it is safely deposited or handed off with minimal interruption to the shooters progress through the stage.

With a discrepancy between the spotters, get the shooter to the unloading table, immediately call the time, show the timer to the scorekeeper, hand off the clock to a second RO, call up three new spotters, and gather the spotters involved with the discrepancy to resolve the confusion. If not resolved within this group, contact a Match Range Officer and keep the group together.

With a discrepancy about a “foul” between the stage props, or RO, and a shooter protest, again hand off the timer and call new spotters. Gather the spotters and attempt to resolve the situation. If not resolved within this group, contact a Match Range Officer and keep the group together.

With a discrepancy regarding a shooters protest about any condition (misses, penalties, etc.) on the stage, hand off the timer, gather the spotters, assign new spotters and contact a Match Range Officer.

With a sensitive condition about the shooter being close to a penalty condition (swinging a barrel close to the 170 degree line, holstering and being close to the 170, etc) read the timer, show the timer to the scorekeeper then hand off the timer to another T/O and follow the shooter to the unloading table for a discussion of what condition was seen.

A T/O does NOT:

Physically contact the shooter to move them through the stage unless an unsafe condition might prevail; or physical condition of the shooter requires it

Stop the shooter to ‘coach’ them about better shooting behaviors, either during or upon completion of the stage

Re-stage, or touch, a shooters firearm, except to avoid a potential unsafe condition

Count MISSES

Explain the course of fire on the shooting line

Argue with the spotters about misses

Overrule Spotters’ calls

Summary Statement:

As can be seen from the guidelines, steps and comments above, the actions of good T/O's will definitely provide: an efficient posse process through each stage; an opportunity for each shooter to have a consistent stage experience; the process for dealing with discrepancies during, and after a stage; and, an effective means of dealing with any situation that might arise during a stage or entire shooting event. It is not reasonable to expect every T/O to be cognizant of and demonstrate each and every step and consideration equally for every shooter for every stage, but it is incumbent upon all of us who take the responsibility of being a T/O to administer these guidelines as fairly and as equitably as we can. It would be nearly and ideal world of Cowboy Action Shooting however, if these guidelines were the foundation for every club Range Officer training, range orientation, session and an actual section in the ROII handbook and training program. Then at least we might all recognize, appreciate and experience the consistency in stage operations whichever event we happen to attend.