

**SASS® Mounted Shooting™**

**Range Officer Training Course**  
**MRO-II**



**Compiled and Edited**

**By**

**The Wild Bunch**

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# SASS Mounted Range Officer Training Course Level II

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## SASS Mounted Range Officer Training Course Level II

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The design and production of this course has evolved from the national implementation of the SASS Mounted Range Operations Basic Safety Course. This course is the culmination of the dedicated collaborative efforts of many long time Mounted Shooters.

### REGISTRATION

Students interested in taking the SASS Mounted Range Officer Training Course Level II:

- Must be a SASS Member
- Must have completed SASS Mounted Range Operations Basic Safety Course.

A Level II Mounted Range Officer must have participated in SASS Mounted Shooting matches for at least six months.

A Mounted Range Master must have more than a year of competition status or sufficient experience as deemed by the Match Director.

SASS Range Officer Instructors are required to verify minimum length of time the student has been an active SASS Mounted Shooter.

### TRAINING FEES

The SASS Range Officer Training Course is \$25, and students must pay on the day of the class. Advance registration payments are not required.

### OFFICIAL CERTIFICATION OF COMPLETION

Upon receipt of registration fees, completed test, and trainer confirmation, SASS will issue an official certification of completion certificate and pin directly to the member.

The SASS Mounted Range Officer Training Course Level II requires a classroom setting. The classroom includes seating and writing areas for all students. SASS Mounted Range Officer Instructors will supply all course materials and are encouraged to create an atmosphere conducive to effective learning. Visual aids such as photography, chalkboard, and props are recommended. Pencils and other writing tools are recommended.



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### INTRODUCTION

The SASS Mounted Range Officer Training Course is a risk management program for SASS Mounted Shooting matches. It is designed to eliminate personal injury, strengthen SASS' safety record, and ensure integrity and consistency of the SASS Mounted Shooting Program.

This course requires the student to have a thorough working knowledge of the SASS Mounted Shooters Handbook and Mounted Range Operations Basic Safety Course and is not intended to be a teaching course of rules and regulations for conducting a match.

This is a four-hour course designed to train SASS Mounted Range Officers.

Utilizing a classroom environment and written test followed by practical field training in a controlled environment, the student will be trained in the areas of safety and safe Mounted Shooting practices. This course expands on the premises found in the Mounted Range Operations Basic Safety Course.

### MRO-II COURSE GOAL

Upon completion of this course, a SASS Mounted Range Officer will be knowledgeable of all aspects necessary to safely assist competitors and ensure safety practices, provide necessary leadership and assistance in the event of an accident, and enforce the rules and regulations in accordance with the SASS Mounted Shooter's Handbook.

### BEFORE THE MATCH

#### *Mandatory Meetings*

There is much information to disseminate at a Mounted Shooting match. We will discuss three mandatory meetings. Before the match begins, it is necessary for the Mounted Range Officers to meet. The purpose of this meeting is to meet each other, get assignments clearly

defined, discuss individual needs, open communication lines, and create a cohesive environment for a well-run match. This is the time to discuss match guidelines, policy, procedure, and protocol. This meeting can be conducted by the Match Director, Chief Mounted Range Master, or a designated match official. Match officials such as the Timer Operator, Scorekeepers, Armorers, and the Announcer are all Mounted Range Officers and should definitely be included at this meeting. It is advisable to have a brief meeting at the end of each match day for a critique in order to improve the match experience. **Remember, we are here for the safe enjoyment of our members.**

A detailed summary of the pre-match mandatory rider's safety meeting is covered in the MRO-I Course and Appendix A and B in the MRO-I Course. A mandatory riders meeting serves several purposes. A good rider's meeting can help competitors understand match guidelines, personnel infrastructure, and avoid gray areas with respect to policy, procedure, and protocol. The riders meeting is held before any competition begins and is conducted by either the Match Director or the Mounted Range Master. A thorough and complete overview of the match, safety, and rules should be accomplished at this mandatory meeting. This meeting can be the pathway to a successful match. A competitor is responsible to attend and to understand the information disseminated at this mandatory meeting. All participants are safety officers; however, it is the ultimate responsibility of the **Mounted Range Officers to assure the competition and safety rules are consistently followed.**

In addition to the pre-match rider's meeting, it may be advisable for the Mounted Range Officer to conduct a brief meeting during the match with the competitors before a stage begins to cover certain areas that may be

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pertinent to a particular course of fire. It is important the competitor is aware of and understands their responsibilities and asks the Mounted Range Officer any questions they may have regarding arena conditions and the execution of a course of fire. Make sure only one Mounted Range Officer answers any questions for that stage.

The following information is discussed at both the Mounted Range Officers meeting and the Rider's Safety Meeting:

### ***Medical Assistance Plan***

A plan to assist any injured rider, spectator, or animal must be in place in the event of an emergency. Each Mounted Range Officer shall be informed of the event's emergency procedures. These procedures shall also be posted or published to facilitate a timely response. These plans shall include emergency medical assistance, veterinarian, location of first aid equipment, and who is the assigned Medical Information Officer. All Mounted Range Officers shall have the telephone number and know the physical location of the nearest trauma center. In some areas, 911 is not necessarily the most appropriate number to call. The event's Medical Information Officer shall be responsible for maintaining and implementing the Medical Assistance Plan

### ***Safety Evacuation Plan***

A well thought-out emergency evacuation plan shall be in place. Timely evacuation of the competition venue during an emergency (such as a wild fire) is extremely important. Designated egress routes, means of controlling the flow of traffic, and procedures for ensuring total evacuation are addressed.

### ***Non-Shooter Safety***

All Mounted Range Officers shall be informed of the plan for non-shooting participant's

control and safety. This shall include a line of demarcation for non-shooters, areas of required eye and ear protection, and directions for non-shooters to available eye and ear protection on the range (either free or for a nominal fee) when required.

### ***Appeals Procedure***

Each Mounted Range Officer shall be briefed regarding the appeals procedure. In the event a call is challenged, the Mounted Range Officer must know the chain of command for directing the shooter to the next higher authority to settle the dispute. It is just as important to observe an appropriate chain of command for a match as in any other organization. Remember, attitudes effect perception, and poor attitudes and shooting sports don't mix well.

### ***Contestant's Responsibilities***

At all SASS sanctioned Mounted Shooting matches, no matter what size, the contestants have a responsibility to ensure safety and consistency through their own conduct. All contestants are safety officers. The following describes, but is not limited to, rules and disciplines for all contestants at a SASS sanctioned match:

- All contestants are responsible for their own safety and the safety of their mount.
- All contestants are responsible for the working condition of their equipment, including firearms, saddles, and tack.
- All contestants are responsible for ensuring the correct amount of ammunition is loaded in each gun, to check primers, cylinder rotation, correct indexing, and any other condition that may inhibit their ability to complete the course.
- All contestants are responsible to supervise their firearms in pommel holsters and at any other time, whether mounted or dismounted.

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- All contestants are responsible to verify targets are set correctly regarding color, size, and placement on the course.
- All contestants are responsible for final field check, i.e., the arena is clear of personnel and safe before engaging the course.
- All contestants are responsible to adhere to the Safety Guidelines and Rules outlined in the SASS Mounted Shooters Handbook and the Range Rules in the MRO-I Course.
- All contestants assume all responsibility for participation in these events.
- All contestants are responsible to take immediate action to remedy any unsafe condition or confront anyone whose conduct is unsafe.
- A competitor is responsible to attend and for the information disseminated at a mandatory riders meeting.
- All contestants are responsible for knowledge of the SASS Mounted Shooters Handbook and the MRO Safety Course.

### ***Range Safety Rules***

At the Mounted Range Officers pre-match meeting, each MRO shall be informed of all local range safety policies that may differ from the rules printed in the SASS Mounted Shooters Handbook. Each Mounted Range Officer is responsible for understanding and implementing all remaining rules and guidelines contained in the SASS Mounted Shooters Handbook.

Any question(s) pertaining to local or SASS rules shall be clarified at this point.

### **MOUNTED RANGE OFFICER DUTIES**

#### ***Rider Evaluation***

As each rider approaches the start/finish line, the Mounted Range Master shall conduct a visual inspection. This inspection shall include the following:

#### ***Impairments***

Does the rider appear to be physically and mentally capable of safely navigating the requirements of the stage?

#### ***Firearms***

Without physical inspection, are the firearms in place and do they appear to be SASS legal?

#### ***Leather***

Does the rider's leather (gun belt, holster) conform to SASS rules and safety guidelines?

#### ***Clothing***

Does the rider's clothing conform to rules? A contestant will not be allowed to compete unless they comply with the SASS dress requirements for Mounted Shooters.

Note: New shooters may be exempted for minor clothing infractions.

#### ***Tack***

Does the rider's tack appear to be in place and secure, and does it conform to rules?

In the event the rider is found to have illegal equipment or to be unprepared to begin the course of fire, the Mounted Range Officer shall allow the rider to leave the arena and make the necessary corrections.

#### ***Stage Inspection***

All stages shall be visually inspected for safety by the Mounted Range Officers. Potential problem areas shall be discussed and any safety issues resolved at this time.

Any changes necessary to make the stages safer shall be completed at this time—prior to any of the participants shooting the stage.

Stage design plays a major part in the safety of a match. Poor stage design can lead to rider confusion and safety problems, and unsafe stage design can lead to injuries. All Mounted Range Officers are mounted

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officials. It is necessary Mounted Range Officers understand stage design so safety issues are avoided.

### *The Course of Fire*

If the horse and rider accidentally break the start timer during warm-up and before the Range Master gives the “go-signal,” the contestant will incur no penalty and the timer shall be reset. The rider will be given a warning for that stage, and the scorekeeper informed. A second breakage of the timer will result in a 99.99 second penalty, a stage DQ.

Once the Mounted Range Master has completed the evaluation of the rider, he or she shall prepare to supervise the rider and stage as follows:

Prepare the rider to begin by declaring “**Is the rider ready?**” (Never ask “Does the rider understand the course of fire ... first it is inappropriate, because he may think he does, but does not ... so nothing is gained. Secondly, he may opt to recite the stage to you, verifying he really does understand the course of fire and consume minutes of precious match time. The rider is obligated to understand the course of fire ... the only appropriate query is, “Are you ready?”)

The Mounted Range Master shall give a short pause and declare, “You may start on my signal.” Once the go-signal<sup>1</sup> is given the rider may engage the stage.

Once the rider engages the stage, the Mounted Range Master shall watch the muzzles of the guns for correct target engagement, and ensure there is no sweeping with their guns or other unsafe practices.

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<sup>1</sup> The MRO must use a flag or similar signal with the arm held straight out pointing in the direction of “go.” Never use across the body arm movements as this is often hard to see and can be confusing.

After the rider has completed the course of fire, the Mounted Range Master shall declare the stage raw time to the rider, and then instruct him to holster all revolvers.

The Mounted Range Master shall determine any misses by polling the assigned Mounted Range Officer and communicate the misses and any procedural or penalties to the person recording the score as well as to the rider.

The Mounted Range Master shall then ensure the rider has fired all rounds, and instruct the rider to exit the arena and unload the revolvers in an appropriate area.

### *Incidents*

As each rider engages a course of fire, the Mounted Range Master shall be prepared for any or all of the following incidents to occur and be expeditious in corrective action. The Mounted Range Master shall be decisive with calls. If a command given by the Mounted Range Master is determined to be errant, the rider will automatically receive a re-ride.

### *Prop Failure*

In the event of a prop failure, the Mounted Range Master shall be prepared to make a determination of whether or not the rider shall continue the course of fire or cease-fire immediately. In any event, the rider shall not be penalized as the result of prop failure. Broken or deflated targets are not considered a prop failure. The rider must engage the targets.

### *Tripping or Falling*

In the event a rider’s horse accidentally trips or falls during a course of fire and the rider is not dismounted, the Mounted Range Master shall make an assessment of the condition of the rider, and give a “Cease Fire<sup>2</sup>” command

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<sup>2</sup> If the Mounted Range Master gives a “Cease-Fire” command for what ever reason and the rider had not become

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only if horse or rider appears injured. Otherwise the rider will be allowed to regroup and continue with the course of fire.

If the rider becomes dismounted for whatever reason, the course of fire is over.

### ***Timer Malfunction***

A timer failure or malfunction is considered a prop failure, and the rider shall be granted a re-ride.

When the horse and rider cross the timer beam to begin the course of fire, the activation is not considered a malfunction; and a re-ride is not granted.

## **CART DIVISION**

### ***Stage Design***

In matches having a Cart Division, the stage design will remain the same as the mounted categories, but may be engaged differently due to limitations of the cart and the shooter.

The Mounted Range Master shall meet with a cart representative who has been selected by the Match Director prior to the start of the match. These individuals shall agree on the routing of the cart through each stage, with safety being the foremost criteria. All carts will engage the course in the method agreed upon.

### ***Categories***

There are three categories in the Cart Division:

- Combined Team – Shooter and Driver sign-up as a team. The passenger does the shooting and a driver drives the cart.
- Shotgun – Shooters are assigned to pre-qualified driver/cart/horse. The passenger does the shooting and a driver drives the cart. Same rules as for Combined Team.

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dismounted, the MRO will grant a re-ride. Safety is first and foremost.

- Pioneer – The single rider does both the driving and the shooting

In the Combined Team and Shotgun categories the shooter must always shoot off the side of the cart opposite the driver. No off hand or across the body shots are allowed.

In the Pioneer category, the driver/shooter may use either the right or left hand. They are allowed to drive their cart while shooting. They can also make crossover or across the body shots.

The three categories will engage the course as agreed by cart representative and the Range Master.

Broken cart parts such as wheels, axles, wagon tongues, or broken harness will be considered the same as a dismounted rider. The course of fire will be stopped, and a 99.99 second time given.

## **SAFETY**

Range safety is top priority for the entire range staff. While setting up **the course of fire**, pay careful attention to the distance targets and barrels are set from the perimeters of the arena. Barrels<sup>3</sup> shall not be closer than 25 feet to the arena side and end rails, and targets shall be at **least** 30 feet from side and end rails. A safe and reasonable shut down area **shall be provided for** horse and rider upon completion of each stage.

An inspection of the range shall be accomplished. Large rocks or other debris should be removed. All poles, cones, barrels and props are inspected for potential hazards. Timing equipment are set in a safe, secure position on the field. A marker, such as a cone, shall mark the timer placement during the match to ensure safe visual guidance to the Range Officers and riders. Strong, sturdy

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<sup>3</sup> It is required that all stage barrels be plastic and they be closed at both ends.

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equipment is vital to prevent malfunctions during an event.

Accidents can and will happen. It is the responsibility of the event staff to minimize the opportunity for such occurrences and be prepared to handle them without creating havoc when they happen. The Mounted Range Master shall accomplish final inspection of the arena.

### STAGE DESIGN

The primary purpose of a stage is to provide a scoring grid that is fair for all contestants. Well thought-out stages make the field as equal as possible. Basic designs utilize the full arena. It is suggested a match have stage designs that test controlled horsemanship skills, such as reining, lead changes, and barrel turns, while others demonstrate speed with control, quick gun changes, as well as shooting skill. A good variety will make a good match. Stage designs are created by a variety of distances, placement on the field, and heights of ten targets. Target order consistency within a stage will avoid procedural and spotting problems while promoting safety. A good stage promotes action and challenging target engagement, while letting skill make the difference.

SASS has provided a comprehensive Mounted Shooting course of fire book. While the stages are not required for use, they are strongly recommended for safety and consistency.

### *Stage Instructions*

Stage instructions should be specific in addressing each step in the sequence: gates, across the body shots, right or left barrel turns—don't be vague. Concise written stage descriptions are suggested to convey your instructions to the riders. Try and imagine every interpretation of your instructions—many riders will look for alternatives within

the limits of the description that may give them an advantage. It is your responsibility to ensure the instructions are specific. There are instances where riders have options as to how they will run a stage. Let skill make the difference, not interpretation of stage instructions.

### *General Guide Lines*

1. Avoid designing a stage that brings “luck of the draw” into the outcome. Setting targets close together is an excellent scenario, but should not attach a particular benefit for one rider over another by the outcome. For example, targets set close together test the rider's duelist skills and is acceptable, but a shooter that gets two or three targets with one shot is “luck of the draw.” This can be avoided by varying height of poles and angle of targets.
2. Design your stages for ALL SASS Mounted Divisions. Don't forget you are dealing with many levels of expertise. If there is any question whether or not the stage will be understood, include any needed special instructions.
3. Do not design stages that require riders to perform out of the ordinary athletic feats. The riding and shooting skill of the competitor should be the deciding factors not their overall athletic ability.
4. Design stages that offer an opportunity to exhibit both horsemanship and gun skills.
5. The responsibility of the Mounted Range Officer is to watch the rider at all times, ensuring safety on the field. Keep the chance for procedural to a minimum.
6. Be careful to avoid designs that take riders to the edge of safe firearm handling and horse maneuvering. You, the designer, can eliminate many problems with a little more thought. Be careful of designs that

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- find riders firing close to the side and end rails of the arena.
7. Be careful of a stage that requires the riders engage targets set in very high or very low positions.
  8. Getting off a horse may be do-able (but time consuming) under the clock, but getting on is discouraged.
  9. Pistol loading (or reloading) should not be used in big matches. Loading and unloading firearms while on horseback is not acceptable.
  10. The Mounted Range Master and Mounted Range Officer should inspect barrels and other turning points at regular intervals and rake or level as required.
  11. All stage designs should be reviewed with the 25' and 30' rules in mind.
  12. Make the match as interesting, safe, and fun as possible.

### ***Tools***

If you design your own stages, graphics programs are effective. Integrating verbal descriptions and graphics is easy and greatly expands your ability to create a complete picture for the competitors. A standard page set-up is a great reminder of the requirements for every stage description.

Here are a few suggestions:<sup>4</sup>

1. Create icons for the timer, all targets, cones, barrels, rails, or other arena props.
2. Use a different color icon for each set of five targets.
3. Number each target 1 – 10.

4. Insert a dotted line indicating the horse's designated path on the field for that stage.
5. Insert arrows to indicate direction of travel, which way to round a barrel, and the like.
6. Use a consistent method for indicating placement of timer.
7. Color graphics can be effective in helping to get your message across.

### **STAGE DESIGN GUIDELINES**

#### ***Timer Placement***

Designate the position of the timer beam. Position of timer beam can be across the arena or in an alley position on the field. Make sure the rider understands the start/stop placement before beginning the course of fire. Make sure the rider understands the course of fire. Leave nothing to interpretation.

#### ***Mounting/Dismounting***

Stages that require mounting or dismounting should be reviewed with contestants, juniors, and handicapped. Not all contestants are physically able to accomplish mounting and dismounting under competition conditions.

If dismounting is required it is well to put it at the completion of a stage, so remounting is not required, and as an option, an alternate course not requiring a dismount might be provided that does not consume more time. It is advisable to restrict mounting and dismounting to fun day stages.

#### ***Jumping***

Not all contestants and their mounts are able to negotiate a jump successfully or safely.

Jumping should be avoided. If used, an alternate route should be provided that does not require more time.

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<sup>4</sup> These computer tools are very helpful for preparing many stages. However, successful, fun stages may be designed by simple hand drawings with clear instructions for matches at the local level.

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### *Pole Bending*

Pole bending is a useful test of a horse's reining and lead changing abilities. Shooting, while pole bending, is not a wise decision. It is recommended pole bending be done before or after firing at the balloons.

### *Luck of the draw*

Targets that are released into the air are luck of the draw (e.g., helium filled balloons) and should be avoided in SASS sanctioned matches. However, they are great for fun shoots and exhibitions.

### *Other*

Stage design where two targets might be broken with one round should be avoided by adjusting the heights of the target poles.

Stage designs that call for a subjective call by the Range Master should be avoided. **For Example:** Is the rider required to be at a certain spot that is not clearly marked before engaging the target? Or, was the horse's body past a certain line before the target was shot?

### *Movement*

1. Whenever possible, design the stage "ambidextrous"—that is to allow movement right to left or left to right depending upon whether the rider is left handed or right handed.
2. Stage design should utilize the fullest extent of the field. Many competition areas, for example, are longer than they are wide. Design stages and arrange targets in a manner that will take complete advantage of the ground a horse can cover.
3. The competitor should be prepared to demonstrate horsemanship and shooting skill. A stage may be designed whereby rating down is necessary, followed by quick acceleration, lead changes, and right and left barrel turns to demonstrate

horsemanship. Targets set close together and quick gun changes demonstrate gun skills. A stage should be designed to test these skills. Design stages that have a few or all of these elements in them. Variety makes for a fun competition.

### *Time and Balance*

1. Start the match on time. This is vital in order for all elements of the match to run smoothly.
2. When reviewing the stages for time balance (stages should each take about the same time for the average rider to complete), consider set-up time between riders. It will be necessary to calculate the following in the total elapsed time estimate: resetting targets, raking barrel, re-set timer, announcements, and Mounted Range Master safety check. One minute per rider is a good average for large matches<sup>5</sup>.

### *Targets*

1. It is recommended target balloons be helium quality.
2. Two distinctly different colors of targets should be used. One color for the first set of five targets to be shot with pistol one and another color for the second set of five targets to be shot with the second pistol.
3. When inflated correctly, a target will measure six to nine inches in diameter. Care is taken to make sure targets are of uniform size for all competitors.
4. Design stages that promote action and challenging target engagement. Mix distances, placement on the field, and heights of targets.

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<sup>5</sup> A well timed stage and a match that moves efficiently will help contestants stay alert and safe.

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5. Targets should be set whereby the rider must shoot to the interior of the arena, away from the side and end rails of the field. The stage designer needs to be mindful of safety and there are target setters, announcer, and spectators nearby. The targets shall be set 30 feet from the side and end rails. Stay away from complex target engagement sequences. Basic designs utilizing the full field, on and off hand shots, barrel turns, lead changes, and so forth are advisable. Target order consistency within a stage will ease procedural and spotting problems. Varying target order from stage to stage is acceptable, will add to the personality of each stage, and still demands the competitor pay attention and thinks about what he/she is doing.

### ***Props***

1. If you use props in your stages, such as a mailbox or a moneybag, position these to avoid causing a hazard for the horse or rider.
2. Always have extra props at the stages where they are used. Make sure someone knows where these are located and can access them quickly if they need to be replaced. Avoid special mechanical targets, where only one is available. If it can break, it will.
3. Position all props safely in the stage. Do not set props in the vicinity close to announcers, target setters, and spectators who are always nearby. The props should be set 25 feet or more from the arena sides. A suggestion is to use caution tape on poles to protect the prop as well as horse and rider. set at a distance of five to eight feet from the prop.
4. Targets set with or near a prop should be set so the shots will be toward the interior

of the arena, away from the side and end rails of the field.

5. Props come in all shapes, sizes, and design. Not all are conceived with safety in mind. It is important to ensure props are safely set, especially when movement is required.

### ***Materials***

Targets are a costly item for a club. If possible, buy targets in large quantities. They can be stored for a long time if kept in a cool place. It is a good idea to get together with another club to purchase target balloons for the season's needs and for large matches. It is a good idea to network with other clubs for resources and shop for price.

### ***Target Stands***

Target stands should be made of a flexible material like PVC or polyethylene pipe no larger than 3/4 inch in diameter. Standard target poles should be 48 to 60 inches high to increase the variety possible within each stage. A simple 1-1/2 inch vertical hacksaw cut in the top of the pipe provides an excellent way to fasten targets to the target pole. Tie off the neck of the balloon, stretch it, and slip it into the saw cut. A traffic cone can be the base for securing the target pole. Keep the base light-weight for ease when changing stage design and storing.

### ***Be Prepared***

It is a good practice to have extra targets and target stands available at a match. This is especially true for large matches where running out of targets and broken equipment can create a huge backup of riders.

### ***Target Angles***

Be cautious of angles at which targets are placed, again due to the fact target setters, announcers, and spectators are nearby. A

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barrel shall not be closer than 25 feet to the arena side and end rails, and targets should be 30 feet from side and end rails. Remember, SAFETY FIRST.

Targets should be set so it is difficult to hit more than one target with one shot. Avoid setting targets too close to a barrel. If the instruction is to hit the target before turning the barrel, set the target so the rider cannot be turning the barrel and still hit the target at the same time. The point is to have the targets set in a way the competitor will engage the course the way you intended it to be accomplished.

Pay careful attention to targets that move to unsafe target angles during shooting. For example: moving targets, swinging arms, and helium filled balloon targets.

### STAGE DESIGN SUMMARY

Remember, there are points of bad stage design that cause the rider or non-shooter to be at risk.

If a stage is found to have severe and hazardous safety flaws, the Mounted Range Officer shall politely confront the Match Director with the potential for problems. If no safe and timely remedy is implemented, the Mounted Range Officer must quietly dismiss him or herself from the event. Voting with one's feet is the ultimate way of communicating with an unresponsive organization.

The bottom line for stage design is keep it safe, interesting, and have some action. A good stage is a balance of action, horsemanship, and shooting while keeping the required experience level well within the range of all shooting categories. Design stages with the average rider in mind—the top riders will be competing at another level, so don't try to design the perfect stage that makes the average rider equal to the legends of the game. It takes greater skill to design a simple,

challenging stage than a complicated one. Complicated and highly “choreographed” stages are not fun for most average riders, and being complicated can lead to unsafe situations for some. Most of us are just average folks, so never turn your stages into an intelligence test—you shouldn't have to have a photographic memory to enjoy SASS Mounted Shooting! **And, after all, that's what we're here for—to be safe and have a good time.**

### PRACTICAL FIELD-TRAINING

This practical field-training may be preformed in an arena or in the class room. The most important part of this training is Safety for the contestants and spectators. A classroom environment is a great place to learn the rules and procedures that will enable you to do your job. In the arena things usually happen fast, therefore it is very important for you to keep your mind on what you are doing all the time!

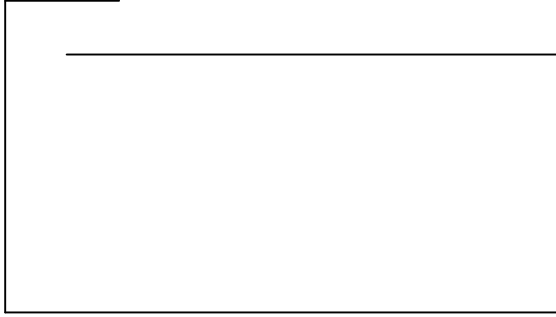
#### *Arena*

All SASS sanctioned shoots will be held in an arena. If an arena is not available a temporary arena can be made from “T” posts and “flag ribbon.” It is suggest the “T” posts be covered with a plastic cap, such as a hot wire insulator to help protect contestants and horses. The flagged arena should be 150 by 300 feet<sup>6</sup>, though many matches have been held in smaller arenas. When considering a smaller arena keep in mind such things as, rider shut down, the 25 and 30 foot requirements of barrels and targets, footing conditions, spectators, announcing area, and target setters.

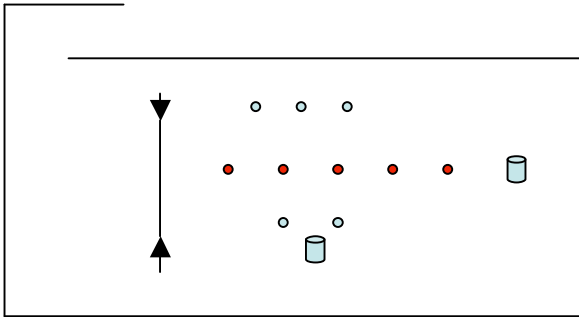
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<sup>6</sup> An arena that is 150 by 300 feet provides plenty of room to set-up any stage with required safety considerations in mind.

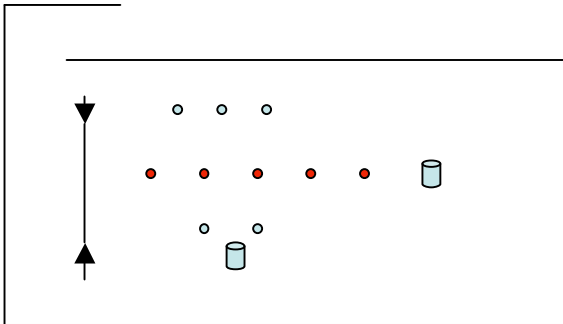
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**Figure A.** This flagged arena example shows an entrance area that does not require a gate. The flag entrance appears to create a closed arena to a loose horse.

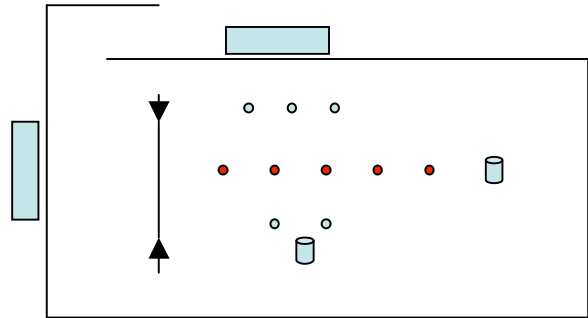


**Figure B.** This graphic shows a stage with a good rider shut down area and full use of the arena.



**Figure C.** In this case the rider shut down is much too small for the size of the arena and could lead to an unsafe stop and possible accident of the horse and rider.

Think Safety. The location of target setters, announcers, and spectators is very important around the arena.



**Figure D.** The announcer at the end of the arena is in a dangerous area where a run-away horse could cause a problem when people are stationary and cannot get out of the way quickly. Also the announcer or target setters near the entry gate causes congestion and could make it difficult for contestants entering the arena.

### *Riding Arena Footing and Surface Maintenance*

Unfortunately, there are no universal recommendations for the “Perfect” riding surface or footing material. A “perfect” riding surface should be cushioned to minimize concussion on horse legs, firm enough to provide traction, not too slick, not too dusty, not overly abrasive to horse hooves, inexpensive to obtain, and easy to maintain.

The intended use of the arena for shooting, reining, or driving, for example, also influence footing material attributes such as traction or depth of loose material. A handicap to recommending a strict formula for footing materials is that materials vary greatly around the country.<sup>7</sup>

Due to horse traffic patterns during arena use, the footing material will become uneven. The high-traffic path along the stage route will

<sup>7</sup> Arena preparation and footing materials will be covered in another document.

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take the most abuse. The footing around barrels will be thrown out of the path by hoof action, while any remaining footing will be more compacted in the rest of the arena. It is not uncommon for the footing material to be almost entirely gone from areas where there is a lot turning from the horses working off the base material.

This is highly undesirable. Footing is supposed to provide a cushion above the highly compacted base material. Uneven footing and compacted areas are resolved with a dragging device to redistribute or break up the footing material. This should be done whenever traffic patterns begin to be detected. Once a deep path of disturbed footing is established, it is difficult to alleviate. Ruts along the path are common, but frequent redistribution of the footing will keep the rut from becoming chronic. A tractor-pulled chain-link fence section is adequate for loose footing such as wood products. Finer, but heavier footing materials such as sand, will need a harrow with short spikes. Make sure the spikes are not long enough to penetrate the underlying base material. For small areas of uneven footing an arena rake may be used. This can be a job assigned to the Line Judge to monitor.

### ***Stay Focused***

It is difficult to maintain a professional attitude and be firm to those people we call our friends. With that said, you must remember you are the Mounted Range Officer, judging the stage, and not a cop.

Do not talk to people outside of the arena. Distractions from outside the arena will impair your ability to be fair to all contestants.

Keep your eye on the rider at all times. A 300 by 150 foot arena is a large area to judge. Things will happen quickly, and it is important you monitor all the contestant's activity.

Keep track of penalties and procedures. This may be difficult due to your placement in the arena. You can consult with your Line Judge in areas where needed. But remember, you must make the final call.

Always give the contestant the benefit of the doubt.

### ***Off limits zone and safe zone***

In most cases a Mounted Shooter begins the course of fire with the first revolver in hand before crossing the start line. There are several stages whereby the rider approaches the first target by riding down the side rails. For example: Please review stage 9, 32, 46, and stage 70 of the Course of Fire book. Persons at or near the arena side rails are likely to be swept in these cases. The issue discussed here is not limited to these stages. It is the Mounted Range Officer's responsibility to review each competition course of fire for these or other courses where riders are near the side and end rails during the execution of a stage. The solution here is for the Match Director and the Mounted Range Officer to discuss an off limits zone and a safe zone for spectators and mounted shooters and their horses. It is important to discuss this issue at the pre-match Mounted Range Officers meeting and make it clear this is the Mounted Range Master's duty and not the responsibility of the announcer. Bottom Line: It is the Mounted Range Officer's responsibility to keep the off limits zone clear during the course of fire.

### ***Target setters in the arena***

The Mounted Range Master is responsible for the target setter's activity in and out of the arena. A responsible adult is required to accompany any under age target setters at a Mounted Shooting activity. The Mounted Range Master should communicate with the adult and the target setters prior to and during the match regarding balloon-setting

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procedures. Each course of fire may have varying needs and safety aspects specific to the target setter's job.

There are several stages whereby the timer placement is in such a position the balloon setters may be on both sides of the timer. Please review stage 58, 59, 69, 75, 76, 78, 82, 87, and 91. In these cases the Mounted Range Master is responsible to determine the safe entry and exit from the arena of both the balloon setters and the competitor.

### ***Final Check / Go Signal***

A lot of things must come together prior to giving the Go Signal to a competitor. These are outlined in detail in the MRO-I Course. Remember to:

- check the competitors clothing,
- does the competitor appear to have the correct guns,
- are all props in the correct place,
- all targets and equipment all in place and correctly located,
- is horse and tack correct,
- is cart, horse, and tack correct,
- is the timing equipment ready,
- is the Timer ready,
- are all gates closed, where required,
- Is the arena clear to go, and
- are you ready to judge? Then give the go-signal.

A clear and consistent "Go-Signal" to all contestants is just as important as instructions given to the contestants at the rider meetings. The "Go-Signal" must include the use a flag or similar signal with the arm held straight out pointing in the direction of go. Never use across the body arm movements as this is often hard to see and can be confusing.

### ***Questions and Answers***

Keep an open door atmosphere and take all questions. If you are unable to answer a question let the contestants know you will check on the correct explanation, and you will get back to them. Be prepared to discuss stage layout and how to resolve a potential problem. Visual aids such as photography, chalkboard, and props are recommended. It is important to have a copy of the SASS Mounted Shooting Course of Fire Stage Book and the SASS Mounted Handbook with you at all times.

It is important to remember, BE SAFE, HAVE FUN, and BE SAFE.