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In a previous article, I briefly touched on the topic of how match conditions can effect one's shooting performance. This week we are going to give you a heads-up on what we, playing the game, met and dealt with on the ground during the 3-Gun Nation Tournament Series.

The first two episodes (watch at www.3GunNation.com/tv) show us running and gunning in what are generally the best conditions we compete in during the entire season! I am talking about DPMS Superstition Mountain Mystery 3-Gun in Mesa, Arizona. Mid-March finds the desert is in bloom, and shooting days are sunny and warm with little in the way of wind. The weather is not always so pleasant in Arizona, but after winters most everywhere else shooters hale from, it is a welcome change.

Moving forward to the dismal and truly dangerous weather conditions that were experienced at the Sabre Defence Blue Ridge Mountain 3-Gun in Kentucky, and you have a whole 'nuther animal. Here, Match Director Andy Horner faced an unpleasant choice. Whether to have competitors slipping and sliding their way (with loaded guns in hand) through the courses of fire during the monsoon rains, and risk being swept up in a tornado then struck by lightning, or cancelling the event. Mr. Horner did the sensible, if unpopular thing, and called the match over. Nobody was more bummed about it than Andy.

Next stop was the mud bowl madness 3-gun No, scratch that, The FNH-USA Midwest 3-Gun! A couple of things stood out at this event. First, all of the targets reacted, meaning they fell or broke when shot (no paper targets were used). Second, the course designers did an excellent job of setting up stages that seemed easy to figure out but were more difficult in actual execution. Those two elements alone make for a fun and challenging match experience, but we had to deal with one more element, MUD!

While the FNH-USA match episodes show little in the way of mud, it was there. I know rain makes corn and corn makes whisky, but this rain made deep, boot-sucking mud and lots of it! Just ask the guys hopping around sans one shoe! While it rained for several days before the match, it only rained at night and a little before the first stage of the day while we were there. That rain leads us to the subject to this article: difficult shooting conditions.

Difficult footing, radically different lighting conditions and the rain itself have their own way of testing us as competitors. Here are some tips.

Bring, buy or borrow a second set of footwear suited to conditions "other" than your primary set of boots or shoes. I am a boot guy and bring an aggressive rated tread (mud, grass, sand) and a second set that offer good traction on rocks and hard, dry surfaces. Having two sets of footwear is a good idea if only to have one set drying out while you wear the second.

Lighting conditions. This is a BIG deal! We can only reliably and safely shoot at and hit targets we can SEE! Overcast days make for great and even lighting when you and the targets are out in the open, but move into a forest and targets (and most hopes of hitting them) disappear!

Seeing better in poor conditions can be improved with the proper selection of protective eyewear. Here, I run glasses that have interchangeable lenses. Colors can range from (Joe Cool) midnight black mirrored to ice blue, smoked and plain old clear. My favorite Vermillion lenses can be counted on for good target and iron sight contrast in most conditions with me only swapping to clear or yellow when it is overcast or dark. Be aware that yellow lenses can fatigue the eyes in bright conditions. Keep a few anti-fog wipes in your range bag too, so your baby blues can see through your "Joe Cool's" when it is humid.

When the best eyes looking through the finest lenses still can't quite find the targets, then you got to improvise and make a plan. "Landmarking" is a technique that can get you through a tough-to-see-targets stage when just good shooting won't. Here your task is to seek and find every target during the stage briefing and walkthrough given by the range officer before you shoot. Once you locate the targets, break

them down into smaller arrays. Put those arrays into a shooting order based on what you **can see** around the targets and where you will be physically on the course. Something like this: "Targets 4, 5, 6 and 7 from the stump, starting on #4 above the white rock and moving to #5 and #6 to the right and left of the broken branch, finishing on #7 below the clump of grass." Sounds crazy, but it works.

Rifle shooting brings its own challenge when targets are beyond adequate visual identification. First, if you are shooting steel, apply the above with a twist. Longer-range steel rifle targets usually have some kind of support structure to hold them up. Therefore, along with locations identified via rocks and bushes we now have additional "man-made" vertical and horizontal elements to use. I, as an iron sight shooter, have aimed directly at a target support or tree stump that **I could see** and adjusted my sights to land the bullet high, low, left or right to hit the actual target. Such is the life of die-hard iron sight rifleman!

Personal physical condition: Many of us could be in better shape, I know I could, but giving up chocolate chip cookies and my wife's smoked salmon fettuccini for treadmills and free weights just ain't gonna happen! So how do I (or you) get through a physically tough match without being particularly fit? Let me tell you what you are up against and then maybe I'll share.

The MGM Iron Man match (coming up on a future episode) is an epic match with more shooting than any other three matches combined! Couple that with lots of movement and an oversize kiddy-slide, a 100-yard zip-line and a breaching door, a surprise stage shot in a "dark house" by flashlight (thanks SureFire!) and the carrying of an 80-pound stage prop dummy that is trying to drag you down, and you have by any measure one heck of a physical match! ##### fun too! Oh, and I forgot, you have to do all that crazy stuff with enough ammo on your body to complete just one of the ten 80+ round stages!!!

You say you are "strong like bull" and the dummy's not heavy, "he's your brother?" Good for you, Mondo. Tell me, big boy, how well do you breathe at 6,700 feet after running up hill, over rocks and dead fall, with your rifle slung on your shoulder while shooting a dozen rounds out of your shotgun, leaving it behind smoking and empty only to transition to your pistol, running that empty too, then un-slugging your stick, loading it and shooting at targets over 150 yards away off-hand? Say what??? I can't understand you dude, are you OK? Stop your wheezing and talk to me!

That was pretty much how stage #1 went down at Denise and JJ Johnson's widely known and loved JP Enterprises Rocky Mountain 3-Gun. When August rolls around I know it's time to head to the NRA's expansive Whittington Center in Raton, New Mexico for this the final qualifying event in the 3-Gun Nation series for 2010.

Do you wanna know how a 50+ year-old-guy who ain't a gym rat gets though these events and still manages an occasional win or two? Hydration and homework. The more physical the match is, the more importance I place on a good night's sleep. At my age, sleeping in the car does not work as well as it used too. Quiet hotels with working A/C and comfortable beds help much when at these "away games." Keeping fully hydrated ranks even higher for me than sleep and is not to be overlooked nor underestimated. Grab your favorite electrolyte brew and drink a bunch before, during and after each day. This keeps your brain and body working to capacity. At higher elevations, this is even more important! In addition to quality sleep and hydration, I snack all day. Dried fruit, nuts and sweets in the form of trail mix and breakfast bars are consumed between stages. This helps to keep me working well for the whole day. Again, I am not an exercise fanatic (not that there is anything wrong with that). I do walk and try not to overeat, holding my midsection down to a modern "mini spare." In addition, the body parts you fail to warm up by stretching, you may break on race day. Make no mistake, the practical shooting game is an athletic endeavor; treat it as such.

As I have said before, the competitors at the top of the game know how to shoot; we have mastered the fundamentals. It is the application of those fundamentals under the stress and strain of match conditions that can make or break a winning performance. Now you know how I prepare for changing match conditions, the question is ... are you ready?

Get out and get involved! Join the 3-Gun Nation!

Good guys, good shooting, good TV!