

Shooting Restricted Firearms for Fun and Relaxation

In this short article, I examine the process of obtaining a restricted firearm in Canada — legally that is. It seems that criminals don't have anywhere near the same level of paperwork to file. Of course, the question is, why would anyone want a gun? Perhaps this will help to shed some light on the rationale of the so called "gun nut" and help Canadians understand and enjoy this safe and responsible pastime.

1. My Mid-Life Resolve

It was not the fact that I'd turned forty. It wasn't that everyone, my Mother included, forgot my birthday, it wasn't even a mid-life crisis. I was in a serious funk, and sat staring at my computer screen thinking about being somewhere else. I was ready for the Pythonesque "something completely different". I was 40, and although I could fly a plane, scuba dive in murky and icy cold water into forbidding shipwrecks, play golf, squash, guitar, trap and skeet and various other and sundry hobbies, I was missing something.

Around mid-afternoon, I had compiled a list of things to do, and amidst the trips to the Congo, and the hang-gliding lessons, I became fixated at item number 3. Shoot a pistol. Hmmm. That was something I knew precious little about, and seemed to be an attainable goal in a relatively short timeframe. The short timeframe was crucial, as I really needed to break out of my cloud shrouded mindset in good order, or continue to face this unbearable heaviness of being. I left the office, and headed down to my local gunstore. A positive first step, and I felt better already.

2. How do I Start?

Not altogether unfamiliar with firearms, I already owned a couple of shotguns and a rifle or two (which I seldom if ever used), I walked into the store and was faced with a wondrous array of sophisticated shooting irons. Long ones, short ones, and in a corner glass counter, the objects of my fascination — handguns.

I had stayed away from handguns for all these forty years as I was under the mistaken impression that it is just too much hassle to obtain one, the police will investigate you, and you will become a pariah. Well, some of that is true, as it turns out.

I had to admit, and fortunately for me, I did, I was a newbie when it came to restricted firearms, and I needed help. My saviour came in the form of the sales clerk, a lovely lady who I'll call Paulette. Immediately sensing my Bambi like naivete', she gently placed a .22LR Ruger Mk II target pistol in my hand. Intuitively, I pointed the barrel in a direction away from Paulette, myself, and the inevitable gun store guys who hang out there, and never buy so much as ammo. Raising the sights to eye level, I hefted the gun, and smiled.

Now the questions began. Paulette provided me a succinct, totally accurate picture of the procedure ahead of me, gave me some gun club application forms, and showed me a couple of other handguns that might be of interest to someone starting out. From her lips, the list seemed reasonable, and the sound of her words gave me confidence. Yes! This was doable! And the procedure was relatively straightforward:

- Take the Canadian Firearms Safety Course (CFSC), and pass a written and practical examination involving safe handling of firearms.
- Take the Restricted portion of the same course above (this was broken out of the standard curriculum owing to some self serving lobbying by the association of Anglers and Hunters, and now

was a separate course and exam, although the materials covered is largely an overlap with the CFSC above — this backfired by the way, and the long-gun registry comes into effect Jan 1, 2003 in spite of the hunters distancing themselves from restricted firearms).

- At this point, I could apply for what is now the Firearms License with Restricted endorsement and acquisition privileges. The first waiting game begins, as I send in the application with proof of successful completion of the CFSC/Restricted written and practical exams.
- Join a club authorized for Restricted firearms. This proved to be a bigger stumbling block than I thought. The club I chose has a new member application procedure akin to the black hole of Calcutta. One applies, and when the first opening for the club safety course (yes, each club has its own, over and above the two I just completed) comes up, only then are you contacted. I should point out that this is not usual, and is the unfortunate side effect of applying to a club with over 1500 members. My second query was responded to, and I joined the club, took the safety course, and eagerly attended my probationary supervised shoots.
- Upon my gaining full membership, the club would then sponsor my application for an Authorization to Transport (ATT) to and from the club (more on this later — suffice it to say that the government will not approve a restricted firearm transfer to you unless you are either a collector, or a bona fide shooting club member).
- The next waiting period for the Club ATT approval finally ended with a call from the Chief Firearms Office (Ontario), and I was issued a bright shiny new piece of paper that said I could take a restricted

firearm from my house to any firearms club in Ontario authorized for restricted firearms! Hoo Haa!

- Back to the gun shop. I presented my license, my club ATT, and my VISA card, and began the purchase process for that little Ruger MkII target pistol (remember way back when?). It seems that it takes a day or so to approve the transfers, but first I had to speak with the nice people at the Canadian Firearms Centre, and explain WHY I wanted this little target pistol. The correct answer was, and is, "for target shooting". In Canada, the government will not let you have a restricted firearm for any other purpose.
- Finally, the day arrived, and I went back to the gun store to pick up my purchase. I had my license, my registration, a one time ATT to take the pistol from the gun store to my home (and no-where else), and my club ATT which said that I could take it to the range (go figure). Paulette was there, and as she finished the paperwork, she asked me whether I had a box, or wished to purchase one. One cannot, it seems, transport a restricted firearm in Canada without a secure locking device on the firearm (a trigger lock), and the firearm must be locked in a locked container with the ammunition stored separately. Fair enough, I'm legal.
- Total elapsed time for all of this: Nine months from the time I first held the little Ruger MkII until I owned it legally.

3. Now comes the Good Stuff

So much for politics, I didn't go through all this scrutiny, safety indoctrination and such just to bitch about arcane regulations designed to confound the law abiding. I came to shoot! And shoot I did. My problem was, that in the course of my club indoctrination, I became

aware of a shooting discipline that just blew my socks off. Action pistol, or the International Practical Shooting Conference (IPSC) style of shooting.

This involves shooting a centre-fire handgun through a dynamic course of fire involving re-active targets as accurately as possible, as quickly as possible. Not only that, you start from a holster! Man, oh man, it does not get any cooler than this! When I first saw the sport played, it looked as if the shooters were flying through the course of fire. Along with each shooter, and there is only one shooter at a time, obviously, a dedicated Range Officer and a scorekeeper follow the shooter. A special clock which records the time of each shot (by sound) down to the hundredths of a second establishes the time through the course, and the scorekeeper tabulates the point score. Every stage is different, and every shooter has to establish their own "solution" to the problem.

I very quickly, (immediately) decided that this sport was just way too much fun not to participate in, and I set out to learn how. It turns out, that one must qualify to shoot any holster discipline, and this is a good idea, because lack of knowledge in this area can leave you missing a toe or two. The "Black Badge" certification consists of several hours of in-class instruction, including dry firing (no ammo) from a holster to teach the required safety considerations prior to two full days of live fire training under the watchful eyes of a highly qualified IPSC instructor. I would say that the IPSC Ontario Black Badge course has consistently produced the safest shooters that I have seen to date. Bar none. Muzzle control, trigger finger and safety are pounded into the candidates until it becomes instinctive.

In short order I obtained a suitable firearm. I guess I should point out that after you get your paperwork in order on your first restricted firearm, the subsequent purchases are simply a matter of applying for a transfer, approval, issuing a registration certificate, a one time ATT, and takes about 24 hours or so.

That's the good news. Having gotten a new ParaOrdnance P16-40, I retired to the range to put about 2,000 rounds through it until I could shoot it accurately, and was completely familiar with its workings. I felt I was ready. I signed up for a Black Badge course, and kissed my wife goodbye for another weekend of range safety. I emerged at the end, with my holster qualification, and a new world had opened up for me.

4. Pick a Discipline

IPSC is not the only discipline to choose from. Police Pistol Combat or PPC style shooting is derived from the police qualification exercises, and consists of shooting from various positions (standing, prone, kneeling, sitting, strong hand and weak hand) at various ranges in timed strings. Bullseye style is the granddaddy of the pistol disciplines, and the one which most people think of. Silhouette shooting consists of knocking down steel targets at extreme ranges with high powered handguns, and is typically done outdoors.

The International Shooting Union (ISU) is the body which controls the Olympic shooting disciplines, and a number of shooting sports, including air pistol, rimfire and centrefire pistol are currently (for now) Olympic disciplines.

A new and rapidly growing sport is the Cowboy Action shooting, and this is an event to behold! Shooters dressed in period costume use black powder and old six guns and lever action rifles in pistol calibres. Sometimes double barrel shotguns are used as well. The participants, both men and women are a fantastic site in full western regalia, and this is sure to bring out the childhood memories of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, Trigger, Bullet, Gabby and the whole gang. Adding to the hilarity, each shooter maintains an alias like "Black Bart" or "Saloon Sally" or some such handle to call them by. Even if you don't shoot, you might want to grab your "Eyes and Ears" and find your way to one of these

matches.

5. Cost of Entry

In addition to the fees paid for courses, exams, application fees, club memberships, licensing fees (and of course the billions of dollars in taxes that every Canadian pays to keep you "safe" from law abiding citizens), add the cost of the firearms and ammunition, a safe storage cabinet, locks and trigger locks for your safe storage at home. I figure you can get your first restricted firearm home (all safe, and legal) for well under the cost of a full blown personal computer system.

Personal gear you will need early on includes ear protection and eye protection. This is mandatory, and no, cotton balls or cigarette filters stuffed in the ears are NOT sufficient. Invest in a good pair of industrial hearing protectors affording about 29db protection or better if possible. In addition eye protection which is shatter resistant, and preferably ones which wrap around the sides are a good bet.

One way that you can keep the cost of the sport down is to load your own ammunition. This is a very good way of reducing the largest cost to the active shooter, and I hope anyone interested in the sport will be active and shoot regularly. I hope to be adding an article in this series to cover loading of pistol ammunition, and perhaps later rifle ammo as well. Suffice it to say that one should look closely at reloading if action pistol sports are at all appealing to you.

6. Children and Shooting

My young children have varying degrees of interest in the shooting sports, and although I don't push them, they are given every opportunity to enjoy the sport, and they take full advantage. I am very proud of their knowledge of safety and discipline around firearms, and at the

range. If every child were taught even a rudimentary safety curriculum, tragic events could be avoided. Instead, we give firearms a special mystique by declaring them taboo, and thus turn them into kid magnets. As a child growing up in the 60's, firearms were common enough that they just weren't interesting to a kid.

Perhaps the best way to introduce a child to the shooting sports is with an air rifle or pistol. Of course, the pistol requires a little more maturity since the muzzle must be respected just as with a real firearm. At what age a child should begin shooting largely depends upon the child, and can begin when they show signs of responsibility and maturity. Oddly enough, an interest in shooting is a great way to motivate a kid to develop responsibility and maturity.

7. Women and Shooting

An interesting phenomenon that continues to amaze me, is that the most adamant anti-firearms lady, when given the opportunity to shoot, and with a gentle introduction to safety and the fundamental skills necessary to excel (sight alignment and trigger control are generally sufficient), then a new understanding of shooting sports is gained.

I have watched women who get dragged down to the range warm from "I'm just going to watch" to "when can I come back?" many times over. Invariably they have the innate skills to shoot very accurately, and perhaps a sex-related predisposition to actually listen to instructions. Whatever the reason, I much prefer teaching a female shooter, since the results are usually immediate.

I cringe every time I see some macho guy put a big honking .44 Magnum into a new shooter's hand (regardless of sex), as it does a disservice to everyone. Mind you, after a gentle introduction, maybe the .44 Magnum would be welcome.

I remember putting a .40S&W handgun into my Sixty'ish (she might be reading

this) Mother's hands, and watching as she tore the X-ring out of a target. Upon finishing the string she turned to me with a sly grin, and asked "Do you have any more bullets?".

8. **Safety, Safety, Safety**

Perhaps the most telling statistic which demonstrates the safety of shooting sports is the cost of liability insurance for shooters. The CSSA membership covers a number of benefits, and a very small portion, less than \$5.00 will cover the shooter for over \$5 million — and that's \$5.00 Canadian!

The shooting sports and the clubs are largely self regulating, as there is no place for anyone at the range who doesn't obey all the rules, respect other shooters, and demonstrate safe shooting skills.

Several years down the road now, I have been shooting PPC, IPSC and various rifle and shotgun disciplines actively and safely. I am now qualified as an IPSC Range Officer, and I try to give back to the sport that has given me so much. I recently completed the Canadian Shooting Sports Association (CSSA) Club Level Safety Instructors course and I am the Safety Director of the shooting club in my new home town. As I enjoy teaching, and bringing new shooters into the sport, I am grateful to be able to assist anyone who expresses a legitimate interest in getting into the world of shooting sports.

9. **OK, I'm Convinced**

Now that you're all rev'ed up, and finally admitted to yourself that you've always wanted to try your hand at shooting handguns, there are a number of resources of which you should be aware:

- **Canadian Firearms Centre**
<http://www.cfc-ccaf.gc.ca/>

- **Canadian Shooting Sports Association**
<http://www.cdnshootingsports.org>
- **IPSC-Ontario**
<http://www.ipsc-ont.org>
- **Your local restricted shooting club (likely listed in the IPSC-Ont.org web site link list).**
- **Your local firearms dealers (check your yellow pages).**

One thing you'll find out quickly, is that everyone has an opinion about what kind of firearm to get, what type of shooting to do, how to reload, and just about every topic under the sun. I'd advise you to research every magazine, periodical, text book etc. pertaining to the disciplines which interest you. Some of the advice you get will be golden, other, not so. The main thing is to be able to separate the wheat from the chaffe. I hope that this little piece did something to set you on the road to a new hobby.

10. **This Web Site — A Resource**

As with any controversial issue, the ownership and use of firearms for any purpose has become a bit of a hot potato in recent years. Rather than involve myself in the rhetoric of one side or the other, I decided that a more positive use of energy would be to demonstrate the safe and fun aspects of recreational and competition shooting. In keeping this web site has been launched to help those with little understanding of firearms, safety and the law to find their way, and to form an educated and balanced opinion.