



By Keith Sanderson, 2008 Olympian

PISTOL LIFTS



One of the most misunderstood and incorrectly performed elements of pistol shooting is the **lift**. This action applies mostly to 25 meter pistol, but it also has relevance to other types of pistol shooting. We will focus primarily on the two Olympic pistol events requiring lifts: Women's Sport Pistol and Men's Rapid Fire Pistol.

Why is lift important? It is a critical element of your shot process during Rapid Fire. Shot process is the ordered application of the fundamentals (position, grip, trigger and sights; see *USA Shooting News*, May/June 2009) to deliver a shot or series of shots. Training for a more perfect lift encompasses all your fundamentals. Since Rapid Fire requires performance on demand (when the targets/lights turn), your lift must be precise and purposeful, and fundamentally correct every time.

The lift is simply moving your arm and the pistol from a 45 degree angle (the *ready* position) to a position where your sights are on the target. In the Sport Pistol rapid fire stage, an athlete has three seconds to perform the lift and then fire. Rapid Fire Pistol may require less time, depending on the stage of fire. Early in my shooting career, I neglected the lift. But once I began to study and train hard to improve my lift, my scores improved and I performed consistently at a much higher level. Perhaps you're like me; some reasons my lift held me back was that I didn't really know how to do it correctly, or even why I should concern myself with it.

During the lift it is important that you only move your arm; your head should not move at

all during any part of the lift. Of course, you need to breathe during this whole process. Your eyes need plenty of oxygen in order to function with clarity when you are aligning your sights. When and how you should breathe depends on your physical fitness, the air quality and the habit pattern you establish. Try to coordinate the timing of your breathing with the range commands. Ideally, the lift should be one fluid motion, but let's divide it into three separate actions: the *Start*, the *Glide* and *Follow-through*.

The *Start*: Settle on your target like you would in slow fire. Then lower your arm and pistol to the *ready* position (45 degrees) while maintaining muscle tension in your arm. Do not relax your arm; instead, keep your arm tight and wrist locked. In essence, you are pulling your arm down against the muscle tension used to hold it on target when aiming. Your wrist stays locked by keeping your grip intense and consistent. When at the *ready*, your sights should not be aligned because your arm pivots at the shoulder, not the eye. Look at the target; wait for the targets/lights to turn. Your position and grip need consistent intensity throughout the entire series to achieve consistent good scores.

The *Glide*: Smoothly raise the pistol as soon as the targets/lights turn. Basically, you are releasing the muscles that were holding your arm down. The muscle tension required to move the pistol into your aiming area should still exist. This needs to be a very smooth, *soft* action but quick with no hesitation. About half way up three things should happen nearly simultaneously:

1. The upward movement of the pistol slows, and smoothly glides to a stop in the middle of your aiming area.
2. Your eye drops from looking at the target to looking at the rising sights.
3. You begin to exert positive pressure on the trigger.

Your eye must drop from looking at the target to looking at the sights while the pistol is still moving up into your aiming area. If you don't do this your eye cannot focus on your sights, and of course, you must be focused on your sights to shoot center shots. Your eye is attracted to movement so focusing on the sights will be natural if you start looking for sight alignment while the pistol is moving upward

into your aiming area. Your sights should come into alignment just as you glide to a stop in your aiming area.

Pressure must start building on the trigger *before* your sights are aligned. Remember, trigger is independent of the sights. Dry-fire training will develop a trigger control that will release the trigger just a fraction of a second after your pistol is level and sights are in your aiming area. The goal is to have your trigger start moving when you start looking for sight alignment, but before they are aligned and/or in your aiming area. Your goal for every lift is uninterrupted trigger control that is *independent of what you see* while separately working very hard to align your sights before the shot breaks.

Follow-through is . . . nothing. Nothing changes after the shot. It's as if the shot didn't happen. You are still working to align your sights, keep an intense consistent grip and hold your pistol in the middle of your aiming area. After the shot breaks do not relax. If dry firing, keep your sights aligned for a period of time after the trigger is released. If live-firing, recover back to the middle of your aiming area and align your sights. Proper follow-through takes you back to where you started: aligning your sights, intense and consistent grip, settled in your aiming area. If in the rapid fire stage of Sport Pistol, return your arm to *ready* and wait for the targets/lights to turn again. There are seven seconds between the target exposures so there is plenty of time to follow-through for three or four seconds and then lower your arm and prepare for the next lift. Of course, for Rapid Fire Pistol you recover over to the next target and continue the series. That first shot in Rapid Fire Pistol can define the series, so don't neglect follow-through even on the first shot. Follow-through is incredibly important during dry fire as well. Dry fire with an exaggerated follow-through is an important element of a great lift and great shooting.

Smart, disciplined training will develop a consistent lift that can produce the high scores we all want. Certainly, there is more to pistol shooting than just the lift, and a great lift alone won't make you win matches. You must train and apply the fundamentals of pistol marksmanship to raise your skills to the level of greatness you are capable of achieving.