

BEST TARGETS

BEST Targets Shooting Team After Action Report (AAR)

Event: Big Dog Steel TNPRM
Date: December 5, 2015
Location: Cookeville, TN
Websites: www.bigdogsteel.com
Shooter: Chris Andrews (with Scott Whitehead)
Rifle: GA Precision GAP-10 chambered in 6.0 Creedmoor
Ammo: Copper Creek Cartridge 6.0 Creedmoor with Hornady 105 gr BTHP
Gear: Vortex PST 6-24x mounted in Vortex precision rings with a Vortex scope level, Kahntrol Solutions muzzle brake, Harris Bipod w/ Kahntrol Solutions Pod-Mod Adapters, Mechanix Wear gloves & Wiebad bags

Facility Notes

This was the first annual Big Dog Steel TNPRM. Cookeville, TN was nearly a five hour drive from Charlotte, NC but it was an easy, all interstate trip. The event wasn't held at a shooting club or a private/public range – instead the stages were spread across a huge cattle farm that allowed for plenty of range and shooting position possibilities.

Event Format

Scott Whitehead and I signed up for this match without knowing much about it. Ryan Brandt of Big Dog Steel Targets was the match director and he had several helping with RO and scoring duties. Up until a few days before the event the only info we had about it was the street address to meet at by 7:00 am. We didn't know if there would be 10 or 100 shooters and the count ended up right at 25. This match was originally scheduled for two days but as the date got closer Ryan sent out a message that if we all moved quickly this could be a one day match. Ryan and his staff arrived a little after 7:00 and everyone got their paperwork done. The group was divided into two squads that started at opposite ends of the farm.

A key to understanding my performance at this match is that this was the first time I had used my new GAP-10 6.0 Creedmoor in competition. I've been shooting a .308 bolt gun for several years and this year I've decided to try something different. The speed of the gas guns has interested me and the ballistics of the 6.0 Creedmoor looked impressive. Before this match I had shot 40 rounds thru the rifle getting a good 100 yard zero and shooting 3-5 rounds each at paper targets 200, 300 & 400 yards out. I used chrono numbers and the JBM Ballistics calculator to build a data card out to 1200 yards and I was hoping for the best ... and WOW was I surprised. This is also the first competition for me with a full range of Wiebad bags including an Ultra-Light Loop rear bag, a Mini Tac Pad front bag and a Pump Pillow for positional use.

Our squad started at Stage 1 – BUS TO BUS. This was a 3 minute stage with a 10 round limit. The shooter started outside a school bus with an unloaded rifle. At the sound of the buzzer the shooter had to get inside the bus and build a position shooting out the side windows at (3) of any (5) 4" gongs hanging in another bus 100 yards away. You were allowed (4) shots from inside the bus so if you didn't hit (3) gongs with (4) shots you lost points. After shooting from the bus the competitor had to move into a nearby barn and shoot (2) rounds each at (3) 10" gongs 322 yards away thru a loophole in the wall. The position here was standing with a wooden wall as a support. Like many other shooters I hit the (3) 4" gongs from the bus and got into position in the barn quickly but I struggled to find the targets thru the loophole. I hit one and scored 4 points out of a possible 9. I had my first gas gun stage under my belt but I had a lot to learn – and fast.



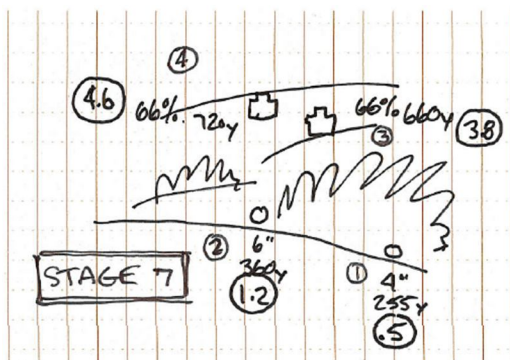
Stage 2 – BARRICADE BLITZ was just a short walk away. This was 2 minute stage with a 12 round limit. There were (3) 2 position barricades setup with approximately 25 feet between them. There was a single IPSC torso target 350 yards away. The shooter was required to fire (2) rounds from each of the 6 barricade positions. Many competitors did very well on this stage and I scored only 4 points out of possible 12. Although I had shot this new rifle prone I hadn't yet had to build any positions with it on barricades and I found that my scope was mounted too far back for me to get a good eye relief in many positions. As a quick fix I added 1" to my length of pull by adjusting the MagPul stock and continued with my day. I also found on this stage that the Mini Tac Pad bag that I was using as a front bag tended to rotate around the handguard at the worst possible time and several of my barricade shots were taken with the handguard right on the barricade.

Stage 3 – TARGETS IN THE OPEN was a short hike away and not as advertised. This was a 2 minute stage with a 12 round limit. Below our shooting position on the top of a hill there were (6) targets spread out in a field ranging from 260 to 350 yards away. The targets were (3) 6" circles, a Big Dog Steel Headhunter, a 45% IPSC torso and a 4" x 8" oval. A key to this stage was that the shooter had to find the targets in the field and engage each with two rounds. A point was only scored if you hit the target with both of your shots. Shooters that went early struggled to find some of targets and as the stage progressed the others figured out where most of the targets were by watching the others. I shot this stage late in the group and scored points on (3) of the (6) targets. The difficulty here was finding the targets. Many targets had all the paint shot off of them. Late in the event and in the interest of saving time to get things wrapped up in one day the other squad skipped this stage and our scores were dropped from the total as if it didn't exist ... but it was fun to shoot.

Stage 4 – ACROSS THE POND was a short drive across the road from the first three stages. This was a 2 minute stage with a 9 round limit and it was my first shining moment of the day. From the prone position the shooter could pick any of (4) targets to shoot at hanging from a rack 615 yards away in any order and as often as you'd like. The targets were 12", 10", 8" and 6" squares. The targets were worth 0.5, 1.0, 1.5 and 2.0 points respectively. There was a hint of wind in the field that we were shooting across. This was the first stage that was outside the range that I had previously shot this rifle so I was depending on the calculator to be correct. I figured the safest bet would be to start at the 12" square. I hit it twice with two shots. I hit the 10" square right away with my third shot. I moved to the 8" square and proceeded to hit it and the 6" square back and forth several times. I scored on 8 of my 9 shots including (3) hits on the 8" square and (2) hits on the 6" square. Honestly I felt like Superman after this stage. I had the highest score of our squad on this stage and this is where I first felt the magic of the gas gun. I never took my eye off the glass or my finger off the trigger.

Stage 5 – ON THE RUN was based in the same staging area. This was a 2½ minute stage with a 12 round limit. There were (3) 2 position barricades here setup from right to left with approximately 25 feet between them. The shooter was required to fire (2) rounds from the bottom position of each barricade at a 12" gong 222 yards away then fire (2) rounds from the top position of each barricade at a 12" gong 416 yards away for 12 possible points. The two gongs were nearly in line from one barricade and several people shot at the wrong gong from the wrong position. I scored 7 points here and did better at this stage than I did Stage 2 – of course this was the second time I had shot the new rifle off a barricade. Once again I struggled here with the Mini Tac Pad rotating around the handguard on several barricade positions.

Stage 6 – SHUFFLE ON THE DECK was my worst stage of the day. This stage was a short drive across the pasture from Stages 4 & 5. It was a 1½ minute stage with an 8 round limit. At this stage we shot from a nicely built elevated platform at full sized torsos 1000 and 1100 yards away. Each shooter was to send (2) rounds at each target twice. Three shooters were staged on the platform and each got a chance to shoot before they swapped out for another three shooters. When I went to dial my 1000 yard dope of 8.3 mils for this stage I found that my elevation turret ran out at 8.0 mils ... and I surely wasn't going to get to my 1100 yard dope of 9.9 mils! To make these ranges dial-able in the future I will need a 20 MOA scope base. To get thru the stage I dialed 8.0 and held 0.3 and 1.9 at the two distances. I held center of mass and then left edge thinking that there was a little left to right wind and I missed with all (8) shots. I could suspect that my dope was wrong but as well as I shot some longer ranges later in the event I believe I did not hold for enough wind. Other shooters that hit were holding 1.5 off the left edge and I never go that far off because I didn't read the wind well. After Stages 6 and Before Stage 7 we swapped locations with Squad 2. We also shot the afternoon with different ROs and scorers.



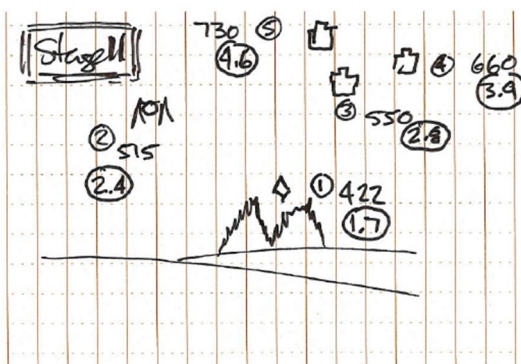
Stage 7 – LONG WAY AROUND was a 3 minute stage with an 11 round limit. This was a prone stage that included 4 targets: a 4" gong at 255 yards, a 6" gong at 360 yards, a torso at 660 yards and a torso at 720 yards. The shooter had to start at target 1 and targets 1, 2 and 3 needed to be hit (or passed) to move to the next target. The last target could be hit as many times as you had rounds left when you got to it. This stage included some highs and lows for me. Because I was using the charging handle to release the bolt instead of the bolt release I did not get a round chambered properly the first time and I pulled the trigger on an empty chamber. The scorers were generous enough to let me start over and this time I had a double feed as I chambered a round manually then swapped magazines and got everything all crossed up. This was the first mechanical issue I had with the gas gun and it was all operator error. After I got everything cleared and ready to go a third time I was on my way ... and WOW. I hit the first three targets on each of their first rounds and then hit the 720 yard torso with 6 of my last 9 shots. I know I pulled one of my last shots and I also accidentally fired one while resting my finger on the two stage trigger while settling into position. I scored 9 points here – the second best score in our squad to one person who scored 10 out of a possible 11. I was fortunate that the RO and scorer let me restart when they did.

Stage 8 – WEAK STEP was a 2½ minute 12 round stage. There were (2) 3 position barricades setup side by side with a single 12" gong 310 yards away. The shooter had to shoot (2) rounds from the low position of one barricade normally then move to the low position of the other barricade and shoot (2) rounds weak hand and eye. The same thing had to be done from the middle and high position of the barricades. I scored only 3 out of a possible 12 points here as I struggled to get a sight picture on my weak side. I also struggled on the normal side as I couldn't stop thinking about how poorly I did weak side. This stage was also made more difficult by the fact that we were shooting towards the setting sun. The three takeaways here are that I need to do some weak side practice, I need to not let issues or failures during a stage affect what should be easy shots later in the stage and I need a plan for shooting into the sun. I also had the Mini Tac Pad rotate around the handguard a few times during this stage and I finally figured out that the handguard is narrower than it is tall. Any side load on the bag makes it want to rotate around the side of the handguard – this will need to be fixed.

Stage 9 – CAUGHT IN THE OPEN was shot from a very nice barricade that included angled sides and a ladder in the middle. This was a 2 minute stage with a 10 round limit. The shooter had to shoot a single 12" gong 310 yards away from 7 different positions of their choice. Only one hit would score from any position and if you scored 7 points and had rounds left over you could repeat a position and score again. I did well on this stage scoring 6 points. The ladder positions were not too difficult and I was getting more comfortable with barricade positions after doing so many throughout the day. One headache of this stage is that we were shooting near the setting sun again and it was blinding to many competitors.

Stages 10 & 11 were a short hike across the field from where we shot stages 7, 8 and 9.

Stage 11 – LONG RANGE MASSA was a 1½ minute stage with a 10 round limit. This was a prone stage shot from a hilltop across a valley at (5) targets including 10" gongs at 422 and 515 yards, a 45% IPSC torso at 550 yards, a 50% IPSC torso at 660 yards and a 66% IPSC torso at 730 yards. The shooter was allowed (2) shots at each target for a possible maximum point total of 10. I scored only 6 points here because I rushed many of my shots trying to get done quickly. For some reason the 1 ½ minute limit was on my mind and I couldn't shake it.



Stage 10 – CASTLE was a 2½ minute stage with an 11 round limit. We shot this stage last. This was a prone stage shot from the same hilltop across the same valley to (5) targets including a coyote at 427 yards, Headhunters at 490 and 540 yards, a Snipers Hide reactive target at 650 yards and a full sized IPSC torso at 880 yards. The first (4) targets needed to be hit or "passed" before moving to the next target. The shooter could use all remaining rounds to score as often as possible on the last target. I scored 9 of 11 available points and had the second best score in our squad. It took me (2) rounds to hit the coyote and (2) rounds to hit one of the Headhunters. (3) of my points were on the 880 yard torso. Because everyone hustled to get all the stages done in one day many of us shot this stage in near darkness and it was difficult for me to see some of the targets. A few shooters couldn't complete the stage but most were able to give it a try. I used the illuminated reticle on my Vortex PST for the first time ever on this stage and I learned that if it was set too high it would hide the target but at very low settings it did make squaring up on a white target in near darkness easier. I felt really good about finishing the match with this many hits on the first day that I used a new rifle.

Things Done Well

Considering that I had only shot 40 rounds thru the GAP-10 at distances 400 yards and less before the event the performance of the rifle was incredible. Other than a few operator errors the rifle cycled flawlessly and I hit much more than I missed. The data card that I built with the JBM calculator was ridiculously reliable and the Copper Creek ammunition, loaded with Hornady 105gr bullets, shot flawlessly all day. My Kahntrol Solutions muzzle brake helped to keep me on target and the Vortex PST continues to impress me even in challenging low light conditions. When I put this rifle/scope/brake/ammo package together I had high expectations but even so I was impressed with how it shot.

Results & Lessons Learned

I finished 5th out of 25 shooters - WAY better than I expected to at a new event with a new rifle setup. Scott finished 1st.

A few takeaways/to do's:

- Do something different for a front bag. The bag I was using flopped around the side of the handguard way too often disrupting my position and causing a distraction. I may try a SILO device from Atlas next.
- Practice on barricades. Practice with the Wiebad bags. I shot more barricades and used the Wiebad bags more at this event than I ever have before but I still have more work to do.
- Find a new scope base/mount. I'll need a 20 MOA base to be able to dial out to 1200 yards with this setup. What I have will work for now but I'll want to change this before the Mammoth Sniper Challenge.
- Wind calling is still a weakness of mine. I need to practice it more but I don't really know how. I think I may have a better grasp on wind holds with my .308 bolt gun but I've been shooting it much longer too.
- Have a sun plan. I need to have a few hat, sunshade, and shield options for shooting into the sun. This has been an issue at other matches before but this was by far the worst example I've experienced so far.
- Work on getting LOP & Scope offset right. Adding the 1" LOP during the match was the right thing to do, but I need to spend time making sure my set-up is optimized for a variety of shooting positions.

Summary

Driving 5 hours to and from an event in one day made for a long day but Scott and I had a ton of fun at this match. The stages were very challenging stages and I put the new GAP-10 thru it's paces and found the things I needed to debug. The attempt to get all the stages done in one day seemed a little disorganized but for the first ever Big Dog Steel TNPRM event it ended well. Ryan was a great host and the other ROs and score keepers moved things along quickly. Scott and I brought home 1st and 5th place trophies respectively. If we can fit it in our schedule we'll definitely be back next year.

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