



.22lr for HANDGUN TRAINING



THE merits of using a .22lr for marksman training has been addressed with several articles in previous editions, however, these mostly focussed on using rifles. Here I want to look at the possible merits of using a handgun in .22lr to learn the basics, and also explore the possibility of performing more advanced training with the Lilliputian cartridge.

Yes, the ammo is very cheap compared to all centre-fire cartridges. For example, reliable .22lr ammo can be bought for R120 per 50, while the cheapest 9mmP FMJ factory ammo will set you back about R350 for 50. This is a huge difference, but more important, is that for new shooters the almost non-existent recoil will help to master the fundamentals faster.

In my experience one of the biggest drawbacks of recoil is flinching which results in the handgun being jerked downwards on pulling the trigger. This means that your shots are hitting low,

sometimes very low, resulting in misses. To this day, it is a recurring problem I experience with handguns if I do not subject myself to dry fire exercises fairly often. Apart from dry firing, the mild mannered .22lr is another way of fixing

this problem.

When considering a .22lr handgun for training my aim was to find a suitable pistol to use specifically to perform defence drills. The best option would be a modern pistol that functions exactly like the bigger centre-fire calibres but, the prices of the likes of the Glock 44, Ruger SR22 and S&W M&P22 had me looking at used 'old-school' pistols. If you decide to go down this road be warned, many of these used guns, mostly Star, Beretta and Astra firearms, are, after years of service – and in some cases abuse – no longer very reliable, only feeding certain types of ammunition, not extracting cases reliably and prone to light primer strikes. Finding extra magazines can also be a problem.

Then of course most of the older models do not have the traditional thumb-actuated magazine release. Many are also very small in size and have



almost useless sights, which presents challenges when trying to do, for example, the Mozambique Drill. And, dropping a magazine with greasy .22lr ammo in the sand will only serve to enhance your emergency drills as malfunctions will increase. Putting a canvas on the ground on the spot where mag changes are anticipated helps keep mags cleaner.

One exception among the older pistols is the Beretta Model 71, which is a reasonably usable size, even if you have big hands, is reliable and, although the mag changes are done via a release at the bottom of the pistol grip, the pistol is still a worthy training tool that can be considered. I have been using my Unique Model L for training, but so far I have been unable to source an additional magazine.

I finally decided to buy a modern .22lr pistol and managed to get hold of a Glock 44. Our regular readers will know that I am not a fan of Glock pistols, mainly because the grip angle is wrong for me (the pistols point high) and Glock handguns come with plastic sights. After spending an hour on the range with the G44 I decided I am willing to overlook these drawbacks as far as the .22 is concerned. The G44 is the exact same size as the Glock 19 - this goes for all the levers and even the magazines. The only difference is the calibre and the fact that the 44 is very light as it has not only a



polymer frame but also a polymer slide with small, and light, metal inserts.

If you are used to a polymer striker-fired pistol the G44 will be very easy to master. It handles and shoots like the bigger double stack centre-fire models but without the recoil. In the beginning I found the light weight a bit disconcerting but I soon got used to it. It is now one of my favourite range tools, and I can use almost any holster or mag pouch I own. I am currently using the G44 for most of my training.

On arrival at the range, I normally start out by doing the first 'cold' drill (not having warmed up) with my 9mmP to set the benchmark of my skill level for a specific drill. I choose this drill before I arrive at the range. I then switch to the .22lr to work on fundamentals, skills and techniques, and right at the end I usually fire five to ten more 9mmP rounds to end off the session. This last drill normally includes reloading and switching between targets.

Given the relative cheap price of .22lr ammo I have been able to shoot a lot more with my handguns and it has definitely improved my skill. However, using 'cheap' ammo can lead to concen-

trating less as you now know you can easily repeat the exercise, which defeats the purpose of diligent and planned training, and is a waste of precious ammo.

If you stick to the goals you want to achieve by measuring your results through the use of a shot timer and keeping score, the .22lr is an excellent choice to improve your handgun skills. Moreover, whether training seriously or just plinking, it is enjoyable time spent outdoors. //

