



## **Bianchi Cup, NRA Action Pistol**

### **History**

John Bianchi took his vision of a truly professional pistol tournament to Ray Chapman, the 1975 World Combat Shooting champion. Ray designed a 4-stage course of fire which demands skills from PPC, IPSC and bullseye without unduly favoring or handicapping any one discipline. While the Bianchi Cup course can be fairly criticized as being dated, static, and boring (IPSC with the fun removed?) it still persists as the most challenging of the action disciplines. It's a tough room!

Each of the four classic matches that comprise the 20-year-old Bianchi Cup NRA Action Pistol championships imposes its own unique personality and technical demands upon the shooter. Over the years, this unchanging course has spawned some very specialized and extreme equipment modifications as top competitors strive to game out each match's course requirements and pitfalls. The open championship is decided on X-count so nothing is left to chance. This extends to loading procedures and load selection.

Early on, the Bianchi Cup was won by IPSC shooters using 45 Auto pistols. Mickey Fowler has the distinction of winning with the most inaccurate pistol: his barrel-ringed 1981 Devel Gammon 45 Auto wouldn't hold six inches at 50 yards! Such a poor-grouping gun fired by mere mortals won't cut it at the Cup, whether in open or stock category. You will fire 12 rounds at 50 yards, 12 at 35 and another 48 at 25 yards. In open category, the course can perhaps be cleaned with a 3 1/2" or 4"-capable pistol, but achieving a winning X-count is impossible without a sub-2"/50-yard gun.

### **Which Caliber?**

These days, firearm selection is divided between L-frame Smith & Wesson revolvers and 38 Super Auto pistols. A well-built example of either type should be capable of consistent 2"/50-yard accuracy. Revolvers do have the edge in being simpler and generally less expensive to build up; an action job, perhaps a top-quality barrel and your choice of a red dot sight and mounts are the minimum requirements to be competitive. Barricade wings, finger stops and extended prone-friendly grips round out your options.

Load selection for a .38 Special Bianchi gun takes two tracks, depending on how you approach the all-important moving target event. Higher bullet velocity on the "mover" never hurts, but light-bullet, high-velocity loads will be a bit harder to shoot off of the barricades than tamer stuff. With the development of lead-compensating scopes and cam-action "mover bases," the requirement for 1000 fps minimum velocity to facilitate a leading edge hold at 25 yards has been negated. The Laser-Cast 148gr DBWC driven to about 850 fps remains a shootable and accurate choice for any shooter opting for a center hold on the mover. Try HP-38 or Titegroup first.



Still, a number of shooters opt to forgo having to readjust their optic for each pass and simply hold for a pre-determined lead point at each distance. The minimum velocity needed for a leading-edge hold on the 18" wide D-1 target at 25 yards is 1000 fps. There is a noted tendency for revolver shooters to "stop the gun" at the point of trigger break, more so than for the auto pistol crowd. Thus a little extra bullet velocity might be worth some trailing Xs. Our 125gr truncated cone is capable of excellent accuracy throughout the 1000 to 1100 fps range, and such velocities are easily attained.

### [Auto Pistol Loading](#)

ON the semi auto side, light bullets are the rule and the 38 Super Auto (or variant thereof) is the dominant cartridge. Each pistol has its idiosyncrasies and preferences so plan on doing some experimenting with your own. Knowing the actual groove diameter of your barrel will help.

Bianchi Cup shooters tend towards seemingly unreasonable fanaticism in the preparation and loading of their match ammunition. It's not hard to see why, when a year's worth of practice, endless trips to the pistolsmith and expense culminate in 192 (hopefully) perfect shots. Any malfunction or stray shot is an unsurvivable disaster! Thus, certain precautions and procedures are employed by the top X-men to insure perfect performance in the tournament.

Most shooters opt to use once-fired brass in their match loads, holding to the theory that if it worked the first time, it'll work again. There's an element of truth to this as defects like mal-formed rims or a missing flash hole may not be revealed through visual inspection. The first firing also expands the case a bit and subsequent firings may show less velocity variation within a given string. New brass can also be used but each round *must* be inspected and gauged for case length, rim diameter and concentricity of flash hole, rim and extractor groove. New brass often has sharp, burred cast mouths and starred butts around the flash hole exit.

One approach to case preparation involves tumbling in walnut hulls for as long as it takes to remove these burrs, this can take days to accomplish. Another is to hand-reburr using one of the many tools available. Though time consuming, a little work with 600 grit abrasive paper will do an excellent job on rough case mouths. At least one shooter goes to the trouble of regulating primer pockets and flash holes with a hand-held pocket reamer in bench-rest fashion. The author has tested this practice and not found it to be profoundly beneficial to 50-yard pistol accuracy. Then again, it probably can't hurt. Thus is the price of peace of mind at the Bianchi Cup.



Loading is done in the traditional manner as outlined in the Loading Procedures and Safety page, with a few minor precautions thrown in. Check your powder measure for consistency, installing a set screw to lock down the charge bar insert is a good idea. Recheck charge weights each time you refill the primer magazine. Start each bullet squarely on the case mouth (after visually checking the powder charge, of course). Taper crimp only as much as is needed to prevent bullets from pushing in under feeding pressure. Use dummies to determine the right amount of crimp. And if using new brass, sized and deprime anyway! A granule of media stuck in a flash hole can blow your match. Finally, test hot and cold samples for both velocity and groups. (The 120 power factor is easily achieved but resist the temptation to hedge the line with weenie loads.)

**[For further information on NRA Action or any other NRA-sponsored shooting sport, contact:](#)**

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