



COMPETITION! PREPARING TO HUNT

With an upcoming hunt in Africa on the horizon, I wanted to get fully prepared for the adventure — these hunts don't materialize every day. To make the best out of the opportunity, I wanted to spend quality time behind the trigger and build confidence in my capability, so when that big kudu walks out of the bush, things will end successfully.

I recently learned about Handgun Hunters Competition — a match designed specifically for handgun hunters. The match was held in Newcastle, Wyo., and hosted by the owner of Bayside Custom Gunworks, Chris Rhodes. Chris is a handgun hunter, so he knew firsthand proper practice techniques. He designed the course to emulate actual field hunting conditions. There wouldn't be any shooting from a bench or artificial rests of any kind. All shooting was from what you'd expect if hunting in the west, like logs and boulders.

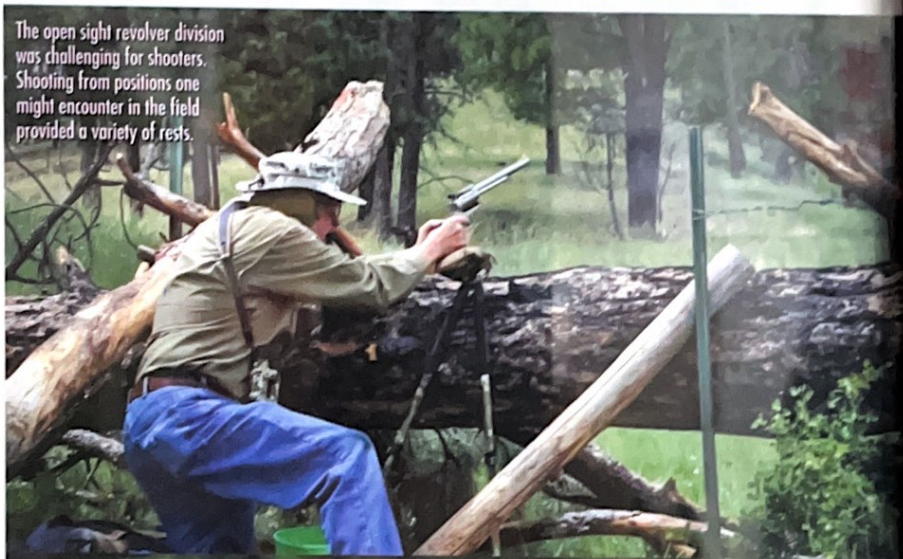
MATCH CONDITIONS

The match consisted of three divisions; revolvers open sights, revolvers with optics and single-shot handguns. The single-shot handguns had to be chambered in anything that was ever offered in the T/C Contender — factory or otherwise and could not weigh more than 7.5 lbs. Shooters could bring small shooting bags, but all rests combined had to weigh less than 3.5 lbs.

In the revolver course, a variety of colored targets in various shapes and sizes were located in and around timber, up on steep hillsides and across valleys. Targets ranged from 20 to 247 yards. The course was well thought out as a novice shooter would experience some success and those with considerable experience would find challenges too. Shooters were allowed only one shot on animal-shaped targets. Squares, triangles and circles accepted two shots max. If that didn't get you out of your comfort zone, a 3-minute time element was added.

Revolvers ran the course of S&W, Ruger, Magnum Research, Freedom

The open sight revolver division was challenging for shooters. Shooting from positions one might encounter in the field provided a variety of rests.



Brad Williams is enjoying the challenge of competition shooting a Magnum Research BFR revolver topped with a Leupold scope.



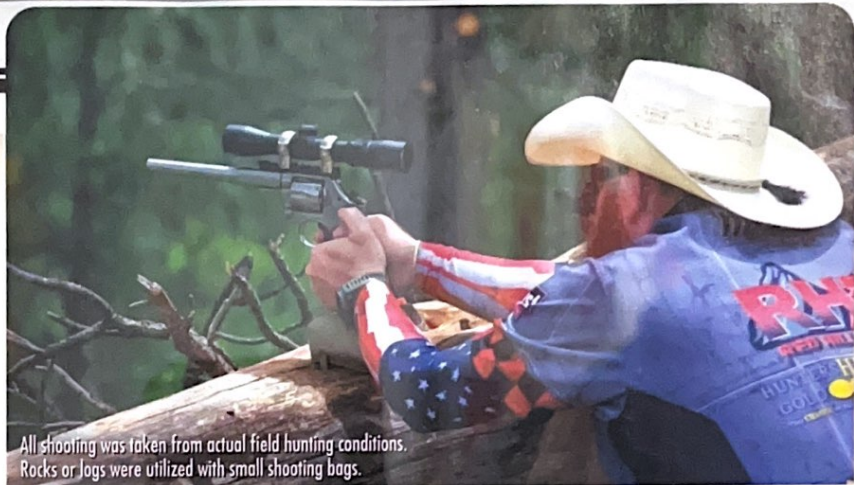
Arms and a few custom guns. Most of the competitors were shooting .357 or .44 Mags with a few .41s and others. Optics on the revolvers consisted of Burris, Leupold, with several running red dots such as UltraDots. There seemed to be an equal number of variables and straight 4X magnified. Basically you could compete with the same gun you hunt whitetail deer. The gun and caliber weren't the deciding factor — how well you could shoot from field conditions reigned supreme.

In the single-shot stage, different colored targets were employed out to 399 yards. Some of these targets were prairie dog cut-outs, rabbits, raccoons and those small triangle shapes that made me cuss more than once. Single-shot handguns showed up with more T/C Contenders than XP-100s, with a few customs in the mix. You didn't need a \$3,000 gun to be competitive. Many shooters opted for rifle scopes, and I saw several Leupold, Burris, Sightron, as well as a few others mixed in.

CREATIVE RESTING

Over the years, I've observed experienced handgun hunters get creative with building a rest of some sort. Well, this same concept of deciding on how to rest your gun came in play during the match. Those who scored well were the same ones creating a good rest. Keep in mind shooters couldn't move anything in the shooter's box but had to utilize what was available, such as the top of a log or rock. One station only provided a fence rail. If a fire hazard hadn't been in effect, I would have burned the rails to the ground!

A charging bear target had to be shot offhand. A couple of other targets were hidden in a position where the only way to engage them was by shooting offhand. We were placed



All shooting was taken from actual field hunting conditions. Rocks or logs were utilized with small shooting bags.

in groups — five to seven per group. There were a total of 42 shooters participating from all over the country. A shooting match with like-minded folks provided an ideal setting for some great camaraderie. It took the better part of the day to complete all six stages.

The guest of honor was Brad Williams, a physically handicapped shooter from Pennsylvania and all proceeds went directly to the Outdoor Adventures for the Physically Handicapped. The prize table was loaded with goodies and

gear. All participants walked away with something — and many were valuable prizes. Donors were very supportive of this great cause.

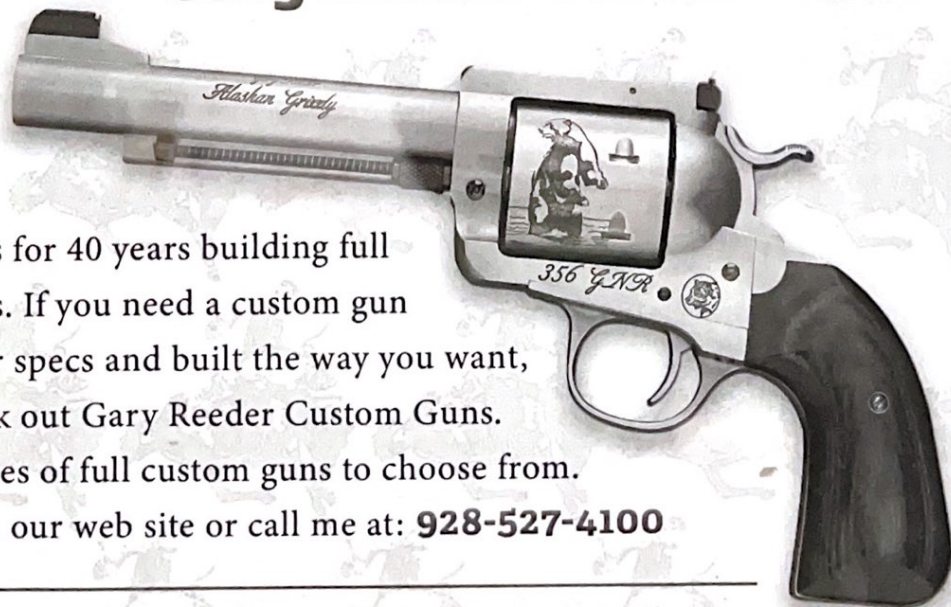
Next year Handgun Hunters Competition will add a .22 rimfire division. I'm already looking forward to the challenge. I can't think of a better way to prepare for fall hunting seasons. Right now, I'm anxiously waiting and ready for that big kudu to appear.



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