

ABLAZING BASICS

Get faster on target, more accurate and more confident at MTG's Advanced Handgun course. **BY** DAVID BAHDE

Since 1994 Midwest Training Group has been holding classes in Illinois, Iowa and Idaho. Andy Kemp and Bob Houzenga are the principal instructors and both have been training shooters for decades. Both are longtime trainers for Massad Ayoob's Massad Ayoob Group. Houzenga is currently a chief of police with 36 years in law enforcement. He also holds six national titles and hundreds of state and local titles as a competitive shooter. Along with his teaching skills, he is a skilled pistol builder who makes state-of-the-art 1911 pistols and revolvers. Kemp brings over 40 years of shooting experience to the table. He has been a staff instructor for Massad Ayoob since the mid-'90s and is a staff trainer for John Farnham's Defense Training International. He is a Master class IDPA shooter and has trained civilians, law enforcement and the military.

Most of Massad Ayoob's classes are focused on the legal aspects of deadly force use. While some classes can include shooting, some students wanted a bit more trigger time. So Houzenga and Kemp created a companion school to the classroom-intensive courses called Advanced Handgun Skills. It is round-intensive and designed to hone your pistol skills. All of the tactics were removed, leaving only skills training. The idea was to focus on running the gun using tactics where necessary for clarification. With students shooting 1,500 rounds (or more) in two days, the course provides an opportunity to really hone the fundamentals of advanced shooting.

The Overview

This class is about building basic skill-sets using repetition, time constraints

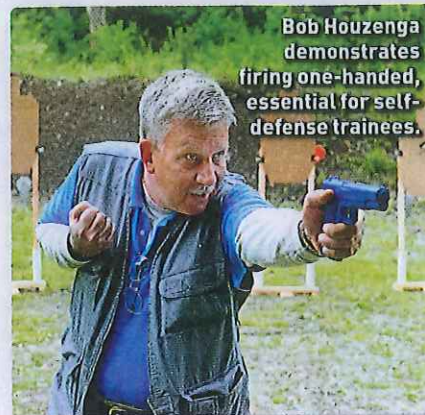
and a bit of pressure. Everything you take away from Advanced Handgun Skills can transfer to most any of the preferred tactics taught these days. Midwest Training Group offers classes focused on tactics as well, but take this course first and then come back for those classes even better prepared.

Day One: Kemp and Houzenga bring a wealth of experience and open minds. There was zero time spent denigrating other schools, systems or styles. Sharing my disdain for dogma, they both feel you should be familiar with all of the current shooting styles. Each is covered along with their strengths and weaknesses. Class time amounted to about an hour of discussion followed by trigger time that did not stop until the end of the class.

After a few minutes of slow fire to get warmed up, we performed a timed draw, placing one round in the A-zone. This was followed by a draw to a six-round "Bill Drill." Times were recorded to be compared at the end of the following day.

Houzenga, like many experienced trainers, focuses on trigger manipulation. Firing a revolver that was upside down using his little finger, he placed six shots on top of each other at 7 yards, stating, "It's all in the trigger." There was also a strong emphasis on accuracy. Using IPSC targets, the A-zone was the standard without regard to speed. Drawing and shooting quickly was encouraged, but never at the expense of accurate hits. While speed was strongly emphasized, this is not a competition school; the end result was always multiple hits that were accurate and placed in the upper thoracic portion of the target.

Moving to the draw, Kemp and Houzenga focused on smooth, controlled motion with as little excess movement



Bob Houzenga demonstrates firing one-handed, essential for self-defense trainees.

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as possible. Getting the pistol up and on target quickly while accessing the sights as soon as possible allows for fast and accurate hits. Sighting was important, but a "perfect" sight picture was not required. Spending time on a "flash" front sight and shooting "out of the notch" resulted in some impressive draw times with dead-center hits.

Reloads were covered focusing on empty loads or speed loads, but no "tactical" loads were used. Every drill was fired to slide lock, allowing for about as much reloading as possible. If you loaded 17 rounds, you fired them all—no doubles, triples or singles. The idea is to get the pistol moving in your hand under



The Advanced Handgun Skills course helps students learn to shoot accurately from various realistic positions with both their strong and weak hands.

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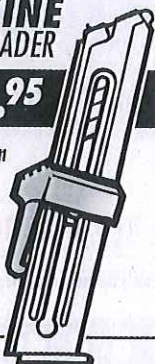
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COURSE RANGE GEAR

WHAT TO PACK

FIREARMS: Bring a pistol you know works, can run hard and you enjoy shooting repeatedly. Typical carry pistols like Glock G19s, Smith & Wesson M&P9s or Springfield Armory XD's are great. You can bring a single-stack pistol, but expect to perform a ton of reloads, and students should bring at least five magazines.



The author's Sig P226 SAO ran flawlessly throughout the high-round-count course.

HOLSTERS: The course focuses on drawing a lot, making a good outside-the-waistband (OWB) holster and double magazine pouch essential. Three double-stack magazines will also do just fine. You can wear eight magazines on your belt if you want, but it is not necessary. Tactical rigs are also fine, but flimsy holsters are not going to work here. I used both my Safariland rig and my Strategic Tactical Group Kydex, and they worked perfectly during the course.

DON'T FORGET: Students will shoot 1,500-plus rounds during this class. Bring a cleaning kit and some oil since shooting as much as 800 rounds in a day will get your semi-auto pistol heavily fouled rather quickly.

recoil, and nothing does that like rapid fire. It allows you to work out the best grip and tends to highlight any weaknesses. By the end of the day we were all shooting faster with better accuracy out to distances of 15 yards.

Day Two: After some warming up, it was time to move to single-hand shooting. Often missing in training courses, it is a critical aspect to gunfighting. Numerous shootings have proven this technique may be required. Most of the day involved shooting single-handed from either side. Time remained a factor, but accuracy was critical. Firing rapid fire really hones your grip and ability to track the sights. After getting well-placed hits on target at 10 yards with one hand, two-handed shooting seemed rather easy. Natural point of aim (POA) is often

seen in rifle training, but it applies to pistols as well. Where a stance is possible, using POA allows you to get your pistol on target quickly and accurately. Moving to the line, we established our stance, closed our eyes and then drew and fired, repeatedly. Having done this before, it is a great drill, but doing it this much was really helpful, and performing it with Bill Drills was even better. Being able to draw your pistol and put six rounds rapid fire into the A-zone with your eyes closed is a huge confidence builder.

The rest of the day was about putting all your skills together, culminating in a qualification course. Not always seen in civilian training, it is a great stress inducer. It's always amazing to see your reaction to the simple stress of having to "qualify" with your pistol. It was also not easy as it involved time constraints, lots of single-handed shooting, a very tight scoring zone and ranges out to 25 yards (20 yards at this range).

After doing some shooting from the ground, it was time to gauge improvement. The timed draw and "Bill Drill" from the previous day were repeated. In most cases times were cut in half or better. My draw time went down by 0.3 seconds, and my Bill Drill time by over a second. There was little doubt we had grown much faster while retaining solid accuracy.

Hardware Tested

I brought close to 2,000 rounds of Federal American Eagle 124-grain ammo to the course, and over 1,800 of them were expended. It was important to clean our guns. On day one, I split my time between my Springfield Armory 9mm 1911 and my Sig Sauer P226 SAO. Both were flawless and represent my two favorite pistols. They have proven accurate and reliable under a number of conditions. After a couple of hours of reloading the single-stack 1911, having an 18-round magazine was convenient for sure, but I would not hesitate to take this class again with a single-stack pistol.

This class allows you to really hone in on trigger manipulation, sight alignment and solid control of your pistol while firing. The idea is to make these skill-sets almost second nature, allowing you to focus completely on the tactics and situation at hand. There is nothing earth shattering here, it is just the basics. But you get the chance to really get good at them, have a great time and learn from incredibly well-qualified instructors. For more information, call 563-259-2123 or visit midwesttraininggroup.net. 