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SIGARMS Academy built its reputation with law enforcement, military and concealed carry training courses. Now the academy is in the process of expanding the curriculum to include practical pistol competition.

To kick off the new program, SIG invited guest instructor Bruce Gray to teach his two-day Practical Fundamentals Competition Course. Bruce has a long history as a Grand Master competitor and is one of the top gunsmiths in the country. He's also an old friend from my California days and is an occasional contributor to *Handguns*.

As a prerequisite to the course, students must have had some practical pistol experience. For those who needed a little refresher, Bruce taught his Skill Builder pistol course the day before the Practical Fundamentals course.

As a special New Hampshire welcome for Bruce, it snowed 18 inches during his Skill Builder class on that day in March. Thankfully, as I arrived the following day the sun was shining from a beautiful blue sky, and the temperature was a balmy 38 degrees.

SIG's Paul Erhardt and Chris Gosselin greeted me and gave me a quick tour of the academy. The newness and cleanliness of the facility were very apparent. I've been in dirtier hospitals, nevermind indoor range facilities.

Once students were settled into their seats, Bruce Gray took center stage. He asked the students to give a little background on their shooting experience. This was followed by a safety briefing where all guns were checked to make sure that they were unloaded. Ammunition was not allowed in the classroom.


Of the 15 students in attendance, 14 had SIGs of various models. SIG doesn't require those attending classes at the academy to use its products, but I'm sure the

high percentage of SIG pistols did not go unnoticed.

Bruce began by humbly telling the class, "What I'm going to teach you has been stolen from people better than me." He briefly flew over some of the key elements that he would cover, including proper equipment, grip, stance, how to construct the draw and presentation, reloading techniques and trigger control.

This last fundamental—trigger control—has been verbally flogged to death in mostly superficial terms, i.e. "don't pull, just squeeze" or "don't squeeze—press." Bruce has devised a system that allows students to get inside the trigger/shooter loop. This unique series of drills he calls the GrayGuns Dry Fire Program.

One of the drills is designed to help the shooter keep the trigger finger in contact with the trigger while breaking a shot. This is the opposite of slapping the trigger, where your finger flies off the trigger as you break a shot. To experience this, students faced away from each other, drew their guns and pointed them in



SIG's Practical Pistol Program

By
**Mike
Briggs**

A Grand Champion shooter teaches the fundamentals of competition shooting.

a safe direction. Slides were then racked to cock the hammers. As they focused on their front sights, the students were told to break the shot and not release the trigger. Then they were asked to rack the slide again, get back on their front sight and release the trigger until they could feel the click as it reset. At this point they would break another shot and repeat the process.

As simple as this sounds, it still takes a little practice to smoothly perform this drill. But practice they did, and I can guarantee that none of the students had ever experienced anything like it. The room was filled with the sounds of racking slides, falling hammers and resetting triggers. This was an aerobic activity where people were using breaks in the action to towel off and hydrate.

Bruce had introduced me to this same drill about 16 years ago. We were scheduled to attend a practical pistol match in Long Beach, California, and I was bemoaning my lack of practice on the day prior to the shoot. Seeing my distress, Bruce told me that he had just the ticket to fix the situation, and he headed out the door. He returned a little while later with a smile on his face and handed me a VHS copy of the original *Dawn of the Dead* movie.

"What's this for?" I asked.

"We're going to dry fire while watching the movie. It never fails," was his reply.

We got our pistols, checked to make sure

that they were clear and spent the better part of two hours doing the dry-fire drill I described earlier. I soon discovered that there's nothing quite like the specter of flesh-eating zombies to really make you get on your front sight and smoothly operate the trigger. By the end of the film, I was totally exhausted. The next day at our match, Bruce came in first, and I took second.

I used our lunch break to follow up with SIG's Chris Gosselin on the expansion of the SIG Academy's courses. He explained that they wanted to reach out more to responsible private citizens with classes on competition as well as start a league that would meet every month and put on matches. To complement this new direction, SIG has also opened up its excellent Armorers course to the public. In addition, the pro shop has been vastly expanded to include an extensive new line of SigTac concealed carry/tactical clothing and accessories.

The SIG custom shop recently introduced several new offerings including the P229 Equinox and the P229/P239 SAS DAK, which are finding popularity with the CCW market.

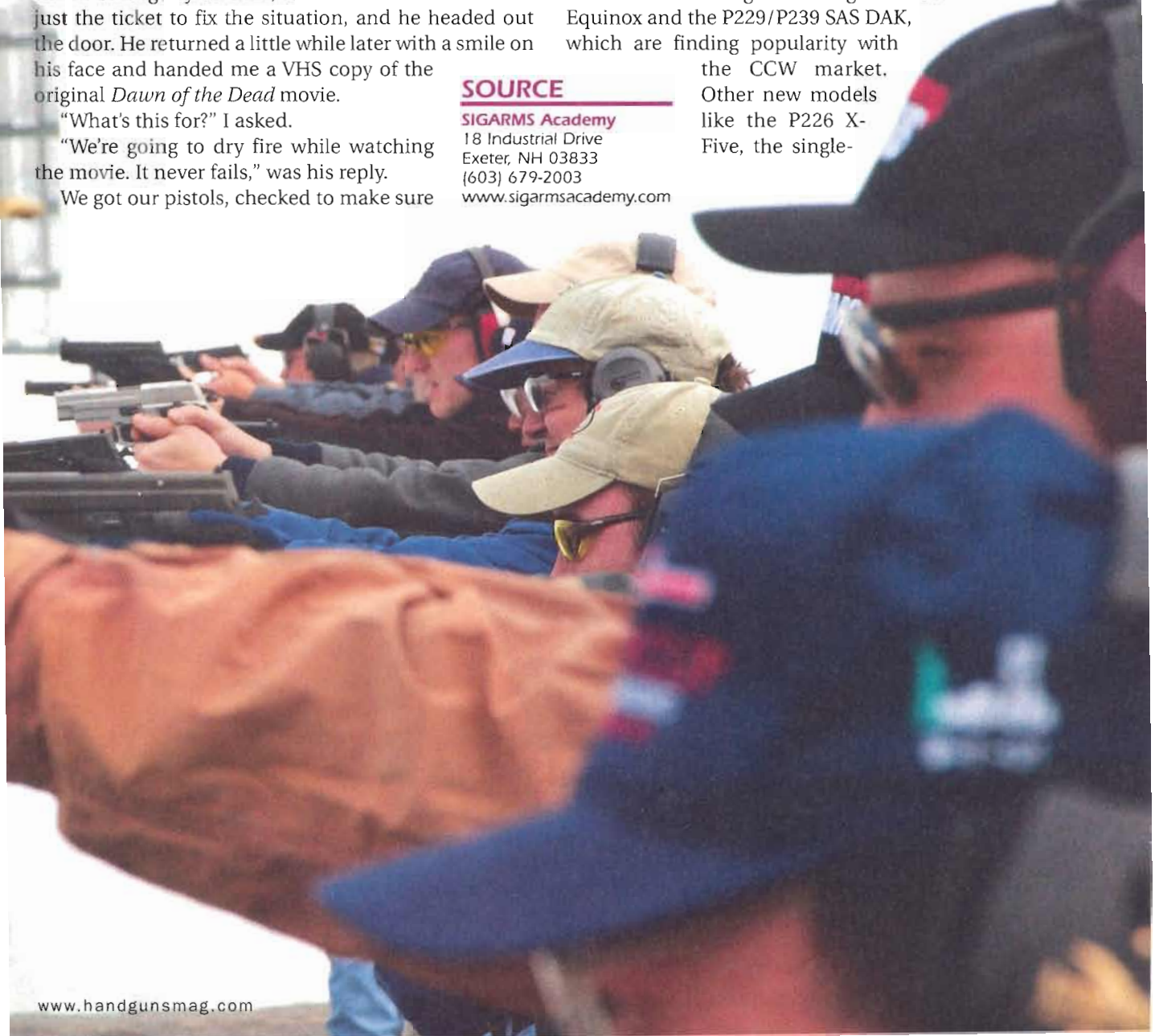
Other new models like the P226 X-Five, the single-

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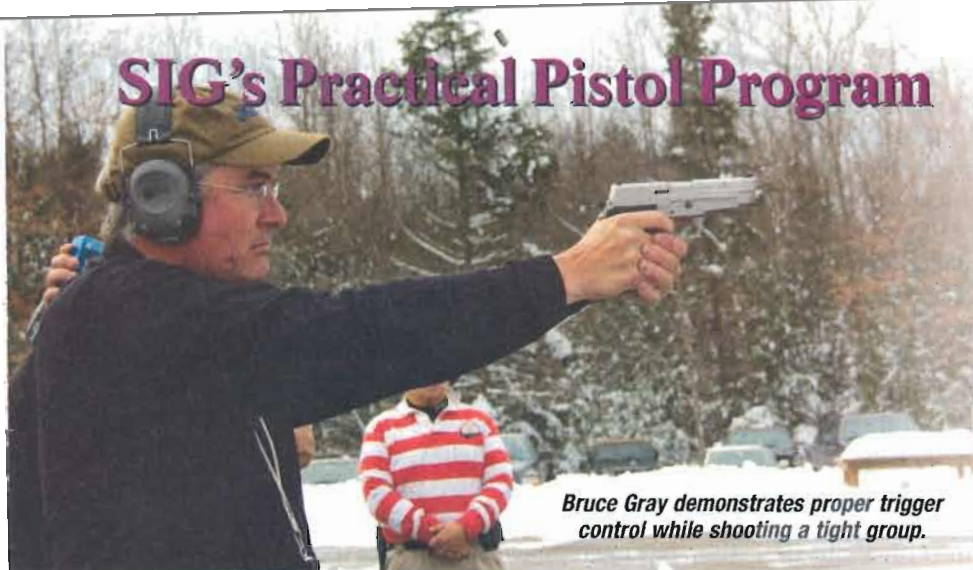
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SIG's Practical Pistol Program



Bruce Gray demonstrates proper trigger control while shooting a tight group.

action P220 and the 1911 GSR Revolution should be hot tickets for competitive shooters.

After lunch everyone reconvened on the outdoor range for the practical application of what had been learned in the classroom. Bruce began by demonstrating proper trigger operation while shooting two five-shot groups offhand at 10 yards. During the first group, he maintained contact with the trigger a la the dry-fire exercise.

For the second group, he started each shot with his finger slightly off the trigger. While both of his groups were very tight, the first was the tightest. Now, I'll admit that this distinction may seem somewhat minute, but it's huge to those who really want to become good shooters. Judging by the reaction the students had when they took their turns firing the groups, they got the message.

The class then began some holster work with an emphasis on a smooth presentation of the gun. Bruce went around and helped the students weed out any unnecessary movement or hitches that would impede their ability to quickly acquire their targets. This was followed by one-shot and two-shot draws. The students were constantly reminded to "keep the sights aligned on the target as you press the trigger" and "think about the process of making a good shot rather than the results."

While getting these fundamen-

tals across to the class, Bruce made an interesting observation: The goal of quickly and accurately hitting your target and the process that enables you to do it are the same in the tactical world as well as competitive shooting. While this makes perfect sense, it ruffles the feathers of those keen to protect their turf by making a distinction between the two. It's common knowledge that a cottage industry has sprung up involving top competitive shooters

everyone in the group to test fire one of its SG550-series full-auto rifles. Needless to say, this was a popular way to end the day.

With the fundamentals over (not to mention 500 rounds sent downrange), the group was ready for what, in my opinion, is the heart and soul of the class—working on how to approach a practical pistol course of fire. Most courses or stages include multiple targets arrayed downrange and designated areas uprange from which the shooter must engage the targets. For example, sometimes you open a door or shoot through a window or shoot targets as you move from one place to another. There's a multitude of different scenarios.

So where do you begin? First of all, you don't get to be a Grandmaster like Bruce Gray without also being a master stage tactician. He can dope out complex stage procedures with the best of them. One of the most important techniques he shared was the power of visualization. This is where the shooter breaks down visually every-



Two views of the SIG 229 Equinox.

training elite military and police units. Indeed, Bruce was one of the first (that I'm aware of) to be employed in such a manner.

The class spent the balance of the afternoon practicing shooting on the move, reloads and malfunction drills. SIG then arranged for





These days Bruce Gray spends a lot of his time working on SIGs, but he built his reputation crafting 1911s like this Officer's Model.

thing required to shoot a stage—for example, target order, when to move, where to set up for each shot and where to reload.

Why is this important? Because it enables shooters to weave everything they do into a seamless fabric of uninterrupted motion. Those who don't use visualization often appear unprepared and disorganized when they shoot a stage. And that usually results in poor performance.

Many years ago I watched Bruce

shoot a difficult stage at the Area 2 Championship in Mesa, Arizona. Each shooter had to negotiate a maze of old tires stacked up to form a zig-zag wall, while other tires created tunnels to shoot through. It was a nightmare. Bruce studied the situation and proceeded to effortlessly glide along, engaging the targets without really looking like he was going that fast. But of the several hundred competitors who shot that stage, Bruce's score was the best. Not even Rob Leatham or Brian Enos could manage to catch him. It was a perfect example of tactical visualization in action.

Finally, the class had the opportunity to put it all together in a "run and gun" course of fire on the SIG Academy indoor range. Bruce critiqued each student's performance, highlighting places where they could have saved time. In practical shooting, time is the essence. Virtually everything you do is on the clock. Whether you're successfully engaging targets, reloading and smoothly transitioning from one place to another or suffering bobbles, blunders and brain fades, it all goes into your score.

To wrap up things, everyone shot that great old chestnut called El Presidente. Then it was time to unload, show clear and call it a day—or two, as it were. After the class, I got a chance to ask one of the students his thoughts on what he had learned. "A lot," was his reply. The young man elaborated that the class had really opened his eyes to the inner game of practical shooting. He also felt that he certainly got his money's worth.

SIG's new competition program seems to be off to a flying start. When you add this ingredient to its other comprehensive offerings, it totals up to arguably the most well-rounded training program in the country. ■



This is March in New Hampshire—but the next day was sunny and clear.