

COWBOY ACTION SHOOTING™

Range Operations Basic Safety Course (Level I)



Compiled and Edited
by

The Wild Bunch

Version C
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The design and production of this course has evolved from many years of running matches and a need for match to match consistency. This course is the culmination of many dedicated SASS members' collaborative efforts. SASS owes a sincere thank you to Quick Cal, SASS #2707, Dang It Dan, SASS #13202, C.S. Fly, SASS #5078, San Juan, SASS #1776, The Sandman, SASS #5748, and all the match directors that have done so much in the past without the benefit of this Range Operations Safety Course. Shooters at all SASS matches will benefit greatly by the consistency this course provides.

SASS encourages the broadest dissemination of this material to its members as possible. For those SASS members who receive this Range Operations Basic Safety Course training taught by an instructor who has passed the Range Officers Training Course (signified by an orange pen) and who subsequently pass the Range Operations Basic Safety Test will be awarded a yellow SASS pin as evidence of satisfactory course completion.

INTRODUCTION

Consistency is important – undefined rules and gray areas cause hard feelings, misunderstandings, and arguments.

The purpose of this course is to ensure safety and consistency at every SASS club match, no matter what size the match is. Each SASS competitor who sets foot on a range is a Safety Officer, responsible for his own safety and the safety of those nearby. It is our intent every SASS competitor has the knowledge to function as a Range Officer given appropriate coaching on the range by experienced personnel.

The Range Officer's role is to keep the posse running efficiently, safely, and consistently. It is the responsibility of club officials

to determine the qualifications, experience, maturity, and judgement of its match officials and appoint appropriately trained individuals as Range Officers for their matches.

The rules and disciplines described in this course will not impose any undue hardship or additional financial burden on any club. It will, however, train our members to be safe and consistently penalize unsafe gun handling. Shooters who travel to SASS matches or clubs will feel comfortable knowing the safety rules and procedural penalties are consistent with their home club. They will also feel comfortable knowing the scoring, guns, and equipment are consistent with the SASS Shooters Handbook.

All SASS Range Officers must know and understand the SASS Shooters Handbook, be informed, and understand any recent changes. We must keep in mind what firearms are designed to do, and remember they can be very dangerous and deadly unless great care is taken while handling and shooting them. **We must always treat every firearm as loaded and ready to fire!**

SPIRIT OF THE GAME

Good sportsmanship best defines "*the Spirit of the Game.*" When designing and running a match, every match Director and Range Officer must keep in mind the event is solely for the safe enjoyment of the shooters. Range Officers must be professional, polite, and friendly. The SASS Shooters Handbook is to be followed in designing a match, and SASS rules enforced equally and consistently. These rules have been developed over time and provide our sport a high level of safety and consistency. This course was designed to give you a better understanding of the rules and how to apply them.

Completion of this basic safety course shows your commitment to SASS and demonstrates your willingness to jump in and help out where needed on your posse.

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Because our goal is to provide a safe and fun shooting experience, any competitor or Range Official who uses foul language or becomes belligerent or threatening in manner will be disqualified from the event, and at the Match Director's discretion, may be required to leave the range.

SAFETY RULES (FIRST, LAST, AND ALWAYS)

All competitors are Safety Officers.

Our sport, by its very nature, has the potential to be dangerous and a serious accident can occur. However, the history of SASS affiliated matches is free of any serious accident.

Every participant in a SASS match is expected to be a Safety Officer. Each shooter's first responsibility is for his or her own safe conduct, and all shooters are expected to remain alert for unsafe actions by others.

Range Officers and shooters are expected to confront any participant observed in an unsafe situation, and it is expected the matter will quickly be corrected and not repeated. Any argument concerning the correction of a safety related matter can be expected to result in the offending shooter's ejection from the range.

RANGE OFFICERS

The purpose of trained club Range Officers is to provide the sport of Cowboy Action Shooting™ competent, firm, and fair officials in all levels of competition and allow Range Officers to perform any duty on the posse.

The main objective of a Range Officer is to assist the competitor safely through a course of fire, and be an authority in all areas of gun safety, any time, any place.

Range Officer's Motto: THE PURPOSE OF THE RANGE OFFICER IS TO SAFELY ASSIST THE SHOOTER THROUGH THE COURSE OF FIRE.

The two words in this statement paramount to why a Range Officer is even necessary on the firing line are **assist** and **safely**. Let's look at these two words separately and how they affect one's actions and attitudes.

ASSIST

As a Range Officer, you are there to *assist* the shooter. You will notice the word "penalize" doesn't appear anywhere, but the word "assist" does. This is not to say you won't be called upon to assess penalties when they are appropriate, but it is NOT your first priority. You are there to prevent safety violations before they occur.

Assisting the shooter may take many forms. Some of the more important ways in which you can achieve this are:

1. **Information.** The best way to assist the shooter is to give consistent, complete information about the stage, such as starting position, round count for each gun, where to stage each gun, and the intent of the stage. Most of the basic information will appear on the stage description, however, many of the smaller details will not. For example, the shooter may know to sit in the chair at the start, but may not know he can re-position the chair to fit his or her size.

BE CONSISTENT in what you say and how you say it. Make sure only one Range Officer answers any questions for that stage. This way the same question is answered the same way every time. *Every posse must hear the same information the same way.* Always read the stage description word for word as it appears on the sheet, whether you have it memorized or not.

2. **Shooter Inventory.** Another good way to assist the shooter is to visually inventory each shooter at the line just before starting your range commands. This means you should inspect the shooter to see if they

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have all the equipment to complete the course of fire. For example, if you know the shooter is supposed to have shotgun shells on their person, but you don't see them, simply ask where they are. Also, look for the appropriate safety equipment. We all know how disconcerting it is to fire your first shot only to realize your earplugs aren't in!

3. **Assessment.** Assess the shooter's condition. We have all seen a shooter who is suffering from a bad case of match nerves. Even though this person may have plenty of experience, adrenaline is a strong drug and has many adverse effects. A person suffering from the effects of match nerves may be a hazard to himself or others, so it is important to pay special attention to a shooter who may be shaking violently, has trouble talking, or seems a little lost about the stage requirements. It may be wise to suggest the shooter sit down and wait a while longer before he shoots.
4. **Anticipate.** With time and experience, you will be able to anticipate the shooter's next move. If you can anticipate the shooter's next move, you may prevent him or her from acquiring penalties or committing an unsafe act. This is the mark of a truly good Range Officer.
5. **Attitude.** The best Range Officers have the best attitude. If you can do your job well *and* have fun too, then you will find the posse generally also has a good time. You will additionally find you are less likely to have any serious confrontations and the posse as a whole will work more efficiently. Remember, it's *your* attitude that sets the mood for the entire match.
6. **Coaching.** This is the most direct way to assist the shooter after the course of fire begins. The Range Officer should coach only when someone looks momentarily confused or lost, if they attempt to put down a long-

gun with the action closed, or address the wrong target. However, it's not your job to "shoot the stage" for the competitor, coaching him in every action, and some shooters don't like to be coached at all. It is prudent to determine if there is anyone on the posse who doesn't want to be coached.

SAFELY

Safety, as it applies here, has nothing to do with the rules per se. When we talk about assisting the shooter through a course of fire *safely*, we mean "without incident." An accident or incident, which has the potential for injury, is of grave concern to all who are exposed to the danger, which naturally includes the Range Staff. Therefore it is critical to do what is necessary to avoid or prevent such incidents from occurring. How is this accomplished?

1. **Course Design.** Some course designs are unsafe and should be avoided or changed. Example: a shooter leaves one shooting position and runs *up-range* (towards the spectators) to pull a pistol from his holster. This would mean the shooter, if he draws the pistol too early, could sweep the crowd with the muzzle of the gun. Solution: either stage the pistol so the competitor can't get to it until he or she is pointed in a safe direction, or change the stage so the competitor has to run down-range.

Don't be afraid to refuse to allow your posse to shoot an unsafe stage. Insist the stage be made safe before proceeding.

2. **Anticipate.** Again, if you can anticipate what the shooter may do next, you may be able to stop an unsafe act from occurring. This is not to suggest you are expected to put yourself in danger in order to stop the unsafe act, but you *might* be able to prevent it from happening through verbal direction or physical action.

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3. **Watch the Gun.** Many shooters acting as the Timer Operator rarely know what or where to actually look. Often, you will see them counting misses or looking around at the spotters. If you want to *really* know how to make more exact calls and anticipate the shooter's next move, *watch the gun!* By actually looking at the gun, you can identify where the gun is pointing and usually what target the shooter is engaging. This is critical if you have to make a call pertaining to correct target engagement. By watching the gun, you can also identify squib loads, warn the shooter if he or she is getting close to the 170° safety limit, or stop the shooter if there is a problem with the gun itself.

4. **Stay Within Arm's Length.** In order to stop an unsafe act, the Range Officer must be within arms-length of the shooter. In fact, the appropriate position for the Range Officer is behind and off to the *strong side* of the shooter. In other words, if the shooter is right handed, the Range Officer should be within arms-length of the shooter, to the rear and right of centerline. In this way, you can see the shooter operate the gun with his or her strong hand. NEVER let the competitor get away from you.

After you have run five or six competitors over a stage, you may get tired or lazy about staying up with the shooter, but remember, if that person commits an unsafe act, such as breaking the 170° safety rule, you will not be in a position to prevent it. If you are more than three feet away, you may not be able to see the gun. If you are getting tired, pass the timer to another Range Officer.

These are just some of the ways the Range Officer can apply safety in a practical manner.

RANGE OFFICER ATTITUDE

1. Be courteous and considerate of your fellow competitors. Never be over zealous in your duties.
2. Always be firm, but fair.
3. When penalizing a contestant, do not allow yourself to be intimidated by the competitor. Stand your ground, but do so in a professional manner.
4. Don't be a "hard-ass."
5. Be helpful to the competitor -- learn to identify the seasoned shooters from the newer shooters -- you can usually tell by their manner and confidence. If seasoned shooters need to know something, they'll ask; if newer shooters need help or coaching, give them all they need. Pay closer attention to newer shooters -- from loading to unloading.
6. Always refer to the SASS Shooters Handbook when stating the rules. Don't quote them from memory; you may be wrong. Enforce the rules as written, not what you think they mean. The Range Operations Basic Safety Course and The Range Officer Training Course offer interpretations to the SASS Shooters Handbook that will be helpful in making the correct call.
7. Make the call, and call them the way you see them!!! There are checks and balances in place. In cases of rule and policy interpretation, you may be overruled. If you are overruled, don't take it personally. Be glad for the competitor if it goes in his/her favor.
8. Never allow a competitor to badger, abuse, or argue with you or any other match official. Be firm and fair, but if they persist, don't argue with them. This is a gun sport, not a tennis match! Heated words between folks wearing firearms are not acceptable. Bring this type of behavior immediately to

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the attention of the Range Master or Match Director.

9. Always read the rulebook from the contestant's viewpoint.
10. Always give the contestant the benefit of doubt.

MATCH PROCEDURES AND TERMS

All match positions described below are Range Officers. The Timer Operator is the Chief Range Officer during shooting stage operations.

1. **Match Director** is in charge of the overall match and is required to ensure qualified officials are in place in all tournament areas.
2. **Range Master** is in charge of and oversees all stages and ensures qualified officials are in place on all stages. He reviews all stages and ensures they are designed and constructed to operate in a safe manner for both competitors and officials.

3. **Posse Marshal**

Posse Marshals can not perform all of the Range Officer functions themselves, but must insure Range Officer assignments are made and the rules and regulations are being followed.

- A) Is in charge of a posse and is required to ensure all positions are manned to safely and efficiently run the posse through each course of fire.
- B) Will understand all stages, conduct a walk-through, and answer all questions before beginning each stage.
- C) Will appoint at least one deputy if one is not assigned.

4. **Deputy**

- A) Acts on behalf of the Posse Marshal when the Marshal is shooting or otherwise unavailable.
- B) The Marshal and Deputy should be separated in the shooting order.

5. **Timer Operator**

- A) Is the Chief Range Officer for the stage and is in charge of the firing line, as long as he/she is running the timer.
- B) Is responsible to assign and identify three Spotters. It is a good idea to have bandanas or batons for the spotters to hold. This helps identify the spotters and keeps them on the line until they hand off the baton or bandana to the next spotter.
- C) The Timer Operator does not have the authority to over rule the spotters.
- D) The Timer Operator should be aware of the skill level of the competitors and very attentive to newer shooters, helping and coaching them through the course of fire, as needed, and always ready to control the newer shooter.
- E) Give seasoned shooters a little more room since they tend to move very fast. Don't let them run over you because you're crowding them.
- F) The Timer Operator never starts a competitor in a faulted position. It is not considered a faulted position for allowing a shooter to start without properly loaded guns or available ammunition on their person. .
- G) The Timer Operator does not count misses, but watches the shooter for unsafe acts, correct target engagement, and stage procedures.
- H) The Timer Operator holds the timer in a manner ensuring the last shots fired in a

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stage are recorded. This is especially true if the last gun being used in a stage is a rifle, which is always considered poor course design, since rifle reports are often not loud enough to reliably record on a timer.

- I) Don't feel you have to record every shot on the timer through the course of fire. Make sure the last one is recorded. It's the one that really counts, but it is always best to record as many shots as possible in the event of a gun malfunction.
- J) Once the stage begins, the Timer Operator stays within arms-length of the competitor until the stage is finished. The Timer Operator then immediately announces the stage time to the shooter. Only after pistols are holstered and long guns are action opened, muzzles pointed in a safe direction, and the shooter is heading towards the unloading table does the Timer Operator, declare "Range is Clear" and conveys the time to the Score Keeper in a loud, clear voice.
- K) The Timer Operator polls the three Spotters to determine the number of misses and/or procedural penalties, and then calls those numbers to the Score Keeper and the competitor in a loud, clear voice.
- L) Only the Timer Operator or Score Keeper calls the next shooter to the firing line.

6. Score Keeper

- A) Score Keepers must never record scores for a family member.
- B) Calls out shooting order and records times and penalties. If scoring instructions dictate, the Score Keeper will also total the times and penalties to calculate

the shooter's score. It is good practice for the Score Keeper to repeat in a loud, clear voice the scoring time announced by the Timer Operator.

- C) The Score Keeper can be one of the Spotters.
- D) The penalties are recorded in a manner not confusing to the person inputting computer data. If there are five misses, for instance, don't simply write "5", since that can be confused as just a five second penalty. If there is one miss don't write "5" thinking someone will assume it just means five seconds. They may read that as five misses and add on twenty-five seconds. It's best to write 1/5, 2/10, or 3/15 for misses and 1/10 for a procedural.
- E) The competitor should always be aware of any misses or penalties as they are leaving the firing line. The competitor has the right to know, since once they leave the line and unload, miss penalties should not be questioned.

7. Spotters

- A) Spotters must never spot for a family member.
- B) Have the responsibility to count shots and misses and to verify the targets were engaged in the correct order for the required number of shots. Spotters will assist the Timer Operator by watching for violations when the competitor retrieves staged firearms and draws handguns since it is impossible for the Timer Operator to have an unobstructed view of both sides of the competitor's body. Spotters are obligated to stop a shooter from attempting an unsafe action if the Timer Operator is not in position to see it or react quickly enough.

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- C) Spotters should always be in position to see all the targets in the course of fire. At least one spotter should be positioned on either side of the competitor.
 - D) Determine misses by both visual and audible means, if possible.
 - E) Always give the shooter the benefit of any doubt.
 - F) There should always be three Spotters -- the majority (two out of three) breaks the tie. As mentioned before, bandanas or batons are a good idea.
 - G) Remember, the Timer Operator is not relied upon to count shots and misses. His main function is to assist the competitor through the course of fire, and his memory can easily be altered if something out of the ordinary happens or if he becomes occupied coaching a newer shooter through a stage.
 - H) It is up to the Timer Operator to verify at least two of the three Spotters agree on misses.
8. **Loading/Unloading Table Officers**
- A) Loading Table Officers are responsible to visually check to ensure all firearms are loaded with only the correct number of rounds required in a course of fire. They count, along with the shooter, rounds being loaded into rifles and pistols.
 - B) They check to make sure no round is ever under the firing pin of any pistol.
 - C) The Loading Table is also a good place for the Loading Officer to observe the shooter's equipment, especially his firearms, inspecting for illegal modifications. A comment from the Loading Officer may save the shooter an embarrassing disqualification at the shooting line. Any illegal external modifications encountered at the loading table should be brought to the shooter's attention and corrected prior to shooting if at all possible.
 - D) It is good practice for the Loading Officer to ask the shooter if he understands the stage. Explanations at the Loading Table avoid these questions being addressed at the line by the Timer Operator and prevent unnecessary delays.
 - E) These officers ensure safe muzzle direction is strictly observed and enforced when a competitor is at a Loading or Unloading Table as well as during movement to and from the Loading or Unloading Table.
 - F) At the Unloading Table, competitors shall unload each of their firearms, and the Unloading Officer must visually inspect all chambers to make sure they are empty. Rifles and shotguns are cycled to verify their magazines are empty. **All handguns** taken to the firing line **must be checked**, whether or not they were used and only two main match pistols may be taken to the line.
 - G) Never allow a competitor to leave the loading table with a loaded firearm unless they are going to the firing line.
- Remember: The primary responsibility always rests with the competitor. Shooters should always know the condition of their firearms and should never depend upon the Loading and Unloading Officers to ensure their firearms are correctly loaded and unloaded. The Loading and Unloading Officers are simply an added measure of safety. A competitor *may never* blame the Loading Officer for an incorrectly loaded firearm, and at no time will this claim be considered grounds for dismissal of penalties.

RANGE COMMANDS

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Standard Range Commands are used in almost every established shooting sport. It is the most efficient way to run a shooting line. Also, it allows shooters from all over the world to understand range procedures, even if they don't speak English fluently. We're not saying you have to say the range commands exactly word for word, but the closer the better. For instance, instead of "Is the Shooter Ready" the term "Is the Cowboy Ready" is certainly acceptable. After all, the western flavor and spirit of our game allows for colorful individuality. **There is no reason Safety, Efficiency, and Having Fun can't all co-exist! Remember, SPEAK UP! -- Many of our competitors are a bit hard of hearing and are wearing hearing protection.**

1. **"Do You Understand the Course of Fire?"** is the customary initial query at the Loading Table. A negative response requires additional explanation. Answer any shooter's questions in a clear and consistent manner. Remember, never make a shooter feel as though he/she is being rushed.
2. **"Is the Shooter Ready?"** is normally the Timer Operator's initial command and should always be said just before the **"Stand By"** command. If the competitor is not ready or doesn't understand the stage, he will ask you questions. If they are ready, they'll just nod their head, and they're ready to hear the "Stand By" command. If they ask a question answer it to their satisfaction. While the primary goal is to assist the shooter, questions regarding the negotiation of the stage should be kept to a minimum at the firing line. After it is apparent they understand the stage, say again, "Is the Shooter Ready?" Don't just say "Stand By." It's better when shooters are comfortable and given the courtesy of a starting rhythm. We are not trying to surprise them with the start signal. Don't rush the shooter, but sometimes it is up to

the Timer Operator to keep things moving efficiently.

3. **"Stand By"** should always be the last words spoken with a one to three second pause before the Start Signal unless the stage calls for the shooter to "say a line" or use a prop before the time starts. **"Indicate Ready by Saying the Line"** can optionally be used to cue the competitor to self-start the stage. The "Stand By" command should still be used after the competitor says their line.
4. **"Muzzle up. Please move to the Unloading Table"** At the end of a shooting sequence, often the competitor stops thinking, after all, his shooting problem is finished! He simply needs a gentle reminder of what to do next.
5. **"Range Clear"** This command is given only after the shooter has completed their run, the pistols are holstered, the long guns are picked up and pointed in a safe direction with the actions open, and the shooter is on the way to the Unloading Table. It is now safe to gather brass and prepare for the next shooter.
6. **"Down Range"** is announced prior to proceeding down range to reset/repair targets.
7. **"Unload and Show Clear"** The command used by the Unloading Officer when a competitor comes to the unloading table (applies to all guns taken to the line).
8. **"Gun Clear"** is the appropriate Unloading Officer response as each firearm is successfully inspected empty at the unloading table. **"Thank You"** is appropriate after all guns have been inspected.

Additional Commands

1. **"Action Open"** This command is given by the Timer Operator when a competitor puts a long-gun down with the action closed. The Timer Operator must do everything in

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- his/her power to prevent the shooter from moving from that position with the action on any long-gun closed. If the shooter puts down a gun with the action closed, but returns and opens the action, there is no penalty.
2. **“Muzzle!”** This command warns the shooter their muzzle is getting close to the 170° limit, and should be pointed back down range.
 3. **“Cease Fire, or Stop”** If at any time an unsafe condition develops, the Timer Operator will immediately shout “Cease Fire” or “Stop.” The shooter is to stop firing or moving immediately. Failure to heed this command is serious and may result in a Match Disqualification. (“Whoa!” sometimes works just as well!)
 4. **“Yellow Flag”** On ranges where multiple stages are run in parallel using a common firing line with no separating berms, it is sometimes necessary to go down range to repair broken or malfunctioning targets. Once the “Yellow Flag” command has been given, each stage affected will allow any shooter already engaged in that stage to complete the course of fire. As shooting finishes on each stage, all in-use guns are grounded at the loading and/or unloading tables and the competitors will “stand back”. Once the firearms are secure, each stage will signal compliance by showing its own “Yellow Flag.” Once all affected stages are displaying their “Yellow Flag”, the initiating Range Officer may advance down range. When the offending targets have been fixed, and the Range Officer is behind the firing line, an **“All Clear”** command will be given, the “Yellow Flags” withdrawn, and normal range operations can resume.
 5. **“Red Flag” means “Cease Fire!”** As in “Yellow Flag” above, flags are often used and generally accompanied by a horn, whistle, or shout (“Cease Fire!”). All shooting must immediately stop and the firearms grounded or otherwise made safe. Once the cease fire condition is resolved, an **“All Clear”** command is given, the Red Flags withdrawn, and normal range operations resumed. Any shooter stopped while shooting a stage is given a reshoot.

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APPENDIX A

RANGE RULES

All participants are Safety Officers; however, it is the ultimate responsibility of the Range Officers to assure the safety rules are consistently followed. The following outlines specific safety violations and their penalties.

1. Every firearm must be treated with respect! **Covering or sweeping an individual or group with the muzzle of an empty gun will result in a Stage Disqualification. Covering or sweeping an individual or group with the muzzle of a loaded gun will result in a Match Disqualification.** Handling guns off the line should be avoided but if necessary should be limited to safe areas.
2. Long guns will have their actions open with chambers and magazines empty and muzzles pointed in a safe direction when being carried to and from the designated loading and unloading areas for each stage. Chambers and magazines must be empty and actions open for all firearms transported at a match. Muzzle direction is important between, before, and after shooting a stage. A muzzle must not be allowed to “sweep” the other participants between stages, or when moving the firearms from the gun cart to the loading tables. The muzzles of all long guns must be maintained in a safe direction (generally “up” and slightly down range), even when returning to the unloading table. Failure to manage safe muzzle direction, even though no individual is swept, is grounds for **Stage Disqualification**, and for repeated offenses, **Match Disqualification**.
3. All firearms will remain unloaded except while under direct observation of a designated person on the firing line or in the designated loading and unloading areas.
NOTE: Percussion revolver shooters must

ensure they maintain safe muzzle direction during loading and have fired or cleared all capped chambers prior to leaving the unloading area. Some Range Officers will require the percussion pistols to be cleared before leaving the firing line. **Failure to adhere to loading and unloading procedures will result in Stage Disqualification.**

5. Six-guns are ALWAYS loaded with only five rounds (five-shooters with four) and the hammer lowered and resting on the empty chamber. All guns are loaded based upon stage requirements. **Loading more than the correct number of rounds in long guns will result in the assessment of a 10-second Minor Safety Penalty. Loading a revolver to maximum capacity and lowering the hammer on a live round and/or holstering or staging the fully loaded revolver will result in a Stage Disqualification.**
6. No cocked revolver may ever leave a shooter's hand (**Stage Disqualification**). This also means from one hand to the other.
7. Handguns are returned to leather (re-holstered) with hammer down on a spent case or empty chamber at the conclusion of the gun's immediate use, unless the stage description specifically directs otherwise; e.g., “move to next position and set gun on table or prop.” **Any time a pistol is re-holstered and the hammer is not all the way down on either an empty chamber or a spent case will result in a Stage Disqualification.**
8. De-cocking a loaded gun under the clock is forbidden. **Once a live round is placed under the hammer of a pistol or rifle, the round is to be shot. If this causes the firearm to be shot out of sequence, the shooter will be awarded a single procedural penalty with hits and misses counted in the usual manner. The**

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- shooter then has the option of making the firearm safe and moving to the correct position or restaging / reholstering the firearm. Shotguns may be opened and rounds removed or replaced without penalty.**
9. The shooter shall never be allowed to move with a cocked, loaded firearm in hand. Movement is defined the same as "traveling" in basketball. Once the firearm is cocked, one foot must remain in place on the ground until the firearm is made safe. Which means, on pistols, the hammer must be down on an empty chamber or expended case and, on rifles, action open or hammer down on an expended case. Shotguns are considered safe when the action is open.
 10. Any discharge, accidental or otherwise, that hits the ground or stage prop less than five-feet from the shooter will result in a **Match Disqualification**. When drawing a handgun from its holster, the handgun shall not be cocked until it is at a 45° angle down range. **A round over the berm is always a bad idea, but is worse on some ranges than others. Local match regulations will establish the appropriate penalty, up to and including a Match Disqualification.**
 11. Rifles may be "staged" with the magazine loaded, action closed, hammer fully down on the empty chamber (not on the "safety" notch), as long as the muzzle is pointed in a safe direction – adheres to the 170° safety rule and the muzzle is never on the ground. (Note: When the muzzle is "on the ground" the barrel will normally be "up-range" from the receiver, violating the 170° safety rule.)
 12. Shotguns are always "staged" open with magazine and chambers empty, never with the muzzle on the ground, and are loaded on the clock unless the stage description states otherwise. Shotguns may be opened and rounds removed or replaced without penalty. It is permissible for mule-eared shotguns to be "cocked" at the beginning of a scenario whether staged or in the shooters' hands. Scoring is very difficult when both barrels of a double-barreled shotgun are fired simultaneously, so stages should not be designed incorporating a shotgun double tap.
 13. Long guns will have their actions left open (**10-second Minor Safety Penalty**) and the magazine/barrels empty at the conclusion of each shooting string (i.e., whenever the gun leaves the shooter's hands during or at the end of a stage). This does not apply to guns shot out of sequence, made "safe" and then restaged.
 14. A live round left in the chamber constitutes a **Stage Disqualification**. A live round left in the magazine or on the carrier is a **10-second Minor Safety violation**. An empty round left in the chamber, magazine, or on the carrier is also a **10-second Minor Safety violation**. Malfunctioning guns still containing rounds will not warrant penalties so long as the malfunction is declared and the gun made safe (handed to the Range Officer or placed on a prop with the muzzle in safe direction). **At this point, the firearm is still loaded, everyone knows it, and the firearm can be handled in an appropriate manner.**
 15. All shooters must demonstrate rudimentary familiarity and proficiency with the firearms being used. While monthly club matches are certainly an excellent training ground, SASS matches are not the forum in which to learn basic firearms handling. Basic firearms safety and rudimentary proficiency training are more appropriately learned under non-match conditions. SASS matches can then be used to mature the learned skills.
 16. SASS affiliated matches are not fast draw competitions. **Any unsafe gun handling in**

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the course of a draw from the holster or any "fanning" will result in a Stage Disqualification. A second offense will result in Match Disqualification. NOTE: "Slip-hammering" is not the same as fanning, and is legal.

17. Although cross-draw and shoulder holsters are legal, they represent a significant safety concern. No holster may depart from the vertical by more than 30° when worn. Extreme care must be exercised when drawing a firearm from a cross-draw or shoulder holster or returning the firearm to leather. The user must "twist" their body, if necessary, to ensure the muzzle never breaks the 170° degree safety rule during the process. (NOTE: The 170° safety rule means the muzzle of the firearm must always be straight down range +/- 85°. If a competitor "comes close" to breaking the 180° safety plane, the 170° safety rule has been violated and the competitor is at fault). Shooters competing in the Gunfighter Category must wear two standard holsters, one on each side of the body. Cross draw, shoulder, or butt forward holsters are not allowed within the Gunfighter Category. **Any gun that breaks the 170° safety rule will result in a Stage Disqualification.**

18. When changing location during a stage, all firearms being carried must either have the hammer down on an empty chamber or spent case, or have the action open. Movement is not allowed with a loaded, cocked firearm. Movement is defined by the basketball "traveling" rule. Whenever a shooter has a loaded, cocked firearm in hand, at least one foot must remain in place on the ground. **1st violation will result in Stage Disqualification; 2nd violation will result in match Disqualification.**

19. **Any unloaded gun dropped during a stage will result in Stage Disqualification.** Dropped unloaded guns away from the line

will be a no call. A shooter is forbidden from picking up a dropped gun. The Range Officer will recover the gun, examine it, clear it (if necessary), return it to the shooter, and assess the penalty. **A dropped loaded gun is a Match Disqualification.** An open, empty long gun that slips and falls after carefully being set down at the end of a shooting string and does not break the 170° safety rule or sweep anyone will result in either a "**Prop Failure**" call or a **10-second Minor Safety Violation**, depending upon the circumstance. An empty long gun carelessly staged that falls will result in a **Stage Disqualification.**

20. Ammunition dropped by a shooter in the course of loading or reloading any firearm during a stage is considered "dead" and may not be recovered until the shooter completes the course of fire. For example, if a round of shotgun ammo is dropped while loading, the round must be replaced from the shooter's person or counted as a miss. No attempt may be made by the shooter or any other person, to pick up the dropped round for use on that stage. Trying to recover a dropped round prompts loss of muzzle direction control. Once the dropped round leaves the shooter's hand or control, it is considered to be a dead round. **Stop the shooter if he tries to recover the dead round. It is a 10-second Minor Safety Violation if the shooter during or after the stage retrieves the round. Staged rounds that are dropped back where they were staged are not considered "dead".**

21. **The Unloading Officer MUST inspect all firearms** before they leave the stage. Rifles must have their action cycled for the Unloading Officer and chambers inspected. All pistols, whether used or not in the stage, must be inspected, including cap and ball pistols. Shotguns must have actions open

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- or cycled and chambers inspected. It is acceptable to leave one or more chambers charged in a percussion pistol so long as the caps are removed from the nipples.
22. Alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the range area for all persons, shooters, guests, range officers, and others until all shooting is over for the day and firearms have been stored. You must also take into consideration the rules of the specific range in this matter and respect those rules. **A violation of this rule will result in Match Disqualification.**
 23. No shooter will ingest any substance that may affect his or her ability to participate with a maximum state of awareness and in a completely safe manner. Both prescription and non-prescription pharmaceuticals that may cause drowsiness or any other physical or mental impairment must be avoided. **A violation of this rule will result in a Match Disqualification and ejection from the range.**
 24. Eye and hearing protection must be worn by all competitors when in the loading area or on the firing line. Hearing protection is recommended for everyone in the range area, and **eye protection is mandatory for all shooters and spectators within direct line of sight of steel targets.**
 25. Only registered competitors may wear firearms.
 26. Main match targets are recommended to be fabricated from metal and approximately 16" X 16" in size. Distances for revolver targets should be 7 to 10 yards, shotgun targets should be 8 to 16 yards, and rifle targets should be placed at 13 to 50 yards.
 27. At this time there is no minimum velocity for handgun or rifle ammunition. The maximum velocity for handgun ammunition is 1000 feet per second and the maximum velocity for rifle ammunition is 1400 feet per second.
 28. Ammo belts must be worn around the waist (at or below the belly button).

RANGE OPERATIONS SUMMARY

1. It is expected the Range Officers will have the primary responsibility for observing and resolving all safety related matters occurring in the loading, unloading, and firing line areas. The Range Officers will make the final determination of penalties and scores. Due care and diligence by the shooter will be taken into consideration when determining whether or not a penalty is valid, based upon factors such as a range equipment or prop malfunction.
2. In the event a competitor doesn't agree with a Range Officer's final penalty or assessment, the competitor has the right to "politely" request a Supervising Match Official (Range Master or Match Director) to review the call. The Range Officer's call can be overruled only in the case of a rule or policy interpretation.

At annual matches and above, often the Match Director will recruit a number of Territorial Governors to hear the shooter's complaint and make a judgement. Three Territorial Governors (three break a tie) are suggested, and none should be from the shooter's home state. The Match Director administers the hearing and refrains from voting.

Fees are often charged to file a protest, preventing frivolous protests. The fees are sometimes returned if the protest is upheld.

3. **Minor safety infractions** occurring during a course of fire that do not directly endanger persons will result in a **10-second penalty** being added to the shooter's time for that stage. "Minor" safety infractions are occurrences such as failure to open a long

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gun's action at the conclusion of a shooting string, or failure to return an empty handgun to its holster at the conclusion of a shooting string.

Major safety infractions will result in the shooter's Disqualification from the Stage or Match. "Major" infractions include: a dropped gun, an accidental discharge that is unsafe (e.g., impacts less than five-feet from the shooter) or hits a stage prop, violation of the 170° safety rule, "sweeping" any person with the muzzle of a firearm, and similar acts that have high potential for personal injury. There are circumstances where a single Major Safety violation will result in a **Match Disqualification.** (See **Addendum for listing of penalties.**) **By the way ...**

A safe and sturdy place should be provided at each stage to position the shooter's firearms, and is mandatory to use. Whether or not they are available, it is the **shooter's responsibility** to take reasonable care in putting down the gun. If the gun falls, the Range Officer shall make the determination of fault: either **Prop Failure or 10-second Minor Safety Violation (1st offense).**

RE-SHOOTS

At all SASS annual club, state, regional, national, and world championship matches, no re-shoots will be given after the first shot goes down range, except for

- prop or match equipment failure
- a Range Officer impeding the progress of the shooter
- timer failure or unrecorded time

as determined by the Range Officer and the Match Director. In this case, the shooter starts over with no penalties (except safety) or misses.

For example, if the Range Officer stops a shooter from completing a shooting sequence because of a suspected squib load, and the gun turns out to be "clear," the Range Officer has impeded the progress of the shooter, and a re-shoot is in order.

Local club matches may allow re-shoots for gun related problems if they cannot be corrected during the course of fire. The Posse Leader will make this determination under local club guidelines.

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APPENDIX B

THE 10 “COMMANDMENTS”

- Safety
- Keep it fun
- Use common sense
- The benefit of the doubt goes to the shooter
- Treat everyone as you would like to be treated
- Treat everyone equally (Sam Colt made us that way)
- Keep the stage moving (if a problem arises, take it away from the firing line)
- Make sure all the assignments are covered
- Coach when needed
- Keep it simple

PENALTY OVERVIEW

5-Second Penalties

- Missed targets

10-Second Penalties

- Any unintentional procedural errors – caused by “brain fade,” confusion, ignorance, or mistakes (not to exceed one for any given stage). Accommodations are often allowed for those unable to comply with specific stage procedures due to physical limitations with no procedural penalties assessed.
- Minor Safety Penalties
 - Not leaving a long gun action open
 - Leaving empty or live round in magazine or carrier in long gun
 - Loading more than correct number of rounds in long guns
 - Not returning pistols to leather
 - Carelessly placed open, empty long guns that slip and fall (do not break 170° safety rule or sweep anyone)
 - Retrieving a dropped “dead” round

Stage Disqualification

- Any dropped unloaded gun
- Any accidental discharge deemed unsafe (including at the loading bench)
- Accidental discharge striking anything five to ten feet from the shooter
- Violation of the 170° safety rule/ Failure to manage appropriate muzzle control
- Returning a handgun to leather with hammer cocked or down on a live round.
- A cocked pistol leaving the shooter’s hand
- A live round left in the chamber of a long gun
- Changing location with a cocked gun or a gun with the hammer down on a live round
- Unsafe firearm handling, such as fanning
- Loading at other than the designated loading position
- Use of an illegal or illegally modified firearm
- Holstering or staging a pistol with the hammer down on a live round
- Sweeping anyone with an unloaded firearm

Match Disqualification

- Two accumulated Stage Disqualifications or Two Spirit of the Game assessments
- Belligerent attitude / Unsportsman-like conduct
- Shooting under the influence of alcohol, prescription, or other medication that may impair the shooters physical or mental abilities.
- Shooting illegal (e.g., “too hot”) ammunition
- Dropping a loaded firearm
- Accidental Discharge striking within five-feet of the shooter
- Sweeping anyone with a loaded firearm

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Failure to Engage/Spirit of the Game 30-Second Penalty

- Willfully shooting a stage other than the way it was intended in order to gain a competitive advantage.

ACCEPTABLE EXTERIOR MODIFICATIONS

The following are examples of SASS “legal” exterior modifications. The current version of the SASS Handbook should always be used as an additional reference for acceptable external modifications.

- Recoil pads on shotguns
- Altering stock lengths on long guns for correct fit
- Changing barrel lengths on long guns and six-guns. (Shotguns barrels must be greater than 18 inches in length and rifle barrels must be greater than 16 inches in length.)
- Bullseye or crescent ejector rod heads on six-guns
- Changing rifle sights to more “period correct” sights
- 1860 Colt grip frames on 1873 Colts or clones
- Engraving as a decorative embellishment
- Bead blasted or checkered sights
- Shortened cylinder pins
- Birdshead grips
- Modifying pistol sights to shoot point of aim, so long as “period” appearing sights are retained (e.g., replacing percussion post front sights with higher period blade sights).
- The use of an external replacement part that is not specifically covered in the “External Modifications Rules” must match the visible contour of the original part.

UNACCEPTABLE EXTERIOR MODIFICATIONS

- The use of a “Bisley” hammer on any other grip frame other than a “Bisley” grip frame.
- Hammer spurs may not be widened, narrowed, polished smooth, or bent either up or down.

ILLEGAL ITEMS

The following are examples of SASS “illegal” items. The current version of the SASS Handbook should always be used as an additional reference for illegal items.

- Colored sights (such as day-glow orange or red paint)
- Shotgun belts not worn just above the pistol belt and touching the belly button
- Two main match pistols worn on the same side of the body
- Main match pistol ammunition that exceeds 1000 feet per second in velocity (currently there is no minimum velocity requirement)
- Main match rifle ammunition that exceeds 1400 feet per second in velocity (currently there is no minimum velocity requirement)
- Bandoleers that are tied down in any manner
- Modern shooting gloves
- Short sleeve shirts
- Modern feathered cowboy hats
- Designer jeans
- Ball Caps
- Tennis, running, jogging, or aerobic shoes
- Clothing displaying manufacturer's or sponsor's badges or logos
- Nylon, plastic, or Velcro accouterments

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APPENDIX C

EXTERNAL MODIFICATIONS RULES

SASS Cowboy Action Shooting™ competitions are divided into three separate types of matches as follows: main, team, and side matches. The rules relative to SASS approved firearms depends upon the type of competition in which you will be participating. The rules for main match and team event rifles are similar, but not identical, to the rules for side match competitions. All the rules and other specific requirements for each type of rifle competition are listed separately in their respective subsections.

-RIFLES-

MAIN & TEAM MATCH COMPETITION

Rifles or carbines used in the main and team matches must be original or replicas of lever or slide action rifles manufactured during the period from approximately 1860 until 1899 incorporating a tubular feed and exposed hammer.

Rifle Calibers

- must be centerfire of at least .25 caliber or larger.
- must be in a “pistol” caliber. (examples include, but are not limited to, .32-20, .38 special, .38-40, 44-40, and .45 Colt. No “rifle” calibers such as .30-30 or .38-55 are allowed.)

Barrels

- may be rebores and chambered for any approved caliber.
- original barrels may be replaced with new barrels of correct styles (e.g., round, octagon, half-round), weights, and lengths that were originally

factory available for that particular model rifle or carbine. Calibers as defined above.

- may be altered by machining or hand fitting to accept mounting hardware for an alternative tube magazine configuration and capacity appropriate to the model of firearm being altered.
- may be altered by machining or hand fitting to accept period style sights as allowed below.

Sights

- Only original or replica style open iron sights or tang mounted peep sight of the 1860 to 1899 period are allowed.
- original style sights that were available during the cowboy era may be substituted for existing factory supplied sights, providing they meet all the other sight rules. Modern style “click” adjustable barrel or receiver sights are not allowed. No receiver-mounted sight is permitted.
- must be made from materials available during the cowboy era and look “period.” Example: ivory, brass, gold, or silver bead front sights of period design are allowable, however, the same design sight with an insert of modern “day-glow” or colored fiber optic plastics or similar materials are specifically not allowed.
- rear and front sights may be “blacked” with ink, paint, or smoke soot. Other colors of paint or colored sight inserts are not allowed on either front or rear sights.

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Stocks

- may be replaced by shorter or longer length stocks providing they maintain the approximate original stock shape and contours that were factory available for that model firearm.
- Period style checkering is allowed on both fore stocks and butt-stocks.
- must be made out of materials that were generally available and used for stock making during the cowboy era.
- may replace the factory butt-plate with a period style permanently fitted or lace on recoil pad, or change the butt-plate to a style that was generally available from the original manufacturer.
- may attach a piece of leather or similar natural material to the butt-plate.

Receivers

- no external modifications are allowed on receivers except where the upper tang is an integral part of the receiver and then only to drill and tap the upper tang to accept approved type tang sights. Engraving the receiver is permitted.

Levers

- “John Wayne” style levers may be substituted on Winchester Model 1892 and 1894 rifles for the standard factory lever.
- Levers may be wrapped with leather or other natural material.

-- SHOTGUNS --

**MAIN, TEAM, OR SIDE MATCH
COMPETITIONS**

Any side by side shotgun typical of the period from approximately 1860 until 1899 without automatic ejectors, with or without external hammers, having single or double triggers is allowed. Lever or slide action single barrel tubular feed, exposed hammer shotguns of the period are allowed, whether original or replicas. Certain shooting categories require a specific type of shotgun and ammunition to be used in those competitions. Please see the shooting categories for further information.

Barrels

- may be any length greater than 18 inches.
- must be centerfire of at least 20 gauge and no larger than 10 gauge.
- may be replaced, rebored or sleeved for any of the legal gauges listed above within industry safety limits.
- may have internal choke tubes installed provided they do not extend beyond the muzzle.
- may be altered by machining or hand fitting to accept period style sights as allowed below.

Sights

- front sights may be bead or simple post types typical of the era.
- must be made from materials readily available and of a style commonly used during the cowboy period from approximately 1860 until 1899 (e.g., ivory, brass, gold, or silver bead front sights of period design are allowable, however, the

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same design sight with an insert of modern “day-glow” or similar materials is specifically not allowed).

Stocks

- may be replaced by shorter or longer length stocks providing they maintain the approximate original stock shape and contours that were factory available for that model firearm.
- Period style checkering is allowed on both fore stocks and butt-stocks.
- must be made out of materials that were generally available and used for stock making during the cowboy era.
- may replace the factory butt-plate with a permanently fitted, slip-on, or lace-on rubber or leather recoil pad, or change the butt-plate to a style that was generally available from the original manufacturer.
- may attach a piece of leather or similar natural material to the butt-plate.

Receivers

- no external modifications allowed.
- Engraving is permitted.

Levers

- Levers may be wrapped with leather or other natural material.

Ammunition

- number 4 lead birdshot or smaller must be used in all competitions. No steel or plated shot allowed.
- light field or target loads are recommended for all competitions. No magnum or high velocity rounds are allowed.

- pump and lever action shotguns are allowed to load no more than two rounds at a time in the main match stages unless specified in the stage description. Single loading the pump or lever action shotguns is always acceptable. In team events shotguns may be loaded to their maximum capacity.

-- REVOLVERS -- MODIFICATIONS AND RESTRICTIONS

Originals and replicas of full size single action revolvers manufactured during the period from approximately 1860 until 1899 and the SASS approved modern category revolvers are the only revolvers approved for use in SASS main match competition. The Rules relative to SASS approved revolvers and pistols depend upon the competition category in which you will be participating. Examples of SASS approved revolvers for each category are listed elsewhere in this handbook.

Regardless of the model or approved type, revolvers shall be maintained in as original exterior condition as possible, and must look period. The only allowed exceptions are listed below:

Pistol Calibers

- Must be center fire calibers of at least .32 caliber or larger.
- must be in a “pistol” caliber. (examples include, but are not limited to, .32-20, .38 special..44-40, and .45 Colt)

Barrels

- may be rebores or lined to any of the approved calibers.

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- original barrels may be replaced with new barrels of period styles, weight, and length.
- No heavy competition or “Bull barrel” is allowed.

Sights

Note: Sights are a major factor for determining in which category a revolver may be used.

- **Traditional**
only traditional style barrel mounted fixed iron foresights of a simple blade or post configuration are allowed. A simple open notched rear sight cut into the frame, hammer, or latch mechanism is the only rear sight allowed. Only Allowed Exceptions: Original cap and ball revolvers, those converted to “cartridge” and their modern made replicas may have either a dovetail front or rear sight, and they must conform to the types commonly found on the originals. **Any other revolver by whatever manufacturer or model that has a dovetailed rear sight, whether movable or adjustable, is a “Modern” category revolver.**

- **Frontier Cartridge and Frontiersman**
Same as the Traditional Category.

- **Modern**
may have factory installed dovetailed or adjustable rear sights and/or dovetailed front sights.

Sights, all categories

- may raise or lower the front sight to bring point-of-aim and point-of-impact into alignment. The general contour of the sight shall remain as per the original.

- may serrate the back of the front sight
- may change the shape of the rear sight notch on Colt Single Action Armys and Bisleys and their replicas from the “V” to a “U” configuration.
- colored sights and sight inserts are not allowed.
- sights may be “blackened” by either ink, paint, or smoke “soot.” Black is the only color allowed and then only in the immediate area of the sights.

Stocks or Grips.

- Contemporary rubber grips, modern target grips, and grip tape are not allowed. Replacement grips of wood, ivory, pearl, stag horn, bone, and the like are acceptable so long as they are not severely customized to constitute a “target” grip. That is, they must be of original profile and scale.

Grip Frame modifications

- Birdshead grip frames and grips may be installed on any SAA, its modern replicas, or Ruger Vaqueros.
- You may “round the grip profile” of any SASS revolver

Frame modifications

- rear sight modifications as per above rules
- Ruger Blackhawk frames may be modified by removing the rear sight assembly, welding up the sight cutout, recontouring the frame top strap and cutting a new sight notch to replicate a Colt SAA frame. The reconfigured frame is mated with a conventional Ruger Vaquero type

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barrel and the original grip frame assembly.

Other modifications

- Colt style bullseye or crescent ejector rods may be installed on Rugers.
- You may shorten the head of Ruger cylinder pins.
- You may apply a light bead blasted finish to the exterior of any SASS revolver.
- You may bevel the front of the cylinder of any Colt SAA, its modern replicas, and Rugers.
- Cosmetic engraving is acceptable so long as it does not constitute a competitive advantage. You may engrave your alias on the backstrap. You may not checker or stipple any portion of the grip frame.
- Trigger shoes, compensating ports, counterweights, and all other such modifications are not allowed.

Interchangeability of Parts Rule

- You may interchange any part from one revolver to another revolver of the same SASS shooting category and from the same manufacturer if the part or parts can be exchanged without major modification to either firearm or the part. The only modifications allowed would have to be accomplished with simple hand tools (hacksaw, files, etc.) and not by machining, welding, grinding, or major recontouring or external shaping of any parts. Some examples of this rule are: the exchange of a Single Action Army grip frame with an 1860 Army frame and vice versa, the exchange of a Ruger Bisley Grip frame assembly and hammer on a

Vaquero, and the exchange of a Ruger Super Blackhawk hammer with a standard Ruger Blackhawk hammer. As in the last example noted you could not replace the hammer on a Ruger Vaquero with a Ruger Super Blackhawk hammer because you would be moving a part from a “Modern” category revolver to a “Traditional” category revolver. *A stage disqualification is issued for use of any non-legal SASS firearm at matches above the club level.

PHYSICALLY DISADVANTAGED SHOOTERS MAY MAKE MODIFICATIONS TO THEIR FIREARMS THAT WILL ALLOW THEM TO OPERATE THEIR FIREARM SAFELY THROUGH THE FULL RANGE OF MOTIONS NECESSARY TO COMPETE IN A COWBOY ACTION SHOOTING® MATCH.

NO FIREARM MAY BE USED IN MAIN, TEAM OR SIDE MATCHES THAT CONFLICT WITH ANY OF THE RULES LISTED IN THIS SUBSECTION. NO MODIFICATIONS OR ALTERATIONS OTHER THAN THOSE LISTED MAY BE INCORPORATED ON FIREARMS USED IN MAIN, TEAM OR SIDE MATCHES.

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