

Why? 17-3/16" & Balloon-Disc Targets (Updated 7-18-17)

By: *Quick Cal*

Since the introduction of the 17-3/16" Plate and the Balloon-Disc Target at the 2015 Marshal's Muster at the Fastest Gun Alive, there have been both positive and negative comments and opinions on various social media outlets. Some have actually shot on this size of a plate and some have not, plus very few of our members have ever had the opportunity to shoot on a Balloon-Disc Target. I understand completely that most folks just don't like change, especially when they feel that what we have works just fine. Frankly, I don't like change either, just for the sake of change. But, when there is a good reason to change something that will enhance and benefit our sport for many years to come, then that is the exact direction I must guide our sport towards.

I'm asking our members and club leaders to please keep an open mind regarding these two new CFDA Target options. Our CFDA Affiliated Clubs have invested a lot of time, money and hard work building their target systems and ranges. Our clubs have a lot of pride in what they have built over the years, I get that. For this reason, the actual rule of the January 1st, 2016 addendum has a sentence that says, "No host or club will be required to change the targets they currently use based upon these standards."

The 24" plate at 21', set at 50" in height, has been the standard target and championship distance since the beginning of CFDA. This target and distance combination was designed to provide the perfect degree of difficulty to achieve the proper balance of speed and accuracy. This exact degree of difficulty defines the very nature of CFDA competition. Every competitor has the choice and challenge to choose their own perimeters which will comprise their competitive strategy. How fast we shoot, in balance with the hit ratio that we can achieve is the competitive calculation we must all make. Faster shooters may calculate less of a hit ratio, since they have a better chance of a winning shot every time they actually hit the target. Whereas, slower shooters may calculate that a very high hit ratio is their best strategy. The slower shooter in any bout can indeed force the faster shooter to hit at least 60% of their shots to be assured of a win. This is the reason Cowboy Fast Draw provides the most level playing field possible, that is as fair as it can be for competitors at all levels. This concept goes along perfectly with the spirit of one of the most famous gunfighter quotes of all time by Wyatt Earp, "Fast is Fine, But Accuracy is Final!" **This is a commitment worth maintaining!**

So Why Change?

In consideration of the above statements, it is a fair question to ask, so why change? Well, there are actually several reasons, I'll do my best to cover most of them right here.....

Showmanship

While I'm certainly not the most prolific Fast Draw Showman in history, the fact is, I've performed hundreds of Fast Draw shows in front of thousands of people. I've studied live shows by many of the greatest exhibition shooters of all time either in person or by means of unedited videos. These include Adolf & Elizabeth Toepperwein, Ed McGivern, Rod Redwing, Thell Reed, Stan Sweet, John Satterwhite, Jerry Miculek, Bill Ogilby, Joe Bowman, Tom Knapp and of course Bob Munden, some of whom I've personally known, shot or competed, or shared a stage with. In live shows, you don't get many do-overs before making a fool of yourself. I've also experimented with screen-testing various contest formats and target configurations.

I believe that Cowboy Fast Draw is the most promotable gun-sport in the world. For CFDA to become truly successful, we must make improvements so that we screen-test better on film, especially television. We can also enhance our onsite spectator appeal as well. Today's spectators are tomorrow's members.

The first rule of showmanship is to perform a feat that appears much harder to do, than it actually is for a skilled performer, who has practiced this feat over and over again. Why would any performer do the opposite and attempt a feat on stage that appears much easier to do than it actually is? That is exactly what we currently do in Cowboy Fast Draw.

We have all done it, we have all been involved in bad rounds as competitors, where both shooters are missing multiple shots. Our Announcers often are heard trying to cover the shooters with statements like, "Folks this is really harder than it looks." Or, "You really have to try Cowboy Fast Draw to find out how hard it is to hit these targets at these distances at competitive times", etc..... When in fact, what registers in observer's minds is how big our targets appear, from their vantage point of 20', 30', or more behind the firing line. It's difficult from an uprange vantage point to determine just how far the shooters are actually from the targets, whether it is 21' or 15'. What we are doing, just appears to be much easier to do than it actually is, especially

when we miss. This is especially true on film. This is exactly opposite of the single most important principle of showmanship.

As stated previously, I firmly believe that our 24" CFDA Target at 21' establishes our commitment to the proper balance between speed and accuracy, which is a commitment worth keeping. I also firmly believe that since the 17- 3/16" CFDA Target at 15', set at 47" in height, provides the exact same proportion, it also produces an identical balance of speed and accuracy. The difference is, the smaller target at a closer distance greatly enhances our showmanship, and quite dramatically.

Balloon-Disc Target

While the degree of showmanship increases by at least 200% by transitioning from a 24" CFDA Target at 21' to a 17-3/16" CFDA Target at 15', it is enhanced several times greater, by ultimately transitioning to the Balloon-Disc Target at 15'. I first introduced this target in 1982 at a side event at a major Fast Draw contest in California. The shooters really liked the way it looked when they hit it. After it was accepted as an official target, some shooters nicknamed it the "Balloon-Disc from Hell." This was related to the fact that most of the shooters of that day favored shooting bigger targets at closer distances, or blanks at balloons, which are both a much easier degree of difficulty than today's CFDA shooters are accustomed to, therefore, many of the shooters of that day were intimidated by the Balloon-Disc Target.

What is a CFDA Balloon-Disc Target? It is a concave target and is 17-3/4" in diameter. There is a 5" hole in the middle of the target in which a 5" balloon is placed. Our new generation of Balloon-Disc Targets are vacuum formed from clear polycarbonate, similar to Lexan. The back of the target is painted black, except for the round start light area. The start light is centered between to balloon and the top of the target. The concave of the plate is sufficient so that, if at least 1/2 of a wax bullet hits the edge of the plate, the resulting shatter will break the balloon in the center, for this reason they are about 1/2" larger than a 17-3/16", where edge hits are counted. There is no white lithium grease placed on the front surface of a Balloon-Disc Target. The shooter must break the balloon in order to score a hit. The balloon is the target, whereas the size of the concave plate maintains the standard degree of difficulty already established in CFDA.

Note: Older versions of this target relied on a sensor mounted on a back plate behind the balloon to record a hit. Our newer versions actually have a photo-cell sensor which records the hit on the timer the moment the balloon breaks. As of this date, they have now been tested and are operating as designed. We even placed a target plate 12" behind the balloon-disc, to record both the time the balloon breaks and the one recorded by a sensor on the plate, when a wax bullet was fired right through the balloon. There result was only .001 of a second longer on the plate, which confirms the amount of time it takes for a wax bullet to move 12".

The Balloon-Disc Target is without a doubt the most impressive target, from the standpoint of spectators or screen-testing, ever created in the 60+-year history of Fast Draw. From the shooter's perspective, it is perhaps even more amazing and self-satisfying to watch the 5" balloon break from the shots you have fired.

Why a Combination of 17-3/16" CFDA Targets and CFDA Balloon-Disc Targets?

While the Balloon-Disc provides the greatest effect for the purposes of showmanship, all preliminary rounds, side matches, etc. should be shot on the 17-3/16" CFDA Target, using white lithium grease for scoring purposes, the same way we always have done. It takes time and effort to inflate, tie and stuff balloons in Balloon-Disc Targets. Not a big deal in a Championship Shootoff, but there is no way we would want to stuff potentially 25,000 balloons during FGA in preliminary rounds! Therefore, the Balloon-Disc should be reserved for Final Round Shootoffs, especially in spectator venues or when being filmed.

Why not use 24" CFDA Targets in preliminary rounds and Balloon-Disc in Finals? Even though these targets are proportionally the same, it may prove to be a rather large transition to make in one's mental game during the same event.

Even using the 17-3/16" CFDA Target with white lithium grease at 15', and then transitioning to the Balloon-Disc may require some mental adjustments, so it is highly recommended that hosts have the Finals Range set up in advance and give the Finalists a chance to practice on the Balloon-Discs before the actual Final Shootoffs begins. We are doing that at the 2017 FGA.

Some Additional Benefits....

Reduction in Club Range Space Requirements

At the first contest we held at our Great Basin Gun Hawks monthly matches using the new targets, it felt like we put a 6' addition onto our building. We had a lot more room behind the shooting line for Hand Judges and such. We were able to move our barrier closer and make more room for shooter's tables and guests.

Also another major advantage is that when mobile ranges are set up at various locations for contests, less sidewall materials are needed.

Enhanced Safety

While CFDA will maintain our requirements for 10' high backstop walls and 8' high sidewalls, moving the firing line 6' closer, actually increases the angle needed to fire a wax bullet over a 10' backstop by a safety factor of an additional 25%.

Home Shooting Ranges

Since we speak with so many of our members on a regular basis, we have learned that a low percentage of them actually have a garage that will accommodate a 21' home practice range. Almost everyone's standard garage will fit a 15' home practice range.

Phasing and Notifications

Those who are considering changing to the new target sizes and distances should not surprise anyone who has decided to travel and support your contest. As a shooter myself, I like to know what to expect when preparing to shoot a contest. So, also stated as part of the rule addendum it says, "When using these optional targets at any distance the Host must advertise this at least 30 days in advance at any Class A through C Events."

The 2017 Fastest Gun Alive

The 2017 Fastest Gun Alive is using the new target format throughout that event. So, it will be the 17-3/16" CFDA Target at 15', 47" height, for all events, with the Balloon-Disc Targets at 15', 47" height, for the Magnificent 7 Finals only.

CFDA Affiliated Club Transitions

Affiliated Clubs have a choice to transition whenever they choose or not at all. Since the new targets are designed to enhance spectator and filming appeal, it may not be important for non-spectator venues to change to the smaller and closer targets. Although, we think that these targets will become more and more popular with the shooters, and may prove to be a great asset for clubs wanting to create more space at their club facilities. We also believe that more home practice ranges will convert to the smaller targets due to space limitations as well.

Target Availability

The CFDA General Store now has both the 24" (\$69.99) and 17-3/16" (\$59.99) CFDA Target Plates in stock, they both are finished with black paint and include an installed 3/8" Lexan Lens. They are available "ala carte", as all of our target components are now available. Both sized plates are completely interchangeable on the CFDA Target System. It only takes undoing the two bolts that hold the Target Plate to the Light Shield, changing the plate, and then re-tightening the two bolts. The sensor will need to be switched to the new plate also. We also have a shorter (upper) Square Pole available separately upon request, so that no pole is visible above the smaller target.

Hopefully this article answers most of the questions about the new target sizes. I'm confident that once our members and clubs start using them, they will soon prefer them. I felt that it was important to explain to our members the reasons for making this transition. Now that you know the reasons, I ask that you please give them fair consideration.