

I Don't Want to be Strung Along about Ammo

BY HAP ROCKETTO

Some times shooting advice comes from odd places and at odd times. One of the better internet shooting sites is moderated by my old, and I like to think, good friend German Salazar. Shootersjournal.com is advertised as "A scholarly discussion of the art and science of competitive shooting." And so it is because the contributors are serious and German does not suffer fools or yahoos lightly. Now that I am through dropping names and sucking up I'll move on with my story.

One of the most recent threads has concerned 22 caliber match ammunition because there are two things that are not long for this world, dogs that chase cars and prone and bench rest shooters who can't get hold of a good lot of ammunition. Those that use 22 rimfire are at the mercy of the manufacturers because it is not practical to hand load for the mouse gun. As a result there are more methods and theories on how to test ammunition than there are shooters.

Following the thread stirred a memory from my far distant past. My mother's father, Grandpa Jack, was a Russian immigrant who had two passions outside of his family—good music and the Brooklyn Dodgers. It was his goal in life to see that he passed that fire onto his grandchildren, particularly his unwilling adolescent grandson. As a result one evening I found myself stuffed into a somber dark itchy wool suit sitting next to Grandpa Jack in Carnegie Hall. I could hardly feel the tie, drawn hangman's noose tight about my neck, through the vise like starched collar.

The great violinist Itzhak Perlman soon entered. Stricken with polio as a child he wore braces on both legs and walked with the aid of two crutches. He moved painfully, yet majestically across the stage, until he reached his chair, sat, slowly put his crutches on the floor, and undid the clamps on his braces to arrange his legs in a comfortable position. He picked up his violin, placed the bow across the strings, nodded to the conductor and concertmaster, and commenced to play.

As he finished the first few bars, one of the strings on his violin snapped. It sounded like a .308 passing overhead in the pits at Perry. Grandpa Jack stifled a gasp. Perlman was faced with repeating his tortuous trek across the stage to find a new violin or replacement string or postponing the concert. Instead, he waited a moment, closed his eyes and then signaled the conductor to continue.

The orchestra resumed and Perlman played from where he had left off. Grandpa Jack whispered to me in astonishment that it is impossible to play a symphonic work with just three strings. Appar-

ently everyone in the hall knew it, except two people, Perlman and me: Perlman because he is the master of his craft and me because I am the musical equivalent of the village idiot. When Perelman finished, there was a tremendous silence in the room. It was suddenly broken by thunderous applause as the audience rose as one. Well, all but one, until Grandpa Jack broke from his mad clapping and jerked me, his lout of a grandson, unceremoniously to my feet to pay my respects to the great violinist.

After the concert an awed Grandpa Jack took me to his favorite deli for the obligatory post concert seminar in classical music. He ordered for each of us a "bagel with a 'schmear' and lox", hot chocolate with whipped cream for me, and he had a "glass" of tea with lemon. He drank his tea in the old country manner, holding a lump of sugar between his front teeth as he slurped the golden fluid through it.

As an aside The Old Man's father, another Russian immigrant more formally known as Grandpa Rocketto, had a little drinking trick that fascinated me as much as Grandpa Jack's tea drinking. Grandpa Rocketto would come home from work, sit down at the kitchen table with what looked like an eight ounce glass of water, and proceed to grind a little pepper onto the top of the liquid before he downed it in four or five draughts. It wasn't until I was older that The Old Man told me his pop was downing potato vodka. He sprinkled the pepper onto the drink because he believed it drew off the impurities. As he drank all of it anyway, including the pepper, I like to think that he was not concerned about purity; he just liked the taste. Both my grandfathers drank but in their own ways.

To get back to the subject at hand Grandpa Jack told me that if watched closely you could almost see Perlman modulating, changing, and re-composing the piece in his head. At one point, said Grandpa Jack, it sounded like he de-tuned the strings to produce music that they had never made before. Most importantly he reminded me how, when finished playing, Perlman smiled, wiped the sweat from his brow, raised his bow for quiet, and modestly addressed the audience in a reflective tone, "You know, sometimes it is the artist's task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left."

And that brings me back to the subject of 22 caliber rimfire match ammunition. We can moan all we want to about how great it was in the old days to get a wooden case of ammo containing 10,000 rounds mated to your rifle at the factory, not the paltry cardboard 5,000 round cases of today. We can groan that the "pasteboard" Eley of the 70s and 80s was so much better than the plastic boxed stuff of today. We can lament on the fact that Federal has dropped out of the match ammo market. Complain as we will, the situation is not going to change in the foreseeable future. Under these circumstances we have to follow Perelman's example because you know, sometimes it is the rifleman's task to find out how many Xs you can still shoot with the ammunition you have left. ☉

