



**TRAINING COURSE REVIEW**

**RAISING MODERN  
"SHEEP DO  
RANGEMASTER**



Some people say that the world is made up of three kinds of people.

First, there are the "sheep". The sheep are the devout pacifists, the blissfully ignorant, and even those that are aware of the dangers of the real world, but are unwilling to take up arms to defend themselves or others in the flock.

Second, there are the "wolves". Wolves are predators, and their preferred food is sheep. Wolves are today's criminals, and

**By Steve Moses**

some of the very worst wolves are the terrorists who will do their best to kill a few unsuspecting and helpless sheep just to ridify all the others.

And last, there are the "sheepdogs". Actually, sheepdogs possess most of the same physical attributes as wolves. They are cunning, and possess formidable weapons. The only significant difference between wolves and sheepdogs is that sheepdogs only fight to protect themselves or the sheep.

Naturally, any one reading this article identifies with the sheepdog. My question to you, Mr. or Ms. Sheepdog, is this: Are you all bark, or do you have a real bite? Just because you have the teeth (as in owning a firearm) doesn't mean that you are prepared to win a fight when a pack of wolves threatens to tear at your haunches, or slaughter

I believe that the human version of the sheepdog is made, not born. And Tom Givens most certainly has a knack for making sheepdogs out of those folks who are willing to invest a small amount of time and money into buying life insurance that can pay off before they die. Tom is a noted author and an experienced firearms trainer who owns and operates Rangemaster, Inc., a range and weapons academy located in Memphis, Tennessee. A former International Defensive Pistol Association state champion and peace officer whose has seen the not-so-pretty side of life on numerous occasions, Tom not only knows what works in the streets, but how to convey that knowledge to others. Tom is a bit of a paradox, in that he is a hard man with a sense of humor. He knows that fighting is a grim and ugly business, and that the ability to run a gun makes up only one-third of his combat equation. The other two-thirds consist of tactics and mindset in equal proportions.

Tom teaches an outstanding 20-hour "Combative Pistol" course that will go a long ways towards making baby sheepdogs predator-proof. I attended the course he taught in Mingus, Texas at the Tac-Pro Shooting Academy on March 6-7, 2004, along with eight other students possessing various skill levels. Tom's instruction is sought by novices and professionals alike, as evidenced by the professions of his students in this class, which ranged from first-time students to deputy constables, civilian firearms instructors, and executive protection specialists.

Tom markets this course as one that covers all of the essential skills involved in fighting with a handgun. It is a very solid course that teaches the skills one needs to know, as opposed to high-speed "advanced" handgun courses that focus on additional skills

## R-STYLE

those you are charged to protect. A real sheepdog is born with the instinctual ability to bite and slash, but few people are born with the ability to simultaneously spot threats in advance, keep a cool head, think tactically, and shoot effectively. Heck, that is not even easy to say, much less do.

The same goes for the majority of police officers, whether patrol or SWAT (full-time SWAT officers excepted). Many of them just don't own the requisite reactive firearm skills and mindset that might mean the difference between life and death. Granted, there are exceptions to this, but in most instances these exceptions represent men and women who have made the decision to better themselves on their own time and dime.

## SPEED KILLS... PRECISION COUNTS...



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that are nice to know, such as 50-yard barricade shooting and achieving .20 second splits. Jerry Mucielek is one of the world's best handgun shooters, and he has personally advised me that what holds most people back is an imperfect understanding of the basics. Louis Awerbuck, a noted weapon and tactics genius, has remarked on more than one occasion in his understated, wry style that he would like for someone to explain to him the difference between a basic handgun and an advanced handgun. Okay, I get the point. Attention to the basics wins fights, and this is where Tom shines.

Topics covered in the course included the following:

Rapid presentation from concealed carry position. Effective gun-handling techniques. Rapid reloading techniques. Movement drills, including target engagement while moving. Disability drills, including drawing and reloading with one hand. Precision shooting at mid-ranges. Weapon retention and disarming techniques. Effective scanning techniques used to locate additional threats. Low-light firing techniques (both with and without a flashlight). Development of a proper defensive mindset.

The objective of this article is to advise the reader that the critical fighting skills that most people lack can be largely remedied through classes of this nature, and that Tom Givens represents an affordable training solution that will travel to their neck of the woods to teach. This article is not meant to convey step-by-step, and in great detail, how Tom trained his sheepdogs to more effectively defend themselves and their flocks. However, there were indeed some course highlights that I would like to share with the reader that might give him or her some idea of what they might expect in a similar course.

"The pistol is a back-up to your primary weapon, which is your brain." Truer words have never been spoken. Tom consistently emphasized throughout the class that students who looked for the answers to the question of "who is that, and what are they doing" each and every time they encountered a person or persons they did not know were extremely unlikely to get accosted, much less surprised. Awareness of one's environment is paramount. The number one weapon used by wolves is surprise, and the second best way to survive an attack by wolves is to not be surprised (the best way is to not even be there!). If one is forced to be present at the time of an attack as a result of duty, obligation, or just simple bad luck, which we may created ourselves because we allowed ourselves to get surprised, then the student needs to have made the decision in advance that he or she will do whatever it takes to make sure he and his flock go home that night. This expressly includes the use of deadly force if required. Awareness and resolve go hand in hand, and a failure to perform both actions will not achieve the desired results. Tom started the course off with a mindset lecture, and interspersed a number of short mindset lectures throughout the course on both days. We would shoot for a while, stop for a lecture, and then shoot again. I found this method to be very effective at conveying critical information, much more so than an initial lecture followed by non-stop range work. In my opinion, Tom does a good job of developing a fighting mindset in his students as John Farnam, which I think constitutes the highest praise.

Tom would also teach a block of shooting skills, administer a shooting test, teach another block of shooting skills, and then administer another test. I really enjoyed this, and found that the end result was that my shooting skills improved noticeably.

The real test was watching the performance of the novice student. He struggled a great deal at the first, but by the end of the course was quite capable of quickly deploying his pistol (think three fight-stopping hits from the holster in 2.5 seconds while moving!).

Students were taught how shoot in low light (including exposure to various flashlight techniques), how to retain their own handgun when seized, and how to take a handgun from another. A lot of attention was placed on being able to win the fight in the event either one of the shooter's hands became disabled. One of the techniques taught by Tom involves accessing the holstered handgun with the weak hand (he prefers the term "non-dominant") by reaching around one's back. Several of the students were heavy-

set and short-armed, and this combination resulted in them going through a series of motions that rather caused them to resemble a dog frantically trying to pass a peach pit. Fortunately, Tom chose to be merciful, and taught a technique that allowed them to access it from the front, also.

Was this course perfect in every way? At the beginning of class, Tom urged us to look at everything he taught with an open mind, then keep what works for us and throw out the rest.

I am not a mindless, sycophantic fan that thinks Tom's way is the only way, BUT it is very obvious that EVERYTHING Tom teaches his students represents a well-thought out and valid technique or tactic.

In summary, the essential skills taught by Tom Givens in the Combative Handgun course are absolutely critical to surviving lethal force scenarios unless one wants to rely solely on dumb luck. He is one of the best combative pistol instructors out there, and while he may not be as well known as some of the other old-school instructors like John Farnam, Louis Awerbuck, and Clint Smith, his ability to turn out sheepdogs in a single weekend is unsurpassed. I hope that I did not convey the impression that the ability to fight effectively is only important to peace officers, even though smart cops seek him out for training. Most of the students in the class I attended were not peace officers, but no less interested in defending themselves and their flocks. It has been brought to my attention that police officers can't be everywhere, and more so, who wants them to be? I feel quite certain that if a wolf intent on committing rape and/or murder should invade the castle of one of my fellow students in the future, the call that will be made to the police when the smoke clears will not be a pitiful cry for help, but a request that somebody come over and remove the carcass before it further fouls the place.

About the author: Steve Moses is a Texas peace officer, executive protection specialist, collective shooter, and weapons and tactics instructor.

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