

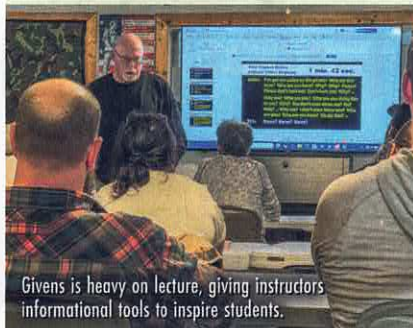
LESSONS FROM TOM GIVENS

A MODERN LEGEND IN DEFENSIVE FIREARMS TRAINING PASSES ALONG VITAL TIPS

In the world of modern firearms self-defense training, Tom Givens is a name to conjure with. A firearms instructor for more than half a century, Tom trained thousands of armed citizens at his Range-Master facility in crime-ridden Memphis before he went on the road as a traveling instructor. Seventy-four of his graduates (that he knows of) have been in shootings. Seventy-one of them won. None lost. There were three “forfeits”: people who died because, on that day, they had chosen not to be armed. Givens says, “You don’t get a vote unless you bring your own ballot.”

I had known Tom for many years and taken many useful lectures from him, but hadn’t trained live fire with him. I took his three-day Instructor Development Course at the Tall Pines range in Lakeland, Fla. I had expected a lot and was not disappointed.

Givens doesn’t just teach shooters. He excels in showing instructors how to teach, coach and diagnose. He doesn’t neglect the instructor’s duty to inspire the student to be always armed and ready, and shares why generally published crime figures far understate the reality of the problem.



Givens is heavy on lecture, giving instructors informational tools to inspire students.

TIPS FROM TOM

When loading or unloading in a hotel room, use the air conditioner as the backstop. It’s the one thing in the room most likely to safely stop a bullet,” Tom points out.

For beginning students, Tom advises, “Tell them to watch the trigger,” since they may not be familiar with our terminology. The pistol is unloaded and triple-checked, and turned over 90°, pointed at the backstop. The student looks down at the gun and particularly the trigger as they go through Tom’s mantra of “contact, (take up the) slack, press, reset.” The eyes are helping to tell the hand and the trigger finger what they should be feeling. Developed by Tom’s lovely wife, Lynn, this is called a Sensory Trigger Drill.

The instructor’s emergency medical plans should not be limited to gunshot wounds. A heart attack or heat stroke may be more likely. Include an automatic electronic defibrillator in your emergency gear.

Tom’s rule is that you must hit with every shot. He quotes the legendary Alaska super-trooper Jeff Hall: “On the street, there are no misses, only unintended hits.”

Tom wants the pad of your trigger finger on the trigger face; he wants you to feel the sear’s reset; and like a growing

number of today’s best instructors, he wants you to use a very hard grasp. How hard? “All you’ve got.” He wants the firing hand applying pressure front to back and the support hand, side by side.

He says, “Don’t ride the gun, drive the gun. Think of the front sight or the dot as a green light, and the trigger as a gas pedal.”

Givens says, “When a student is jerking their trigger, don’t tell them to slow down. They’ll just wait longer between trigger jerks. Tell them instead to be more careful.”

For transitioning between easy targets and tough ones, he says instructors don’t need to array the targets at different distances. He has found it much more time-efficient to use what he calls a parrot target. One silhouette has a big circle in the chest, a small one in the head, and two very small ones just above the silhouette like parrots on a pirate’s shoulders.

Givens emphasizes rewarding excellence and encouraging competition. He advises that the student should earn his or her certificate, not buy it. He demands a 90% score on the final, challenging (4- to 25-yard) qualification, and 90% on the extensive written exam as well. He told us about 15% of the Instructor Development students don’t make it, and that was true in our class of 15. (Student: “But I almost shot a qualifying score!” Givens: “Yes, and you almost earned a certificate.”)



WHEN YOU TAKE THE CLASS

Go to Tom’s website, Rangemaster.com. It will tell you everything you need. Believe it. I took his advice and brought a spare stock GLOCK 19 Gen5 to back up the Langdon Tactical version I shot, as well as 850 rounds of MagTech 9mm FMJ. No problems whatsoever. Some others weren’t so lucky. Our three days ran nine hours minimum. And, be advised: Givens’ breaks run exactly 10 minutes. He has even more advanced classes, for which this one is a non-negotiable prerequisite.

Take good notes. Have a notebook with you on the firing line: It is there that some of the most valuable nuggets are revealed. Be at the top of your shooting game when you arrive and be absolutely scrupulous about your safety habits. He’ll give you a huge workbook and assignments. Do them!

No matter how many instructor certifications you have, you will cherish this one ... but you’ll have to work for it. Strongly recommended!

