



**BLUF:** RECOMMEND, FOR BOTH NEWER AND EXPERIENCED INSTRUCTORS  
(warning, this is a longer than normal review)

### **Format**

24 hours over 3 days | 1,000 rounds | \$749 | Homestead Training Center

### **Instructor to Student Ratio**

3:18 | Tom Givens and two Assistant Instructors

### **Personal Kit**

Colt Combat Commander 9mm | Vickers Combat Wilson Duty Magazines | Speer Lawman 147 grain TMJ | JM Customs AIWB holster | Dara AIWB mag pouch | Blue Alpha EDC belt | Oakley eye protection | Etymotic electronic ear buds |  
**STOPPAGES: 1 stovepipe during training, and 1 shooter induced double feed during testing**

# Rangemaster | Instructor Development Course | January 21, 2021

## Background and Prework

In AAR's, I normally don't discuss how I decided to enroll in a particular course, but when it comes to instructor development courses, I think there's added value in describing the process.

After researching instructor development schools, I created a short list of 3:

CSAT (Paul Howe) offers a 6 day combination pistol/rifle instructor development course costing \$1,200 and requiring 1,000 rounds pistol and 1,000 rounds rifle. The course is structured so the first 4 days are training, and the last 2 days are live coaching of actual CSAT pistol/rifle course students. To pass, you have to successfully complete 8 of the 10 live fire strings for pistol, do the same for rifle, and score a minimum 70% on the written exam. By all accounts, this is a demanding and rigorous curriculum aimed at serious LE and Civilian instructors.

Sig Academy offers a 5 day pistol instructor development course costing \$1,250 and requires 1,500 rounds with a caveat: if you take the class at their NH facility, you have to buy expensive frangible and toxic free ammunition. Again, this is another demanding and rigorous class with very high standards to pass.

Rangemaster (Tom Givens) offers a 3 day pistol instructor development course costing \$749 and requires 1,000 rounds. Upon graduation, you are eligible for their 2 day advanced instructor development course for \$495, and upon graduation from that you can take their 3 day master instructor development course for \$765. To graduate you need a minimum 90% on the FBI Qual, 90% on the more difficult Rangemaster Qual, and 90% on the written exam.

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While I plan to eventually train at all of these schools, I decided to start with Rangemaster for several reasons:

1. CSAT and Sig Academy's curriculum focuses on mechanics, adult learning/coaching, and course design. While Rangemaster does all of this too, it expands into legal, risk avoidance, ballistics, and baseline firearms knowledge all geared solely to the civilian concealed carry context. We did have at least one LE firearms instructor in attendance, but none of the context was geared for LE, military, or gaming.
2. The modular course format (3 day | 2 day | 3 day) provides a road map with much more flexibility and affordability for the typical civilian such as myself who is not ready to commit a full 7 or 8 days with travel. Having a 3 day starting point that was local to me fit both my budget and time constraints. This was very clever on Tom Givens' part.
3. Rangemaster maintains a strong alumni network which is always important for business.
4. Tom Givens is affiliated with the ACLDN (Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network) which is a bonus if you are an ACLDN member and are ever involved in a shooting event.

Once I made the decision to enroll with Rangemaster, my next move was to begin prework. While I really didn't change my skills sustainment practice routine, I did pick up his new book on Concealed Carry. My intent in reading this was merely to get a better feel for Tom Givens and who he is, but my decision to read this book ahead of class paid off in spades. Much of the classroom content was in this book so when I arrived I was not bombarded with all new information, and did not have to study as much . . . and I scored 100% on the written exam.

One interesting note is that even with reading the book, I still took a full 20 pages typed notes over 3 days on my laptop, so this was a very thorough course.

## Training Day 1

We spent from 08:00 to 14:00 in the classroom. We began with paperwork, taking receipt of a 237 page course manual, introductions, and course standards.

Tom then began the lectures with explaining the current state of the industry and the impact from the number of first time gun owners, and the toxic mix of their overall firearms ignorance combined with industrywide bad advice. He continued with what qualities makes a subject matter expert.

Ongoing topics included:

- Safety, including the “two absolutes”
- The armed lifestyle
- Range etiquette
- The ABC’s of coaching
- The different types of pistols, their history, their strengths and weaknesses, and the qualities we must have in a sidearm
- Basics of marksmanship in great detail
  - It was during this point that Tom educated me that the feedway stoppages I often see in students during our FOF training with our UTM Glock 17 are NOT being caused by limp wristing as I had thought, but rather because the student’s firing hand was not choked up all the way under the tang or beavertail, allowing the gun to pivot under recoil.
- Measuring fighting distances using common objects such as vehicles
- Ready positions (Tom is a fan of the Guard position because it meets his 6 ready position requirements resulting in reduced mistake of fact shootings, as two different recent research studies confirmed).
  - One clarification on this Guard position: some schools define Guard as always 45° to the ground. At Rangemaster they teach the Guard’s angle depends on your distance as the goal is to see the subject’s waistline/hands. Thus, the further away you are the higher the position.

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By 14:00 we hit the range where we split up into 2 relays and spent the rest of the day on fundamentals to set us up for success the next two range days. During this time we covered:

- Dry practice of the presentation, trigger control, the Guard position, and sighting
- Live fire practice that progressively increased from 1 shot strings to 4 shot strings with transitions, different cadences, target size and distance problems, etc.

This was an intense class with one 10 minute break every 2 hours, and only 30 minutes for lunch. There was no time for “smoking and joking.” We concluded at 17:00.

### **Training Day 2**

Training day 2 started off again at 08:00 in the classroom, where we spent time and detail on how the 911 system works (or doesn't), crime rates, police responses, victim vs. criminal mentality, and civilian Mind Set.

Tom then shifted gears to the history of the prone position in pistol shooting and it's not so relevant relationship to civilian use. He is an advocate of kneeling in certain circumstances and reviewed the different techniques and their merits.

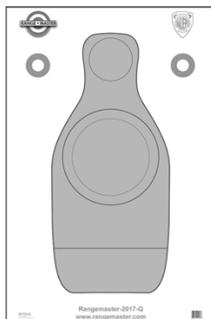
By 10:00 we were back on the range to pick up where we left off. Tom emphasized the MOST important things are getting the gun out and making first hits.

One instructional observation that Tom made was that he doesn't like wasting range time with students walking back and forth at various distances. Instead, he likes to keep them at a static shorter distance and simply use smaller target sizes to replicate longer distance marksmanship. Basically if you can hit a 1" square at say 7 yards, then you can make 10 ring hits at 25 yards. We also covered body shooting mechanics and clearing stoppages.

We next spent time on one hand shooting techniques and why we needed proficiency with them. I personally found this block valuable and immediately improved my one handed shooting both firing and support hand. It also motivated me to spend more of my private practice time in this space.

A few observations from this range day:

- Tom's Rangemaster Q target is REALLY well thought out. He took a bureaucratic FBI Q target and really optimized it in a clever way. He explained the logic behind the zone sizes and shapes, the smaller corner targets, and the Rangemaster scoring system. I was really blown away because the only other two paper targets I like as much are the CSAT target and the RE Factor Essentials target.



- Tom does not advocate chamber checks. He told me if I want to do a chamber check then he prefers removing the magazine and visually checking if it's a round down. For me, the press check is so ingrained I couldn't help myself, but for someone not like me I see the merits to this magazine method.
- Tom prefers overhand releasing the slide during a slide lock reload over using the "slide latch" (his term) because while he concedes it can be a little slower, he believes this method is more reliable. I tried his method on every string in TD2, but again I'm so ingrained on using the slide latch that I reverted back to it on TD3.

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- Tom had us doing “speed reloads” throughout the entire 3 range days. This is where you grasp your fresh magazine in the support hand, drop your partially depleted magazine to the ground, and insert the new magazine. He did explain the rationale behind this versus the often taught “tactical reload” or “magazine exchange” or “reload with retention” (whatever you want to call it!). Again, I tried this method on every string in TD1 and TD2, but by TD3 I was back to magazine exchanges.

None of these observations are to say I disagree with Tom Givens, it’s rather to point out that it was refreshing to see methods I was very used to doing, being challenged intelligently and that I got trigger time to really practice them and give them a whirl. I appreciate and respect that.

We concluded at 17:00.

### Training Day 3

Although we met in the classroom at 08:00, we were rather quickly ushered to the range for our live fire qualifications.

We would be given two chances at the FBI Qualification and two chances at the more difficult Rangemaster Qualification. 90% is the minimum passing score, and he would officially record the higher score of each set. Each relay would operate alone this time so the other relay could quietly study for the written exam.

I lost a lot of sleep the previous night stressing over these quals. I was confident about the written test, but had to wonder if the previous two days were going to pay off. As an instructor, I don’t get anywhere near as much trigger time as I used to when I was just a student, and if I failed either one of these then it would suck.

Fortunately, I passed all 4 attempts.

By 10:30 we were back in the classroom where the lectures continued. We covered firearms storage when not wearing it, the principles of adult learning, and training aides.

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We then delved into topics that would take us to 16:00. Hands down these topics were my favorite part of the 3 days.

First, Tom went over CONTEXT, a topic all too often ignored in the firearms training industry. I'm not going to editorialize further, but suffice to say Tom and I are on the EXACT same page and it was amazingly refreshing to hear him to tell it like it is.

After that he covered lots of statistics, which ones were useful or not, and why, along with what we can learn from them. We reviewed typical Civilian scenarios, the OODA loop, and the criminal subculture at large.

From there he launched into judicious use of deadly force, and by 16:00 we were given 40 minutes to take our written test, which I passed as well.

By 17:00 we were graduating and saying our good byes. Tom mentioned this was an above average class in that 17 of the 18 passed.

### **Reflections**

On my drive home all I could think was what a positive, enriching, and empowering 3 days I just experienced thanks to Tom and Lynn Givens. Just like you can taste the difference in a meal made with love, what the Givens' do is a labor of love and a service.

Having taken numerous courses from the current generation of instructors, it was almost nostalgic training with Tom as I cut my teeth in this craft in the 1990's at places such as Gunsite, Thunder Ranch, Chapman Academy, LFI, Mid-South, and Blackwater to name a few. I haven't heard the ready position referred to as the Guard in years. I loved how during the one handed shooting Tom made it a point for students to let their other arm dangle lifelessly as though it had been shot and disabled. Most of all, Tom EXPLAINED in detail the WHY behind everything he taught, and we are all better for it. Great experience.