

Loading Table Etiquette

The following documentation is a consolidation of comments around loading and unloading table etiquette on the Carolina Wire on the Carolina Cowboys web site. Red Cent was the facilitator of this discussion. This obviously reflects the preferences and experiences of the cowboys/cowgirls of the local clubs in the Carolinas that contributed to this discussion.

Just as a level set for the following loading table etiquette guidelines, the following description of the loading/unloading table officer duties as described in the SASS RO I manual is included. Loading table etiquette guidelines are not intended to interfere with any of the Loading/Unloading Table Officers responsibilities which are primarily focused on safety but rather to enhance the official duties and make the loading/unloading table process more consistent and shooter friendly. Remember that the loading/unloading table procedures are a very key component of the safety considerations of a SASS match. From a loading table perspective, you want to get the shooter safely to the shooting line in a good state of mind and ready to go.

Loading/Unloading Table Officers Responsibilities

- A) Loading Table Officers are responsible to visually check to ensure all firearms are loaded with only the correct number of rounds required in a course of fire. They count, along with the shooter, rounds being loaded into rifles and revolvers.
- B) They check to make sure no round is ever under the firing pin of any revolver.
- C) The Loading Table is also a good place for the Loading Officer to observe the shooter's equipment, especially his firearms, inspecting for illegal modifications. A comment from the Loading Officer may save the shooter an embarrassing disqualification at the shooting line. Any illegal external modifications encountered at the loading table should be brought to the shooter's attention and corrected prior to shooting, if at all possible.
- D) It is good practice for the Loading Officer to ask the shooter if he understands the stage. Explanations at the Loading Table avoid these questions being addressed at the line by the Timer Operator and prevent unnecessary delays.
- E) These officers ensure safe muzzle direction is strictly observed and enforced when a competitor is at a Loading or Unloading Table, as well as during movement to and from the Loading or Unloading Table.
- F) At the Unloading Table, competitors shall unload each of their firearms, and the Unloading Officer must visually inspect all chambers to make sure they are empty. Rifles and shotguns are cycled to verify their magazines are empty. All revolvers taken to the firing line must be checked, whether or not they were used, and only two main match revolvers may be taken to the line.
- G) Never allow a competitor to leave the loading table with a loaded firearm unless they are going to the firing line.

Remember: The primary responsibility always rests with the competitor. Shooters should always know the condition of their firearms and should never depend upon the Loading and Unloading Officers to ensure their firearms are correctly loaded and unloaded. The Loading and Unloading Officers are simply an added measure of safety. A competitor *may never* blame the Loading Officer for an incorrectly loaded firearm, and at no time will this claim be considered grounds for dismissal of penalties.

Loading Table Etiquette Guidelines

The following guidelines are intended to help shooters develop a more consistent loading process - it is intended to have material effect on an individual's thought process. The following information also contains elements of safety around loading and loading guns which is often lacking in shooters that may be less experienced and/or simply have not been exposed to some of this thought process.

- The first thing to address is to know where you are in the posse shooting order. It appears that all of the NC clubs use a posse assignment sheet process that typically generates the shooting order. If you happen to run into a situation where they are using a "shoot when you are ready" process, you will have to decide where you want to jump into the shooting sequence. But if the shooting sequence is defined, find out who shoots in front of you – notice when they go to the loading table.
- So when should you go to the loading table? Do not go to the loading table until you see sufficient room to load and the person that you follow in the shooting order is already at the loading table. Going to the loading table out of order does nothing but cause confusion and irritate your fellow shooters. Keeping 3 or 4 shooters loading allows plenty of time for a shooter to go through their loading ritual and get mentally prepared. DO NOT go to the loading table if there are four or five already at the loading table. If you have too many people at the loading table, you may start having problems with manning all of the posse duties – especially if you have smaller posse sizes.
- Watch the muzzle of your guns when going to the loading table and putting them on the loading table. When you remove your pistols from your holsters for loading, keep the muzzles pointed across the loading table – same direction as the long guns. For the cross draw folks, do the dance. The same obviously applies when holstering loaded pistols at the loading table – watch you muzzle direction and keep your finger outside the trigger guard.
- Know your round count before coming to the loading table. Bring the EXACT amount of pistol and rifle rounds to the loading table preferably in some type of container or via a loading strip or block so it that makes it obvious that the correct number of rounds is available to you. This also makes it easier for the Loading Table Officer (LTO) to verify the round count. Please do not plan on leaving

your loading container/strip/block at the loading table. If you are not carrying them with you when you shoot, please return them to your gun cart after you have loaded. **Just remember to leave any loaded guns at the loading table if you return to your gun cart for any reason – failure to do so is a stage DQ.** For this reason, many do not holster their pistols at the loading table until they are on deck (the next shooter).

- The proper method of displaying your ability to load your weapons correctly is waiting until the LTO is ready to observe you loading your weapons. Both the LTO and the loader may have different methods of loading their weapons; therefore, each should be tolerant of the other. The LTO should never hesitate to request to check a weapon nor should the shooter decline to make the weapon available for examination if they are not able to resolve the LTO's concern. The shooter should never fail to present the pistol for inspection by the LTO. Hold your pistol horizontal and 90 degrees to the LTO when verifying that the position under the hammer is empty. Some place the free hand on the opposite side of the pistol from the LTO giving them a light background to see the empty cylinder. There will never be a shooter whose experience level or reputation will allow him or her to bypass the weapons inspection at the loading table. For new shooters or even experienced shooters with new guns, make sure you are comfortable with the loading process for the guns you bring to a match. A bit of practice with some dummy loads to get comfortable with the process does not hurt.
- If you have completed your loading ritual, you should, as soon as possible, move your weapons down the table to make room for the next shooter to load. In addition, if you have completed the loading ritual and moved your weapons down the table, step back from the table. Your body will take up more room than your guns and do not place your hand on the table and lean on it. Next time you catch yourself doing it, turn around and look at the space on the table you are occupying.
- When “on deck” (the next shooter), many shooters prefer to be left alone (they still like you). Spectators or shooters not in line should examine the persona of the shooter on the loading table line. If you know the persona, then you make the decision if you should interrupt the focus or train of thought of an “on deck” shooter. Typically most “on deck” shooters use this particular time to ingrain how they intend to shoot the stage in their memory. In general, it would be recommended to leave the “on deck” shooter alone unless they initiate a conversation. Serious? Well maybe but this is a personal preference area which will vary by shooter and each should at least have the opportunity for that moment to gather their thoughts at a level consistent with their competitive nature. There are some who do not take the game that seriously and enjoy an on going dialog with those around them and that is OK. Again, it will vary with the shooter.
- As the “on deck” shooter at the loading table, do not leave the loading table until the Range Officer (the person with the timer) indicates they are ready. You want

to be able to stage your guns when you arrive at the firing line and not stand around with your long guns at the firing line waiting for the firing line to be prepared.

Remember folks; respect the other shooters at the loading table and allow them the opportunity to go through their loading ritual. Allow the LTO to do their job correctly. Be safe.

A couple of notes for LTOs:

First, do not handle guns of the shooters at the loading table without asking the owners permission. You have the authority to do so but many shooters do like someone else handling their guns. If you have a particular gun condition you think needs some attention, see if the shooter can verify the situation themselves first.

Second, if you need to get prepared to load, make sure you round up a new LTO to replace you. If you cannot find a volunteer, let the Posse Marshall or Range Officer (the person running the timer) know that they need to find a replacement.