

Fitness for Cowboy Action Shooters™

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with Kenneth King
Pozo River Vigilance Committee at Lazy Arrow
SASS#96080

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Equipment aside, it is agility, focus, and reaction time that make the difference between a good stage and a poor one.

The ability to reach out and grab a rifle or jerk a pistol, and level the sights with agility depends as much on repetition as it does on fitness. Experience tells our hands exactly where the pistol grip is, and



muscle memory tells our fingers how to flick the rifle's lever to its precise distance. But no matter how rich the experience and muscle memory are, the gears slow down if the body can't follow the brain's instructions.

Time helps to expand our experiences, but time works against us as we age through the categories where strength, agility, and overall fitness become continuously more challenging. The young shooters we so admire—and who are often the quickest among us—don't suffer from weakened muscle, worn joints, arthritis, and more.

If you are serious about your shooting, you probably practice either running through drills at the range or snap-capping your guns at home. But what are you doing to help your body do its job when called upon. I wouldn't be surprised if you answered "not much."

As a Cattle Baron, it has become increasingly evident to me that my body isn't as capable of doing many things it could decades ago. I could rather easily pull a 7-1/2" SAA from a belt-height holster 25 years ago, but my shoulders no longer have the same range of motion—at least not with ease. Moving to a buscadero rig greatly aided my strong side, but even with a better drop, I came to realize that my motor skills could be improved if I focus a bit more on muscle strength, stamina, and increased range of motion.

Last year, my wife gave me a gift of personal training sessions at a local gym. She found a certified trainer, Kenneth King, who specializes in sports therapy and is helping me focus on the particular body development needed for cowboy shooting. Now, 14 months later, I spin up my rifle and shotgun from the loading table, approach each stage with ease, and no longer have to rely on just adrenaline to get my body and guns from the first stage to the last.



I took Kenneth to our PRVC range so I could give him a real-time demonstration of the movements and issues related to handling the various firearms used in Cowboy Action Shooting™. "Doing some of the moves you showed me are more difficult for older shooters," he said, "because of a wide assortment of physical ailments. Some of these can be addressed with a well-focused exercise program, and some we can only hope to work around by finding another way to maneuver your guns. For example, you addressed your limited range of motion and possible arthritis in your shoulders by using a lower [buscadero] holster on your right side and taking the other gun out sideways [crossdraw]."

"The problems of manipulating the guns you use," he added, "have much less to do with their weight than how you access them and hold them during your shooting." He also noted that gun weight is not much even for elder shooters, but the muscle strength necessary to yank the five pounds from the holster and steadily jerk it up in the air is critical.

He concluded, "It is clear to me that we need to focus on gross motor skills that address the muscles in the shoulders and arms, rather than dealing with hand and finger exercises that you can do with simple spring-type hand exercisers." (You can get hand exercisers and weights at most better sporting goods store.) "Your leg and hip muscles are also important to allow you to move quickly and safely from one shooting location to another. Walking, outside or on a treadmill, is something I strongly urge for leg and hip muscles, as well as for general health."

Exercise Guidelines by Kenneth King

Warning: Consult with your personal physician before attempting this or any exercise program. The following exercises are intended as general guidelines and may not be suitable to your individual body or physical condition.

Regarding exercising, there are some basic guidelines and terminology for you to be aware of and follow.

Repetitions and Sets

Exercises should be done in repetitions – a repeated sequence with rest between them. For example, some of the exercises should be done 12 times with a 30 second break after each group of 12, repeated three times – we call that a "set." If 12 is too many for the weight you are using, reduce the amount of weight. So, you'll do a set of 12 repetitions of one exercise, take a 30-second break, 12 of another exercise, another 30-second break, and do the last 12 repetitions of the last exercise.

In the exercises I'm showing you, you'll alternate three sets of each exercise. A sequence like this ensures that the muscles don't pass a certain level of fatigue. If



Build up the weight as you go. The ideal weight will be when you can still move the weights smoothly in the last few steps of the last repetition.

there's pain or discomfort, decrease the weight you are using rather than the number of repetitions, but you can decrease both if needed. Each set must be done properly with the same number of repetitions so that you can refine the motor skills.

Ideal Weight

The way to determine the ideal weight for you to use is to first start light (about 5-10 lbs. depending on exercise) and take it slow, steady, and easy, and increase weight over a period of months. The ideal weight will be when you get to the last few repetitions of a set and you can still move the weights nice and smooth without any pain or stress. Most importantly, you want to feel like you've exercised, but you don't want to feel fatigued. In the beginning, you might feel some muscle strain the following day, but as you develop those muscles, the discomfort will go away over time.

Frequency

For what you are doing, exercise should be done three to four times per week. Do them on whatever schedule works best for you— morning, noon, or night. Most importantly, if you are going to be successful, be serious about your exercise program and make it part of your daily routine. You can't just do this once or twice and think you're done. Stick with it!

Pre-Match Warm-Up

As with any sport or activity, you should stretch and work your joints and muscles before the event. You don't want to stretch too much, but you should do a basic stretch before you shoot. Just moving your arms in a broad arc over your head, manipulating your shoulder and arm muscles, and walking in place for a few seconds are good things to get blood flowing.

Exercises

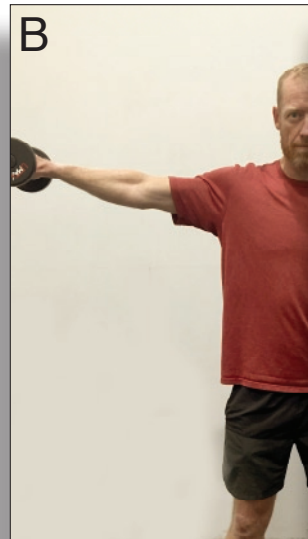
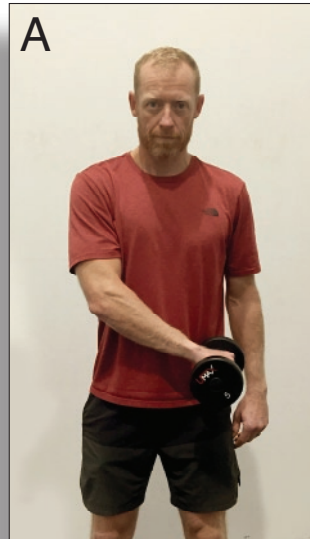
My key goal is to address the muscles you use for each of the moves used for different guns. The exercises I'm recommending are the same for both male and female. I believe that if I can help you pick up and hold a gun more easily, it will make you perform better, which is our overall goal.

Most of the time when working with my clients, I try to find what the person's individual weakness is, but since I can't personally watch every one of your shooters, I can only offer basic guidelines for each of the situations I have been shown.

After reviewing several gun handling motions and positions in action, here are the various exercises recommended for each situation (three sets of 10 to 15 repetitions each, alternating between the suggested exercises for each situation).



Stand up straight and keep the abdominal muscles tight to build up a strong "core."

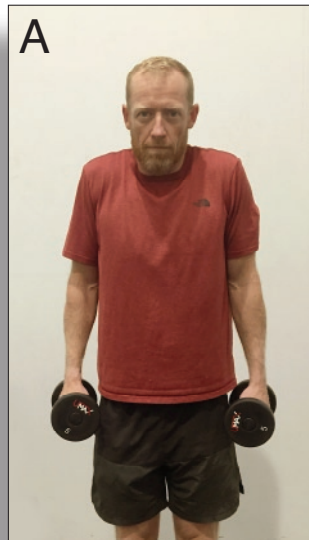


Situation 1 – Cross Draw

Muscle Focus: deltoid muscles and rotator cuff

Ex. 1. (3 lb. weight) This move is called the “sabre” – just like you are drawing a sword or sabre from a scabbard. Keep your knees slightly bent, and move the arm from the waist (A) to a position with the arm straight out from the shoulder. Don’t turn the wrist, and keep palm facing the ground as you lift up as if you were drawing out a sabre across the chest and pointing it outward (B).

Ex. 2. (10-15 lb. weight) For supporting the pistol once it is drawn, we’ll do a front deltoid lateral raise. Keep the palm facing sideway and keep your core (chest and stomach area) nice and stable. With your weight, bring arm straight up from your side (C). Surprising as it may seem, we build muscles better when lowering the weight than when lifting it, so don’t just drop the arm, control the weight as you lower it.

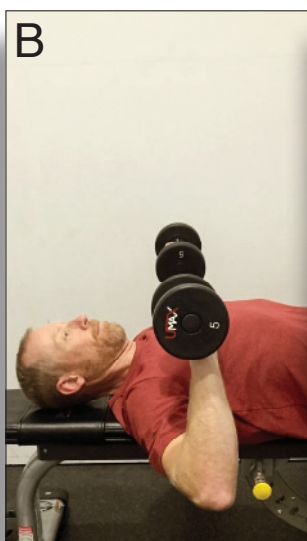


Situation 2 – Holsters at Waist Level

Muscle Focus: deltoid muscles and trapezius

Ex. 1. (5-10 lb. weights) First we’ll work the trapezius muscles with a shoulder shrug holding a weight in each hand. With the shoulders shrugged and leaving the arms down parallel to the body, slowly raise and lower the shoulders as high as you can (A).

Ex. 2. (5-10 lb. weights) Do a double lateral raise keeping the hands close to the body, the palms facing each other, and raise the weights shoulder high (B) and (C).



Situation 3 – Supporting a Rifle

Muscle Focus: pectoral and anterior deltoid muscles

Ex. 1. (5 lb. weights; build up over time) Holding the rifle steady and being able to support it comfortably involves building the pectoral and anterior deltoid muscles. We'll use a bench press to help build these muscles. You can use the floor, a bed, or something like a padded piano bench that will allow your shoulders to move. Lying on your back, raise the weights straight over your shoulders (A) and bring them down, allowing your elbows to go below your shoulders when you come down as in (B).

Ex. 2. (5 lb. weights; build up over time) Stand up and do a hammer curl, arms at 90° with elbows locked at your hips and palms facing each other. Then with elbows bent, bring your arms up until the elbows come to shoulder height ending up as in (C).



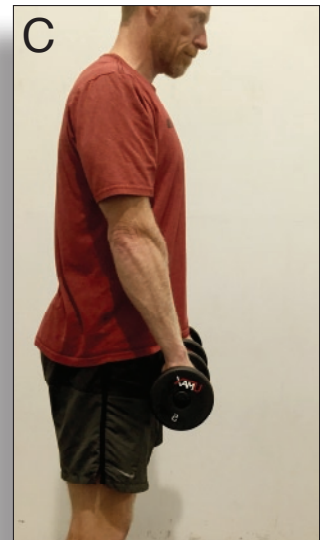
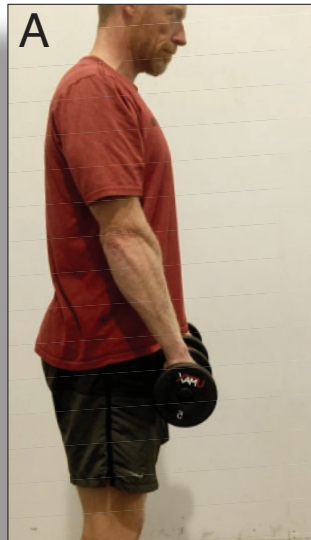
Situation 4 – Loading '97 Shotgun Shoulder High

Muscle Focus: pectoral and anterior deltoid muscles

Ex. 1. (3 lb. weight) Holding shotgun up while loading it with the other hand uses similar muscles as holding the rifle, but in this case you're holding the shotgun up at an awkward angle using only one arm. With weight, bring the arm your support arm straight up from your side, keep your palm facing down, and then lower it again slowly (A).

Ex. 2. (3 lb. weights) This exercise is called a bent-over row. Lean forward at a 45° angle, with knees bent, flat straight spine, then raise the weights to bring thumbs into armpits (B).

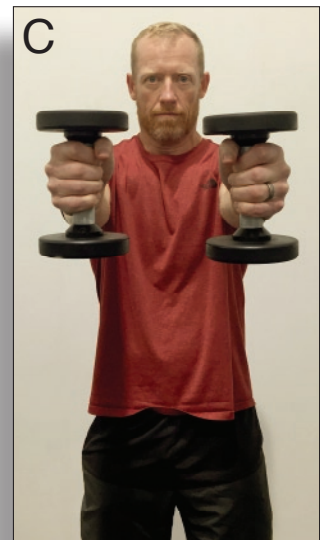
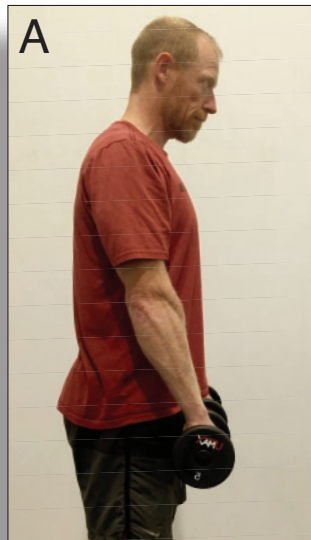
Ex. 3. (3 lb. weights) Stand up and do a hammer curl (same as Situation 3, Ex. 2). With arms at 90° and elbows locked at your hips and palms facing each other. Then with elbows bent, bring your arms up until the elbows come to shoulder height ending up as in (C).



Situation 5 – Reaching Out for Rifle or Shotgun on Table

Muscle Focus: Core

Ex. 1 (10 lb. weights) For reaching out and picking up a rifle from a table, the goal is to build core strength. Building the core gives us strength and stabilization so that we can reach way out without any pain. Starting in a straight up position (A), weights down in front of you, semi-bent knees and flat back, bring the arms and weights straight down keeping your back flat and bend over until your back is parallel to the ground (B) and then come straight up again (C).



Situation 6 – Single-handed Support of Pistol(s)

Muscle Focus: Anterior deltoid muscles

Ex. 1 (5 lb. weights) For holding one or both pistols out in front of you [double duelist or gunfighter], keep the core tight, knees slightly bent, hold weights down in front of you (A). Bring both arms up to shoulder height with palms facing each other (B) and let them down slowly. The arms should be straight but not locked, so holding them semi-bent is okay. Hold the arms about 8" apart as in (C).