

Shooting Range Reflections on Guns and Firearm Skills

I grew up hunting and shooting guns often with my family, but (besides a spring skeet shoot) it's been a while since I've done a lot of training with firearms. As I was planning to get a fully assembled AR-10 rifle soon, thus the weekend before last I visited a shooting range with friends and had the welcome privilege of getting some practice in after a hiatus.

Guns are controversial right now, and I'll write about the politics some other time. It's worth noting some things about how we relate to guns, though, and I have had a chance to think about guns while I was at the range (and after).

Here are some thoughts after the experience:

- Shooting is not something to be proud of or have fun with, exactly. We were shooting at human silhouette targets – which are pretty common at self-defense oriented ranges. Still shooting at something resembling a human, I felt a pretty powerful wave of something like sadness. It's a grim thing that we live in a world where this sort of thing happens, and shooting should be taken seriously as a regrettable thing.
- If anything, we should view shooting as a form of training. Guns are tools, not toys. Hopefully you never have to use them.
- That said, it's OK to enjoy shooting guns as we were doing, if your motivations are right. The enjoyment shouldn't come from destruction (there are people who feel that way). Enjoyment should come from the feeling of mastery and the satisfaction that you can take care of yourself. Shooting is like jiu jitsu or karate – for defense only, but still worth enjoying as you train in them.
- Shooting most guns is actually pretty straightforward. A person coming off the street could get the basics down to shoot well at a range with a couple of hours of practice.
- Guns are also pretty straightforward to load, safe, and otherwise manage. As long as you are observing gun safety rules, it's easy enough to figure out the mechanics of a new weapon.
- Shooting ranges are a remarkable example of human trust. Besides giving up our IDs and signing a pretty extensive waiver, we were pretty much free to go out into the range and start shooting. We had some supervision, especially with automatic weapons, but it was pretty *laissez-faire*.
- It's more interesting to test edge cases with guns, particularly ranged shots for typically short-distance weapons like handguns (it turns out Thompson submachine guns have pretty good range).