

The NSRA's Dispensation System

Part 1 – The Problem

Many people in target shooting have some physical reason for not being able to shoot with entirely “conventional” equipment or technique. If this means that they do not comply with the standard technical rules, on the face of it they cannot take part in competitions shot under those rules. These people range from those who have a relatively minor condition to those with significant disabilities. In some cases the reason may be temporary, but for the majority, it is permanent. Some of these shooters only need to make minor changes to their technique, or to use a helpful gadget; others have tailor-made equipment and are unable to adopt any of the conventional prone, standing or kneeling positions. For more information on the sort of conditions for which dispensations have been issued, see under “Examples” below.

Part 2 – The Solution

For quite a few years now, the NSRA has had a system for allowing such people to take part in most of the competitions run under NSRA rules. This includes the majority of domestic championships, leagues and open shoots. Any shooter who falls within the field outlined in Part 1 may apply to the Association for a dispensation. If it is granted, he or she can take part in competitions run under NSRA rules. In the first decade of the 21st century, the NSRA issued dispensations to approximately 60 shooters. Some have more than one because they shoot more than one discipline.

The Rules

These can be found in the NSRA's Rules and Regulations for the conduct of competitions, which are Part 2.1 of the NSRA Handbook, or can be downloaded from the Reference section of the Association's website: www.nsra.co.uk. The relevant rules are in Section 4 – Shooters with Physical Handicaps. 4.1. says:

"A shooter who, because of physical handicap, cannot fire from one or more of the prescribed shooting positions outlined in these rules, or who must use special equipment when firing, may apply to the Referees' Committee for permission to assume a special position or to use modified equipment, or both."

How to apply

The rules also explain how to apply. This is very simple: in writing (there are no forms – a letter is fine), giving a very brief note of the disability involved, plus an explanation of what the shooter wishes to do. Photographs are required, showing clearly the modified position, and/or how special equipment is used. Everything must be sent in duplicate to the Secretary to the Referees' Committee at the NSRA offices. There is no fee. A decision is generally made very swiftly, but there may be a request for clarification or further information.

The yardstick

The key question is whether what is proposed will be fair to all concerned. When considering what constitutes “fair”, a pretty robust view is taken. Usually, something that might be perceived by others as conferring an advantage is actually only removing a disadvantage. Most people with any type or degree of disability suffer in ways that are not apparent to the observer; pain, muscle spasms, weakness, fatigue, many vision problems, etc. are all invisible to the onlooker, but these are examples of the factors that will be taken into account in trying to level the playing field for applicants.

The dispensation

This is actually referred to in the Rules as “a special authorisation certificate”. It consists of written confirmation that the person concerned is allowed to shoot with the modified technique described, in

accordance with the photograph(s) attached. The shooter should keep this with his equipment, so that it can be produced to prove that what is being done is permitted.

If a medical condition is permanent, the dispensation is normally issued for an indefinite period. If the shooter's condition deteriorates, improves, or otherwise changes so that further and/or different modifications are needed, he must re-apply. Dispensations can also be issued for a specified length of time, for example when a shooter is recovering from an accident or undergoing a course of medical treatment.

A shooter with a dispensation can take part in all NSRA-organised competitions, including national meetings, leagues, etc., except the few that are held under ISSF rules. He can also enter any competition run by any other organisation that is stated to be held under NSRA Rules – unless the conditions state that dispensation-holders are barred (something that ought to be objected to if there is not a very good reason). This covers about 99% of conventional small-bore rifle, pistol and airgun competitions run by the NSRA, county associations, leagues, clubs, etc.

If a competition is held under ISSF rules, a shooter with a dispensation will not normally be able to take part, but in some cases there may be other competitions shot at the same time under IPC (International Paralympic Committee) Shooting rules and for which IPC certification may be required. Information about this is available from [Disability Target Shooting GB](#) (DTSGB).

Examples



The medical conditions that have necessitated the modified positions or techniques are very varied, including all sorts of injuries, tennis elbow, polio, arthritis, heart conditions, spondulitis, limited vision, stroke, spasticity, effects of diabetes, spinal cord damage, snapped ligament, bursitis, spina bifida, dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, cerebral palsy, rheumatism, missing limbs, and a range of less common, named syndromes.

The commonest permitted modification is shooting from a wheelchair – sometimes combined with the use of special equipment. Many dispensations allow shooters who can no longer cope with standing or prone positions to shoot from a chair or stool, including “prone from a table” (where the seated shooter rests both elbows on a table, and uses a sling in the same way as for a conventional prone position). Permitting the use of stand or support (usually a Belgian spring stand) for those who cannot manage the weight of a gun unaided is also common. Some pistol shooters are allowed to use a two-handed grip. For those with missing limbs the dispensation can allow a prosthesis to be used. There have been several solutions for elbow problems experienced by prone shooters, including additional padding or foam rings to provide support. Weak joints and damaged ligaments may be helped by using a surgical brace or support. Those with vision problems may be permitted to use a combination of lenses that is otherwise prohibited because it has a magnifying effect.

Assistants

If a shooter needs someone to help with loading, etc. then a dispensation is not required specifically for that unless it is the only non-standard aspect of his or her shooting. It is accepted that some disabled and less-able shooters need assistance on the firing point, and normally it only needs to be mentioned when entering shoulder-to-shoulder competitions. The organisers ought to leave the adjacent firing point vacant so that there is room for the assistant to operate without risk of touching the next shooter on the line.

Postscript

It is a great pity that quite a few shooters who use unorthodox positions and techniques for good reason, have not been taking part in competitions when many would undoubtedly like to do so. After all, that is one of the great things about target-shooting – it is incredibly inclusive; much more so than other sports, which usually have entirely separate competitions for disabled and able-bodied participants.