

RED DOT SIGHTS ON DUTY PISTOLS

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In today's technologically advanced world, law enforcement agencies are always trying to be up to date with these advances to provide the best opportunities for their officers. One piece of equipment that has gained a lot of traction is the miniature red dot sight for pistols (MRDS). As this is not new technology, competitive shooters have been using them since the late 90's early 2000's, advancement in technology has made the MRDS very reliable and duty capable.

Why

So why the sudden surge in MRDS for Law Enforcement? It will make the officer a better shooter and decision maker. Now, the MRDS will not increase your scores immediately. The shooter must have a solid foundation in the fundamentals of marksmanship as the MRDS is not a magic cure for the "flinchies." Traditional iron sights require three objects working together and creates three focal planes. The human eye cannot focus on more than one thing at a time so the shooter must acquire their target, properly align their sights and then transition that focus to the front sight. While with training and time on the range this task is not difficult, some visual acuity is lost, and it takes more time. So how many things can we actually focus on at once? The answer is one. It is like trying to multi-task. We really cannot do it. We can get close, but we are hard-wired to focus on one thing at a time.

The MRDS requires one focal plane, the target. Once the shooter has identified the target/threat, the shooter will focus on the target, bring the firearm to the shooter's eyes, and once the dot is where it needs to be, the shooter makes a clean press of the trigger. Like officers have been shooting rifles with a red dot sight or low power variable optic, the shooter will remain target focused and superimpose the dot on the target. This allows the shooter to keep both eyes open and gain more vision. The more we can see, the better decisions can be made and at a much faster pace.

Optic and Weapon Selection

Mounting of the MRDS can take two forms. First, an officer can purchase an optics ready platform such as the Glock MOS, FN 509T, Smith and Wesson CORE or the Agency Arms AOS system. These are milled and have accessory plates for the MRDS. Second, an officer can send their existing slide to be milled for the optic of their choice. Each agency will have to decide based on research which method suits their needs/policy. There are many optics on the market today. You must choose an optic that is durable, can withstand drops, accidental impacts and manipulations from the use of the optic. Trijicon, Holosun and Aimpoint are leading the market currently.

With the RDS being an electronic component and man-made, as with anything there will be a potential for failure. Whichever mounting application is chosen, a secondary sighting system should be employed. The use of back-up iron sights, usually of suppressor height, should be lower one-third or co-witness with the RDS. The secondary sighting systems allows the use of iron sights if the battery fails.

Commonly, if a failure is going to occur, it is going to be the occlusion of the optic window. This could be anything from the window getting condensation or fog on it, due to atmospheric conditions, or the window shattering because of a drop or other outside force. In such cases, the shooter will still have a single clean dot visible even though he or she can no longer see through the lens. This is no problem as long as you are shooting with both eyes open. Your non-dominant eye is still able to gather data from the target. Your brain will actually use this data to superimpose the image over to the occluded eye. It is a little trippy at first, but it works. It is called the Bindon Aiming Concept which was developed by Glyn Bindon, the founder of Trijicon.

Training

There is a small learning curve when starting out with the MRDS. The implementation should not be authorization, provide equipment and go to work. As trainers, we have heard everything from "You don't need formal training with them because they are intuitive" to something along the lines of "They have reinvented the wheel." Both mindsets are a little extreme; sure, but there is some ground in the middle of those two arguments.

It is true, they are intuitive; however, breaking old habits and learning new ones is usually where most of the issues arise. This is true with the vast majority of topics. So let's focus on what items are critical to getting the most out of the optics quickly that can be implemented into a relatively short transition course to get officers up and running.

Most people struggle finding the dot upon presenting to the target. Many factors lead to this occurrence. First, the shooter, depending on how long they have been shooting, have been working in the three focal plane arena of iron sights. Most shooters still close an eye when shooting irons and with the RDS being a single focal plane, both eyes open style of shooting can be difficult at first. Second, the presentation from the holster, low ready, etc. must be solid from the beginning. Proper presentation is critical for fast dot acquisition.

The most important concept to adopt is that of "Threat focus." This is how the optics are intended to be used. Many officers have been put in the situation where they' have pointed a weapon at someone. As much as you would like to say, "I was looking at my sights," what were you really looking at? It can be said that in the moment, you were looking at the potential threat that was perceived to you, or someone else in harm's way. This is what humans naturally do. We need to gather information about what is potentially going to hurt us as the brain is going through its fight or flight decision making process.

The fundamentals of marksmanship are the fundamentals, but each agency should develop a transition training course of some sort due to the RDS system. The instructors at the agency should have received formal training from an outside source specializing in RDS, state certified instruction or combination of both. A quick review of topics that need to be covered in a transition course are as follows: threat focus, shooting with both eyes open, proper draw/presentation to the eye, mechanical offset, and failure recovery. With these items properly addressed, the learning curve for MRDS use in a duty setting will be drastically reduced. The instructor can develop other topics needed for the transition course to include but not limited to, zero distances, how to zero the MRDS, optic failure drills, potential lens obstruction, installation and more.

Policy

Well thought out and developed policy is a must for agencies. The policy should be backed by research and establishes a standardized procedure for implementation, training and optic choice that meets the needs for duty. Extensive testing has been done on the vast majority of MRDS optics by Sage Dynamics owner, Aaron Cowan. The results of his somewhat standardized testing are published in his continuously updated white paper for MRDS usage on duty handguns.

With a sound policy, proper training implementation, the MRDS will allow potential growth for the officers shooting abilities. Each officer must be committed to the training program and training with the MRDS and they will see measureable growth in their pistol skills. Optic manufacturers continue to develop optics with advanced technology to enhance the reliability and function for law enforcement use.

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