

Steel Challenge is a speed shooting competition that involves shooting arrays of steel targets while timed. It is as challenging for the seasoned competitor as it is for the first-time competitor. The match consists of eight stages. Each stage has five steel plate targets of various sizes set at different distances. There is a designated “stop plate” which must be shot last in sequence on the stage.

On the start signal, the competitor fires one shot on each of the targets. The competitor must hit each of the steel plate targets on the stage once during the string. The shooter finishes the string by hitting the designated stop plate. Each string is timed, so the faster a competitor can hit each of the steel plate targets on the stage, the better. The only penalty for missing a target is a time penalty. This means you can fire as many make up shots as needed to hit each target without penalty.

All but one stage consists of 5 strings of fire – or 5 different attempts at the stage. The times for the fastest four strings are added together for a total time or score for the stage. The worst (slowest) string is thrown out and not part of the total score. The total time for each of the eight stages becomes the competitor’s total score for the match.

There are eight Steel Challenge stages:

1. 5 to Go
2. Showdown
3. Smoke & Hope
4. Outer Limits
5. Accelerator
6. The Pendulum
7. Speed Option
8. Roundabout

Centerfire Divisions

The centerfire divisions within Steel Challenge are:

1. Open (OPN)
2. Limited (LTD)
3. Production (PROD)
4. Single Stack (SS)
5. Revolver Optic Sights (OSR)
6. Revolver Iron Sights (ISR)
7. Carry Optics (CO)
8. Pistol Caliber Carbine Open (PCCO)
9. Pistol Caliber Carbine Iron Sights (PCCI)

Firearms that have a holographic red dot optic mounted on the slide will probably fit into the Carry Optics (CO) division.

If it doesn't have a red dot on it, most common 9mm carry guns will likely fit in either the Production or Limited divisions. Production division has a 10-round capacity limit and allows very limited modifications. Limited division doesn't have the magazine capacity limit and has fewer restrictions on guns than Production.

If you have a 1911-style handgun, Single Stack might be a good fit. If you already own one, Pistol Caliber Carbine is a great division to start in.

The specific rules for each division of Steel Challenge can be found in the SCSA Rule Book and the match director can also help you determine which division you belong in.

Competitors shooting in a centerfire pistol division will be required to start the stage with their firearm holstered. It is important that the competitor is able to safely draw, fire, and then re-holster their centerfire pistol.

Rimfire Pistol and Rimfire Rifle Divisions

Rimfire pistol and rimfire rifle divisions are each broken down into two further divisions: iron sights and "open" or optic sights. They are abbreviated with the acronyms "RFPO" for Rimfire Pistol Open, "RFPI" for Rimfire Pistol Irons, "RFRO" for Rimfire Rifle Open and "RFRI" for Rimfire Rifle Irons. The open divisions allow the use of optics.

The advantage of starting in a rimfire divisions is that you don't have to draw from a holster. The start position for rimfire divisions is from the "low ready" position. When in low ready, the firearm is pointed downward toward a flag, cone, or other designated marker.

What Equipment do I need for Steel Challenge?

Once you know what firearm you will use, the other equipment you will need is:

1. Hearing and eye protection
2. Bag and/or flag (for rimfire and PCC divisions)
3. Pistol holster and belt (for centerfire pistol divisions)
4. Magazines
5. Ammo

Hearing and eye protection

Anyone who owns and shoots their firearm likely already has ear and eye protection. If not, pick some up at your local gun store.

Bag and/or Flag

You will need to be able to safely bring your unloaded firearm to the firing line to shoot. Rimfire pistol shooters usually come to the firing line with their rimfire pistol safely contained in a zippered pistol bag. Rifle division shooters will use a rifle bag to transport their rifle to the firing line. They must also have some form of a chamber flag in their rifle to demonstrate its safe condition. After the stage is complete, the unloaded firearm is returned to its safe condition (re-holstered, flagged, and/or bagged) prior to leaving the shooting area.

Pistol holster and belt

Centerfire pistol shooters will need an appropriate holster and belt for the holster. Regular competitors in Steel Challenge will use special belts and holsters designed for competition, but belts and holsters you may already own for concealed carry purposes should work just fine.

Magazines

It is recommended that no matter what gun you're shooting you bring at least five magazines. That way you can shoot one magazine per string on each stage without having to reload. If you have less than five magazines, chances are you'll have to reload magazines at least once during your turn. This really slows down the match.

Ammunition

All of the stages have 5 steel targets you must shoot. For all but one stage, you shoot 5 strings at each stage. Therefore, you will shoot a minimum of 25 rounds on each of 7 stages. The 8th stage, Outer Limits, is the exception where you shoot only 4 strings so, 20 rounds. The total minimum number of rounds needed for the match is 195, but you will need to account for any pick-up shots you fire if you miss a steel plate on the first attempt. It is recommended that for newer shooters you bring a minimum of 300 rounds to the match

How to Shoot a Steel Challenge Stage

Every stage will have a Range Officer (RO) who runs the shooters through each stage. Keep track of where you fall in the shooting order. You want to be ready with your magazines loaded when the RO calls your name. Bring your magazines along with your unloaded firearm (cased or holstered) to the firing line.

Range Commands

Once on the firing line, the RO will direct you by using the official range commands.

“Make Ready”

The RO's first command is “make ready!” With this command, you're authorized to do whatever you need to do to get ready to shoot the stage. This includes removing your firearm from the holster or case, putting a magazine in the gun, and chambering a round. If your firearm has an optic, now is the time to make sure the power is on and the dot is at the desired brightness.

You may also take a sight picture by aiming at the targets without firing if needed. This means you can hold your gun up to the targets without shooting.

When your gun is loaded and you're ready to begin, holster your centerfire firearm and place both hands in the air in the “surrender” position. This signals to the RO that you're ready. If you're shooting a firearm you start from the low-ready, aim at the marker. When you do so, the RO will assume you're ready.

“Shooter Ready, Standby”

When the RO believes you are ready, they will ask “shooter ready?” If you're not ready, verbally tell them. If no answer is given, the RO will then say, “stand by!” and the next sound you hear will be the “BEEP!” of the timer. You may then engage the targets on the stage. When you've hit all five targets, the RO will read off the time from the timer to the scorekeeper.

During this time, you're still under the “make ready” command. You can still handle your firearm and ammunition unless you are directed otherwise. You can remove the magazine (if needed) and insert a fresh one in preparation for the next string.

When you're ready, either assume the surrender position if using a centerfire pistol, or aim your firearm at the low-ready marker. The RO will again ask, “shooter ready?” and the cycle repeats until you have completed the stage by shooting all five strings.

“Unload and Show Clear”

Once you have shot all five strings, the RO gives the command “if you are finished, unload and show clear.” Remove the magazine from the firearm, and pull the slide or bolt back to eject any round in the chamber. Show the RO the empty chamber.

The next command will be “if clear, hammer down.” If you’re satisfied that your gun is unloaded, let your bolt or slide forward. Then point the firearm down range in a safe direction and pull the trigger. The hammer or striker should fall at this point, and the empty gun should have an audible “click.”

Rimfire shooters are not required to “hammer down” as pulling the trigger on some rimfire guns, with an empty chamber, can damage the firearm.

The RO will then tell you to either holster (centerfire pistols), flag and bag (rifles), or just bag (rimfire pistols). The objective is to return your firearm to the condition that it was in when you came to the firing line. Rimfire and PCC shooters need to use caution at this point. It is easy to “flag” or muzzle yourself when putting the firearm back in the bag. If this happens at a match, it’s a disqualification (“DQ”).

Once your entire squad has completed the stage, you’ll move on as a group to the next stage. This cycle repeats until every squad has shot every stage of the match.

Getting Your Match Results

Later that evening the Match Director will have the scores posted to Practiscore, so that you can see how you finished in the match.