

New Shooter's Guide to NRA F-Class
by Randell Vansant

F-Class is one of the fastest growing competitive shooting disciplines in shooting sports today. It has grown for good reason, as most shooter's with basic rifle experience, some basic equipment, and desire can learn and participate in F-Class.

The goal of F-Class is simple: Place your rounds in the X-Ring and score points at distances from 300 Yards, out to 1000 Yards. F-Class targets are sized appropriately for each distance, in order to provide the appropriate level of difficulty.

Nothing is as easy as it seems in any aspect of life, and F-Class is no exception. The concept is simple, the execution- not so easy. The shooter, rifle, and equipment must be in sync. Most importantly, the shooter must learn to effectively read the weather, wind, and environmental conditions to score well. The wind, as they say, is what F-Class is all about. F-Class is all about the challenge to me. You can never predict what challenges you may face at any given point in a match. How you understand and overcome them is the biggest challenge.

Finally, the ultimate point of F-Class is to have fun, enjoy the shooting sports, and improve your marksmanship abilities.

Rifles and Equipment

To Shoot F-Class requires some basic equipment, accessories, marksmanship, and knowledge of the range procedures, safety regulations, and scoring.

The rifle is the most important aspect of F-Class, as there can be no match without it. There are of course, innumerable types of rifle designs, configurations, price tags, and paint jobs to be found on an F-Class rifle. Ultimately, many of these are up to the shooter. There are a few general guidelines to be aware of.

Rifle

- Bolt action, though some competitors will compete with AR or even FAL pattern rifles
- Capable of 1MOA accuracy or better (1 Inch group at 100 yards)
- Optics are of course, an absolute must, and if you choose to compete more seriously, better optics are generally required
- Chambered in a caliber that is comfortable to shoot, but have good accuracy and ballistics effectiveness. The most common calibers in F-Class are .308 Winchester, .223 Remington, or a 6.5mm round (more on this later)
- Shooters wanting to try out F-Class without a large financial commitment can even shoot with their hunting rifle of choice, using sandbags, or some kind of improvised rest

Optics

- Variable or fixed power, at least 10 Power or higher. More is generally better.
- Repeatable! Your optic should be able to track, and hit in the same location at any given time (with natural variance due to conditions) Inexpensive scopes which will not track, or move the point of impact when adjusted with the turrets will give you headaches in a hurry
- Turrets should be easy and fast to adjust. Turrets that require tools, or a coin to adjust will cost you time
- Mounted in strong rings, and/or mounted on a 20 MOA style scope base to provide extra elevation at long range

Other Equipment

- Bipod, or front rest (See rules section for details)
- Rear sandbag, bunny ear bag, or similar. The rear bag may not attach to the rifle in any way (No Monopods)
- Shooting mat, old sleeping bag, or mat of some kind, as F-Class is shot exclusively from the prone position
- Spotting scope and tripod to see your hits up closer than your rifle scope will allow, and to help you read the wind conditions
- Notebook and pencil to keep your scores, and record your results from match to match
- Kitchen timer or stopwatch to keep you on pace from the clock
- Wind meter, or Kestrel device (Optional)
- Mirage shade (To deflect barrel heat away from our optic)

Ammunition

- Your ammunition should be safe, accurate, and predictable in your rifle, whether factory, or hand loaded
- Capable of staying supersonic to the target (Velocity required depends on caliber, and bullet type)
- In high enough quantity to shoot the match, plus sighter shots, plus a few extra in case of bad rounds
- Most serious F-Class shooters are hand loaders

Shooter Ability level

Everyone is new to F-Class at some point, and it can be a little nerve wracking your first match, especially when the shooters next to you are better. At the very least, you should have experience with your match rifle at all the distances you will be shooting. Your elevation and windage corrections should be documented in your notebook so you can place your rounds in target safely.

You should have a basic understanding of ballistics, and correcting your scope "doping" for both windage and elevation.

You should understand the fundamentals of cheek positioning, breathing, trigger press, and follow through.

F-Class Rules and Classifications

It goes without saying in any shooting activity, safety is paramount. You should have an empty chamber indicator in your rifle when you arrive at the match location. This assures the rifle is unloaded and safe. Your action should also be open, and all firearms should be treated in accordance with basic firearms safety rules. If you do not have an ECI, ask the match director, or another shooter. There should always be extra's on hand.

There are two classifications within F-Class:

- F T/R (F Target Rifle)
- F Open

F T/R is limited to .308 Winchester and .223 Remington, and requires your rifle weigh no more than 18.18 Pounds (8.25 Kg). Additionally, F T/R does not allow the use a tripod style adjustable front rest. Only bipods are allowed.

F Open is just what it sounds like, Open. You may shoot any caliber you like as long as it is centerfire, and .35 caliber or smaller. Generally, the most popular caliber on Open is 6.5mm, such as .260 Remington, 6.5

Creedmoor, or the ever popular 6.5-284 Norma, but the field is wide open. Unlike T/R, you may use an adjustable tripod rest, and your rifle may weigh no more than 22 Pounds (10 Kg)

Target Dimensions: Visit this link for complete target dimensions:

<http://www.nrahq.org/compete/RuleBooks/HPR/hpr-w22.pdf>

(For complete rules visit: <http://www.nrahq.org/compete/RuleBooks/HPR/hpr-index.pdf>)

Detailed Rifle and Equipment Breakdown:

This is my personal F-Class equipment setup. This is by no means a perfect setup, as there is no such thing. Only what is perfect for you.

Rifle: Remington 700, .308 Winchester

- 26" Factory bull barrel, 1:12" twist rate
- Timney match trigger, set at 1.5 Pounds
- Bell and Carlson Medalist Stock, with wide vertical grip, and wide fore-end
- Vortex Viper 6.5-20x 50mm Objective scope, with Mil-Dot reticle, mounted in Burris XTR Rings, on an EGW 20MOA Base. This scope and mount combo allows me to zero the rifle at 100 yards, and adjust the turrets all the way to 1000 yards with repeatable accuracy

Accessories:

- Sinclair F-Class Adjustable Bipod (Legal for F T/R)
- Sinclair Mirage Shade
- Midway USA Pro Series Competition Shooting Mat
- Creedmoor Sports Polecat Scope stand, and Alpen 20-60x 80mm Spotting scope

Handload: *Author is not responsible for any damage or injury from incorrect handloading practices. Verify all load data with published manuals. Always handload with care.*

- .308 Winchester
- Sierra 175 Grain Matchking
- Hodgdon Varget
- Lapua cases, Federal 210M Match Primers
- Loaded to 2.895 Inches, longer than published data, but functional in my rifle
- As a general rule, your handload should leave the muzzle at approximately 2,650 FPS or faster to remain supersonic past 1000 yards, which is absolutely vital to accuracy and consistency
- Test your handloads at 100 or 200 yards initially. If possible, test them at 300+ yards, as loads that group well at 100 yards, may not necessarily group well at 300

Conclusion:

F-Class competition shooting demands and rewards precision, and dedication. At the highest levels, winners are determined by the number of X's on the target, not the number of 10's. For most of us however, F-Class is a fun and enjoyable way to compete with fellow shooters, make new friends, and enjoy a great day outdoors.

Whatever discipline in the shooting sports you choose, your ultimate goal should be to enjoy the time spent on the firing line.