



# Getting kicks out of being a sharpshooter

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IN Hong Kong, many open areas above service reservoirs are used as playgrounds or recreational areas for local residents. The areas are usually surrounded with vegetation and are far away from the hustle and bustle of city life. The areas are also where some rare fresh air can be found.

Kau Wa Keng Fresh Water Service Reservoir is no exception. It is here that decades ago the Hong Kong Rifle Association (HKRA) established target shooting ranges where their members can practise.

One member is Kern Wong Kwok-keung. Today he breathes out slowly while steadily raising a target pistol in his right hand. He focuses with full concentration on the front and rear sights of the pistol and aims at a target 25 metres away.

Everywhere around him is quiet and still. Only his forefinger gradually increases pressure on the trigger until the pistol kicks with a loud bang, a puff of flame and smoke emits from the front of the pistol's barrel, and a bullet escapes at the speed of sound heading for the target.

## Mind control

Kern is in no real hurry to check his score right after he breaks the shot. He knows too well that, if he has been in good control of his mind and action as the shot is fired, hitting a bull's-eye will be no problem.

Kern is not a big guy by any means but he is built like an athlete. If you meet this gunman for the first time, you may think he is in the disciplinary forces. Actually, he is a mechanical engineer with the Water Supplies Department.

Back in his university days in Australia, Kern started enjoying pistol shooting as a sport. He joined HKRA as soon as he returned to Hong Kong to work in the civil service in 1995.



*Kern aiming at a bull's-eye 25 metres away.*

Between 1997 and 2001, he became a member of the Hong Kong shooting team representing Hong Kong in competitions held internationally and on the Mainland. He participates mainly in 10-metre air pistol, 25-metre standard pistol and centre-fire pistol events.

Since Kern loves pistol shooting, he decorates his office with photographs about the sport. One day, a colleague pointing at one of the photographs with Kern receiving a prize teased him by saying, "Showing off by having a photograph taken with Cecilia Yip, eh?"

Kern replied curiously, "Which one is Cecilia Yip and who is she?" The colleague then realised that this sharpshooter, having been away from Hong Kong for more than two decades, knew little about the local entertainment scene.

Lately, Kern has not been spending as much time at shooting competitions as he would like. Apart from keeping up his weekly practice, he is actively involved in running the pistol club.

## Visits for colleagues

Kern also puts a lot of effort into promoting pistol shooting as a sport in Hong Kong. He has organised several visits to HKRA for his fellow workers to get the feel of shooting with live ammunition.

He also gives talks on firearm safety and shooting skills. He says, "The prime factor to get perfect scores is mind

control and the requirements of physical fitness and eyesight only come second. In many world-class shooting competitions, the champions are over 50 years of age.”

He added, “One recent instance was Wang Yifu of the Chinese national shooting team. He won a gold medal for air pistol in the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. Therefore, if you have a strong will and plenty of self-confidence, you can be a good pistol shooter. Given some tough and diligent training for the next year or so, you could stand a chance of representing Hong Kong in the Olympics 2008 in Beijing.”

Pistol shooting is not as expensive as many people may imagine. Kern says that a brand new target pistol of reasonable quality can be bought for around \$5,000. With some simple routine maintenance, a target pistol can last for 10 to 20 years. Practice at the range for a day including range fees and ammunition costs around \$200.

The Hong Kong Shooting Association sponsors 70% of the overall expenses paid by shooters representing Hong Kong in international competitions. The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region also encourages civil servants to take part in international sports competitions. According to Civil Service Regulations 1111(2), authorised



*Nice and easy: Kern taking aim.*

absence up to a maximum of 14 days in any period of 12 months can be granted to colleagues representing Hong Kong in international events.

### **Possessing a firearm**

To possess firearms personally and legally is not easy though. Kern explains, “You have to join a registered pistol club for at least three months and, apart from having good behaviour during that period, you need to go through all the necessary courses on theory and practical training.”

With a recommendation from the club you belong to, you will be allowed to take a field test organised by the Hong Kong Police Force. Only upon passing the test will you be able to apply to purchase a .177 calibre air pistol or a .22 handgun or rifle to start off in the sport.

To possess larger calibre handguns, such as a .38 or .45, would-be owners need to go through another qualifying period, with the same recommendation and approval procedures.

Kern has been shooting pistols as a sport for more than two decades. Now his 17-year-old son Timothy is showing interest in the sport, and father and son have their eyes fixed on one day representing Hong Kong at the shooting range as a team.



*Special forces at the HKRA practice range? Not quite, it is Kern firing an AR15 carbine.*