

Sonoran Desert Grand Prix 2021
Match Report
Phoenix Airgun Club
March 12-14 2021

The planning for the SDGP started off with lots of uncertainty due to the pandemic. As the infection rates changed unpredictably in Arizona, we were uncertain the event would even occur. Luckily, as the mitigation protocols were beginning to firm up, we were able to plan an effective strategy and the privilege to host the event was granted. The Rio Salado range protocols included the prohibition of food services, appropriate distancing, and masking indoors. This led to the challenge of distributing snacks, and water. In addition to this we had to come to terms with not being able to celebrate over a fine lunch.

This obstacle gave us the prime opportunity to serve fine sealed snacks, and beverages. This years' match was sponsored by Airguns of Arizona, we are grateful and we thank them for their loyal support and contributions.

The Match was set up on Thursday. A few great volunteers came in to help set up. This included, Larry Smart, Allen Surrat, Dan Lange, Kent Gladden, and Stephen Kuntz. Allen and Larry headed up the box prep project for the sight-in range inside the airgun building. The weather, as luck would have it, was scheduled to rain in the evening on Thursday. So we decided to hold off on placing the boxes out until Friday morning. With the distancing requirements on the Small bore range we spaced all shooting positions 6 feet apart, and provided six full lanes of targets. This provided the opportunity to shoot five people per lane and accommodate up to 30 shooters at one time. Each lane was ten yards apart, and with doubling the number of 10y targets allowed everyone to have adequate distancing measurements for nearly all the sighting-in distances. As expected, it rained overnight and early Friday morning. The set up teams arrived early and all the sight-in targets were set up by 0930.

Check-in was located in the airgun building, where Cheri and Dave made sure everything was correct and that all the shooters received their custom stainless steel water bottle.

The sight-in area filled up quickly, and the shooters were taking full advantage of the opportunity despite the intermittent rain.

Chuck and Gary were at the air station ready to fill up anybody's tank that needed it. They also filled the two club tanks as that were depleted at the sight in area.

Saturday came quickly enough. The moisture and the temperature brought frost to some parts of the range, which is a very rare occurrence during this time of year in Arizona. The sight-in area opened at 0730 and ran until 0845. Strings were pulled during this time as well all targets were then re-tested with the official AAFTA target tester. The match and safety briefing started at 0900. There was plenty of discussion around the new AAFTA rules, and how they were to be implemented. At 0920 Andy Picard, the match photographer, gathered all the mask yielding participants outside for a group shot. By 0930 the groups were paired and the teams were announced. Hunter class shooters were assigned the Red Course and all the other classes shot the Yellow Course.

The match consisted of 13 lanes on each course and two targets per lane. The order for the weekend was near to far with one standing and one kneeling lane on each course. Red started on the proximal end of the course, and the yellow starting on the distal end with each moving in opposite directions to encourage shooter interaction. Target face plates were painted in bright random colors, (specifically not coordinated with the lane color). On the back side of the targets, each one was painted a reflective silver to brighten up the paddles which were all painted white.

The crony station was the first lane of the course was, where each shooter rotated through to get their gun tested. The pellets were weighed and then shot over the crony. This process was handled by Larry, Allen and Kevin. Each shooter earned a fancy match sticker to place on their gun, and then proceeded to the next lane.

This year, the match was a bit more difficult. We added a couple “pretty far” targets to both courses for each day. The Troyer for the Red course was 32.2, and the Yellow was 32.0. There were 20 shooters in Hunter PCP, eight in Open PCP, seven in WFTF PCP, two in WFTF Spring, two in Open Spring, and two shooting non-sanctioned Unlimited class, totaling 41.

During the match there were two delays noted. The first, a shooter accidentally shot the string. The second, someone pulled the target string a bit too hard and pulled the target off center. This may have been due to the WD40 that may have leaked under the clamps and target causing a super-lube situation. During the course of fire, clouds eased back in, and we experienced a very light, and slight drizzle only lasting a few minutes. Wind was a bit strong with intermittent gusts. Mostly cloudy, highs were in the upper 50’s and lows in the upper 30’s.

After the rifle match, the scoring team was diligently at work. This year we again did the QR code link which proved to be a success giving super-quick real time access to the scores as they were entered. Folks enjoyed this as they could depart and still keep up with the standings. Not to mention, peeps from across the world could too... in real time. The Set up team got busy right away and painted the targets and set up the lane makers for the pistol course. The pistol course was six lanes that were used from both the Red and Yellow course. The six lanes were repeated to make the 12 lane Green pistol course. There was one standing target, for a total of four shots as shooters cycled through twice. We had 14 pistol shooters. One in Limited class and the rest in Hunter. The Troyer was a stiff 35.1. We started around 2:30 and finished around 5:00. After the pistol shooters finished, the paint team was standing by to finish the course. All targets were painted and re-tested again. All the strings were wound up to prevent the Arizona critters, deer, and coyotes from destroying the course. The volunteer team wrapped up around 6:30 and went home... exhausted.

Sunday arrived, and the sight-in area was buzzing around 6:30 am, Allen on his turbo scooter exchanged targets for fresh ones when the doors opened at 7:00. Strings were pulled, and targets tested again. Weather was expected to be a lot warmer and closer to normal with sunshine. The temperatures were highs in the upper 60’s in the afternoon and lows in the low 50’s in the morning. Winds picked up in the afternoon. The morning briefing was much shorter this time around. There were additional questions clarifying the new accommodation rules for kneeling. A couple shooters, didn't make the second day for various reasons. All shooters were squaddled, and off they went. The match proceeded to go smoothly, and then one WFTF shooter reported a problem with a target. It turns out the paddle got so warped that it altered the fulcrum point of the tripping point and it rendered the target inoperative. This was a perfect example of why it is important to test at 12:00, 6:00 and in the middle. The middle part of the paddle, where the tester struck (and where the pellet struck) wouldn't trip the target, (but at 12, and 6 it would fall) we knew it had to be replaced and the protest supported. The target was replaced right away, and the match continued without incident for the rest of the event.

As scores began to trickle in, it was apparent we would have a shoot-off between four groups. One person forfeited the shoot-off, and the heat was on for the rest.

The new, clear-to-understand protocol worksheet was utilized and the shoot-off went efficiently, fairly, and expeditiously.

After the shoot-off, everyone came back into the building for the awards. We had every shooter masked and spaced out on their own 6’ table. Being this was the first GP since last season, and the only one in the Southwest last year, AAFTA felt it was a great idea to present the Grand Prix

series Champion Awards at the Sonoran's ceremony, since the Nationals were cancelled last year due to COVID restrictions. It just so happens, that all the champions were in attendance this weekend. Larry, the President of Airgunners of Az FT club participated in the ceremony since all the winners attend both clubs' matches. After the ceremony, the SDGP match awards were presented. Winners in each class were presented to the top five of each.

After the awards were presented, Bill Corder donated a "Covid" target to be raffled off. Gerald Long, held the winning ticket and had the privilege to take it back home to NC.

We closed the ceremony shortly thereafter.

After all the pomp and circumstance, shooters said their good bye's, shared their congratulations, and snapped a few pictures. The crowds eased away with the energy and zeal reflective of a great time, and just as proportionally, the excitement and anticipation for next year's event was clearly palpable in the air.

Again, we thank the unrelenting efforts of our volunteers, and our sponsors that made this event a success.

Respectfully submitted,

Garrett Kwakkestein
Match Director