

Center Axis Relock A Closer Look

by Chris Adams

In the evolution of tactical shooting platforms and stances there are usually intelligent compromises made between respective pluses and minuses. One stance may be arguably better for slower precise fire while another may be better suited for close-in work, such as with room clearing. The debates rage on, and provide fodder for countless discussions on the range and internet chat rooms. In the end it is the skill of the shooter that counts, but stacking the odds in one's favor is still the goal of tactics. The traditional shooting platforms (i.e. Weaver, Isosceles, etc.) do have shortcomings and will be replaced (perhaps) by the next improvement down the line. Center Axis Relock, a system, not just a platform, may be the next significant step in this never-ending evolution of weapons handling.

Before getting into the mechanics of Center Axis Relock (CAR) let's take a moment to note some observations about what makes CAR truly different in the performance spectrum, the most significant issue to the armed professional. Firstly, CAR is shot from the field interview stance, which makes it the most stable body position a person can realistically use. This puts it ahead of many other platforms for many tactical purposes. Second, CAR makes the use of the non-dominant eye practical in its system. This means shooting with gas masks, night vision devices and over-the-shoulder (such as when in a car) are all greatly enhanced over traditional platforms. Next, the stability of the firing grip in CAR offers a very noticeable improvement in recoil control, which translates into the ability to dump rounds into a target at a blistering rate, again a tactical boon for the shooter. Finally, in CAR there is no dominant or strong side, so a shooter need not change his body position to engage a target 180 degrees from his muzzle, he needs to just swap grips. CAR lives up to its definition as a non-discriminating platform for stability. These features of CAR are just the tip of the iceberg for tactical applications.

A radical approach to such an entrenched skill set is bound to draw some arrows. The author has spent two weeks learning and using CAR in courses such as Felony High-Risk Vehicle Stop, an environment where the system excels. The author's observations and opinions are based on personal experience learning the system, not second-hand suppositions from individuals who haven't taken a CAR program. After all, no stance or system is "holy" and good strategy dictates a willingness to keep an open mind and search for any edge over the opposition. There is more to the CAR system than meets the eye. The proof is in the merit and effectiveness of the system, which at the time of this writing is POST approved in 22 states, utilized by a variety of military units and a broad range of domestic police

agencies. The author has solicited feedback from a variety of users and found an enthusiastic following as well as a great track record in live shootings; more after-action data will surely follow. Clearly CAR is here to stay.

CAR is the creation of Paul Castle, Chief Instructor of Sabre Tactical Training and Research, Inc. Paul has a very interesting background which for brevity will only be highlighted here. Paul has 27 years of operational and training experience with the U.K. Police Force including special weapons/operations billets and even personal protection tours guarding The Queen and Lady Thatcher. He has trained Foreign and American Special Forces units and too many LE agencies to list. Paul can shoot; in 1992 and 1993 training a four man shooting team, he led and won the NATO Military Police Combat Championships, two years in succession, an event involving pistol, rifle and machine gun disciplines. He holds significant teaching billets such as Chief Instructor for the National Corrections and Law Enforcement Training and Technology Center in WV, among many others. Paul's CAR system is currently taught to a wide range of DOD and police agencies, and has been adopted by a growing list of police academies such as the Winnipeg Police Academy Canada, which has adopted CAR as the basic shooting standard for the entire Province of Manitoba. Through his company Sabre Tactical he offers everything from sniper and advanced SWAT to surveillance and explosive entry. Paul's teaching style and training are associated with descriptions such as intense, physical and most importantly realistic and relevant.

The development of CAR was based on the requirements of close-range combat with a handgun, some of which are: the need for speed, optimum use of cover, ambidextrous ability, realistic weapon retention and performance under the negative effects of stress. In as much, the following key points are useful to understanding CAR:

The shooting system works in harmony with the body when under stress and is particularly reliable in close quarter situations.

The system was developed to improve marksmanship by focusing on natural visual focal points and gross motor movements.

The stability of the shooter is improved by creating a lower center of gravity and a secure base.

So what exactly is the CAR firing platform? There is no intent here to create a how-to guide for CAR; what follows is merely an outline of some of the features of the system. There are four basic positions in CAR; high, combat high, extended and apogee. These positions are used based upon the distance of the threat and the speed required to make deep hits. For example, high position (similar to SUL) is comparable in usage to the

high-ready of traditional stances, whereas apogee is a fully extended position more suitable for slower, precise aimed fire. Apogee looks similar to Weaver, but the weapon is canted inboard slightly. The basic four positions are mirror-image for right-hand fire and left-hand fire. There are physiological traits associated with using combinations of dominant vs. non-dominant eye and hand combinations and these traits are exploited well in CAR. Also, the use of sighted-fire and non-sighted fire are integrated into a system which allows the shooter to adjust methods based upon need and skill. One forearm is always directly behind the weapon, this accounts for the excellent recoil control and ability to shoot very fast. Because the weapon is always close to the torso, reload/malfunction drills have improved economy of motion. Weapon retention is outstanding. Nasty combinations of elbows and pistol punches which can develop real power and force are finally achievable. In CAR one hand merely offers extra support, and the firing hand can fire solo with solid close-range accuracy. This frees-up a hand for the shooter to open doors, key his radio mic, etc. CAR works well with longarms, OC spray, Taser and other related weapons; the benefits still apply and there can finally be commonality in training among diverse weapons. In as much, CAR can be called a system instead of a one-off specialty position.

CAR is about saving time. On the first range day the author dragged out the shot timer and pressed Paul for a demonstration. At two yards with a Glock .40 he achieved the following times from the high position with no warmup whatsoever: 5 shots to body of target (5" group) in 0.76 seconds, 2 shots to body/2 shots to head in 0.94 seconds and most impressive 5 shots to body/5 shots to head in 1.98 seconds! All shots were deep in the vital zones of their respective targets. This shooting is so fast that Paul has actually cracked the frame of his Glock 9mm below the ejection port by exceeding the weapon's ability to absorb stress in rapid fire. Such fast yet accurate shooting is a result of the recoil moving the weapon backwards in CAR instead of upwards as with traditional techniques. The significance of this speed shooting capability cannot be ignored considering the unreliability of pistol instant-stops. Also, because the gun is held closer to the body there is faster multiple target acquisition due to the fact the weapon has a shorter distance to travel between targets.

The biomechanics of CAR are solid, and after relatively little practice the shooter can feel the comfort of maintaining the various positions. This is different from the traditional stances which cannot be maintained for long due to muscular tension. This becomes the opening topic of discussion in CAR classes when the oldest student is asked to square off in CAR (weapons unloaded) against the youngest student in Weaver or Isoceles in a match to see who can hold his gun on the other the longest. The younger student's arms begin to drop after a few minutes much to the delight of the older student who is still comfortable. The lesson of working in harmony

with the shooter's body takes hold. Emphasis should be placed here on the difference between range application vs. tactical application. Traditional stances typically are offshoots of range-application shooting techniques. Many laugh at the idea that as recently as two generations ago police pistol training and qualification entailed shooting single-handed at bullseye targets 25 yards away, a purely range application mindset based on competitive marksmanship sports which are still thriving today. CAR was reverse-engineered to emphasize stability, speed and quite simply tactical/real life application. CAR shooting drills have built-in features such as moving, scanning, breathing and checking one's six. Typical shot patterns involve combinations of multiple shots to the body and head. All of these features have survival value and are worth training regardless of the stance.

CAR training is not currently open to civilians. This is merely a reflection of Sabre Tactical's mission to provide training primarily to law enforcement agencies. There are also aspects of CAR which are LE sensitive and not suitable for non-LE use. Sabre Tactical and Paul Castle have a well thought out system in CAR, one which excels particularly well at contact range, perhaps the most dangerous range considering the minimal reaction time for combatants. CAR enables stunningly simple yet effective defensive tactics and weapon retention and achieves true economy of motion throughout reloads, malfunction clearances and hand/side swaps. CAR is truly a multiple weapon platform which enables even smaller-stature shooters to handle heavy recoil weapons (such as shotguns) effectively. As such, it offers enhanced control with select fire weapons too. For shooting while strapped into a car seat the author has found no other platform which can keep up with CAR in terms of speed, accuracy or effectiveness. Even for entrenched "dinosaurs" out there who have no desire to consider a new stance or system, CAR will probably offer something useful to take home.

CAR is a radical approach to weapons handling which will benefit the patrol officer as well as the soldier and SWAT operator. CAR is a step in the evolution of weapons handling; a change away from a range mindset towards a tactical one. The mechanics are solid, the movements simple and easily learned, and the advantages worth a close look. CAR is versatile, undeniably fast, and here to stay.