

Firebase Phoenix

By Barrett Tillman

They call it Firebase Phoenix. It's the latest phase of McMillan Rifles' training program, begun two years ago in affiliation with William Graves' GPS sniper school. Now, with an increased demand for quality firearms training, Jack and Rick Furr have merged their talents with GPS and McMillan.

Jack and Rick are cousins who like to shoot. Lord, do they like to shoot. But beyond that, they enjoy teaching, and their background is extensive. Between them, they've logged more than 30 years of firearms instruction in four police agencies, Gunsite, Thunder Ranch, and elsewhere, including foreign climes.

Firebase Phoenix is more a state of mind than a location, though the venue is familiar to most Arizona shooters. The Cowtown facility northwest of Phoenix is well situated: barely 30 minutes from the airport, with a variety of training options ranging from indoors to the wide open spaces of The Great Southwest. And small wonder: Cowtown began as a western movie set before most of the recent patrons were born.

Other than sweeping vistas and the splendid isolation of the Sonoran Desert, Firebase Phoenix offers something different than other shooting schools: a unique philosophy.

Education, Excitement, Entertainment

Jack Furr notes the shifting emphasis on firearms training, "Twenty years ago, people went to shooting schools for entertainment, excitement and education, in that order. Today, most students seem interested in education, excitement and entertainment."

Toward that end, Firebase Phoenix avoids the traditional five-day course schedule with attendant high tuition. Rick says, "We're offering three-day courses to limit our clients' time away from home and work." That does not mean the Furr boys are cramming five pounds into a three-pound bag. Instead, they intend to optimize each student's range time by maintaining small classes that permit individual attention. ("No real-estate sales pitches and no license plate frames with our pictures on them; just state-of-the-art firearms training.")

The instructors are aware of customer dissatisfaction with some courses, resulting from the "weak link" students holding back the stronger shooters. Firebase Phoenix is committed to improving every student's shooting and tactical skills by avoiding rote procedures and arbitrary performance levels. As Rick explains, "If you're already up

to speed on the course, we won't have you stand there, just burning more ammo than everybody else. We'll say, 'Barrett, today you're going to shoot strong hand only. When you get that down pat, we'll switch you to your support hand.' That way everybody comes away with new skills and more knowledge."

Both Furs have considerable competition experience but they emphasize that they're teaching people to win gunfights – not trophies. However, Jack notes that action-shooting competitors take well to his brand of instruction, which emphasizes fire and



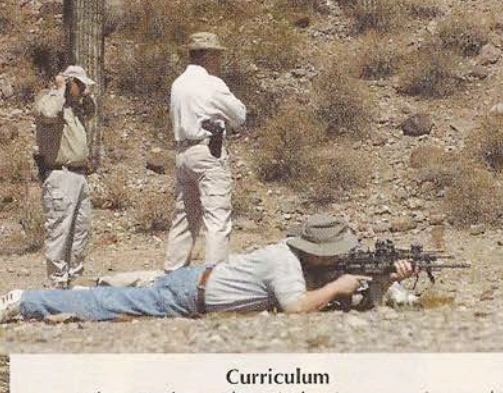
took a decent interval for lunch, and finished with pistols in the afternoon.

Jack and Rick know from experience that it's a rare occasion when everybody arrives with a zeroed rifle. "Usually we take at least half the

of the AUG but concedes that the bullpup requires more practice than the AR and other standard-configuration rifles. In a genuine class, transition from rifle or shotgun to sidearm would have been addressed as well.

The combat trilogy is usually expressed as "Move, shoot and communicate." The Furr philosophy is rearranged as "communicate, move and shoot" since it better reflects civilian priorities. But we had barely started pistol drills before we were moving laterally and backwards. Since most of us had BTDT more than a few times, the class progressed well.

Team tactics are built around communication, and we worked at it much of the afternoon. Operating in pairs, we reinforced the basics regarding mutual support, short "down" intervals, and crisp, concise terms when help was required.



movement. He grins when he says, "Bring knee and elbow pads," but he's not joking.

Sample Class The Blue

Press was invited to participate in a one-day, two-gun demonstration class in August, and it was an enjoyable experience. We shot carbines in the morning,



first day getting everybody on paper," Jack says, "but this is a good bunch." By mid-morning all the AR-15s and AUGs were printing somewhere near the desired POI, and from there we worked inside 25 yards.

"Continuity of fire" is the buzzword, but at Firebase Phoenix it means managing your ammo supply. Jack and

Bill Graves demonstrated the preferred methods of reloads – fast and tactical – while Rick addressed equipment differences. Rick's a big fan

Curriculum

When Firebase Phoenix begins operation early this year, the curriculum will include at least seven courses: basic, intermediate and advanced classes for pistol and carbine, plus "shotgun and other" depending upon client requirements. Currently the Furr boys do not expect to offer two-gun courses, though they're open to suggestions and changes in the market.

Asked about accepting credentials from other schools, Rick said that consideration will be given on an individual basis. "If you took Handgun 1 at Thunder Ranch, you're probably qualified to start with our Pistol 2 course, but we'll check every case just the same."

Firebase Phoenix aims to maximize the student's investments in time, tuition and training. With convenient schedules and affordable fees, located near a major transportation hub, it's a rare combination in keeping with McMillan's well-established reputation: a quality product at a fair price.

Course schedules and fees are available online at www.firebaseio.org.