

LASER SIGHTS: THE MYSTICAL RED (OR GREEN) DOT

Laser sights are not new. You could probably dig back through gun magazines printed twenty-five years ago and read about some type of new, “high-speed” laser sighting system.

What has changed over the last decade or so is the quality and shooter-conscious engineering that has gone into red (or green) laser gun sights.

The original designs were, for lack of a better term, ridiculous. Most of the older laser sights hung precariously from trigger guards or barrels and had wires protruding from them.

While they might have worked on a sterile test range, the original laser sights were hardly robust enough to be relied upon during the chaos of a real-life shooting situation.



For nearly thirty years at this writing I have been involved in professional firearms application and training. I have been paying close attention to the industry for three decades and witnessed many changes.

The pundits, who in the 1990's proclaimed the laser sight to be a fad, have largely been proven wrong.

However, with so many fresh, new shooters entering the fray, misunderstanding and misconception regarding laser aiming devices abound.

I find myself addressing the same laser mythology today that I did fifteen years ago. Hopefully, what follows will clear up some of the big misunderstandings.

Laser Considerations

The impetus for this review came from conversations I had a while back with several firearms instructors. I was at the Gunsite Academy for the annual XS Sights Tactical Roundtable and the subject of laser sights came up.

While much was said regarding the pros and cons of laser sighting systems, I will condense it down to a few of the most important points.

Misconceptions

The nearly universal opinion of the professional instructors was that the biggest problem with laser sights is the misconceptions that uninformed and/or inexperienced shooters have about them.

The biggest one of these is the “bullet guidance system” myth.



Although not necessarily advertised as such, far too many novice shooters have a misconceived notion that a laser sight somehow guarantees hits on target. They believe that, as long as the laser dot is on the target when they begin their trigger squeeze the bullet will hit it.

These folks believe this to be the case regardless of how badly they mash the trigger, anticipate the recoil, or commit any number of sins against good [shooting fundamentals](#).

Along the same lines, shooters can be lulled into believing that their laser-sighted pistol excuses them from regular practice or training. This is simply not the case.

There is also the misconception that a laser sight eliminates the need to practice with standard pistol sights. Laser sights are electronic devices. The batteries can die or the circuitry can go bad.

Yes, the laser sights made today are high quality and the power supplies are better than ten to fifteen years ago.

Are you willing to bet your life on the fact that the batteries won't be dead?

In bright daylight the red dot from a laser sight is difficult, if not impossible to locate quickly and make a shot. The laser aiming points of the new line of green lasers are easier to pick up in daylight, but the sun still trumps any laser.

Yes, I will grant you that the majority of defensive shootings take place in poor light. Majority does not mean all. You might just need to shoot in good light.



Benefits

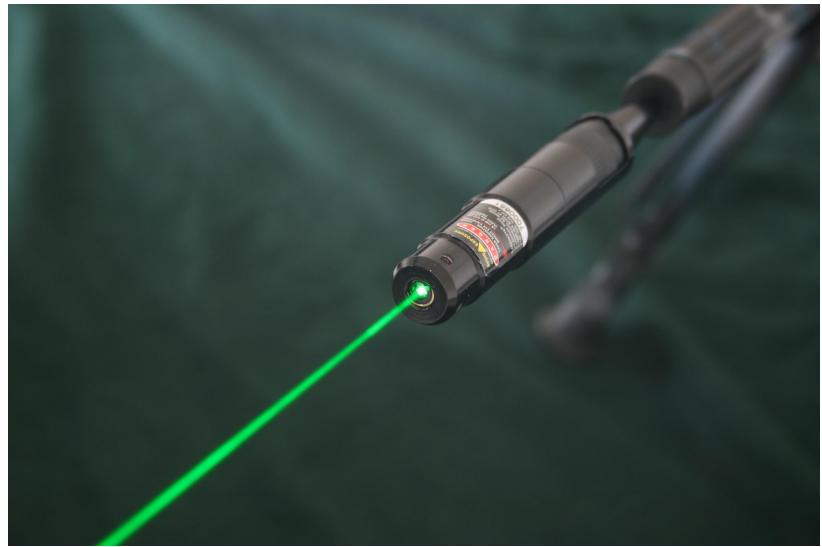
Regarding training, particularly that for the novice shooter, a laser sight provides an excellent indicator of muzzle direction. The student is reminded that anything the laser light touches is also covered by their muzzle. When practicing follow-up shots, the student can also see the importance of a solid grip for bringing the muzzle back down onto the target.

More advanced shooters find that the laser sight gives them a solid aiming point that facilitates rapid and repeated shot placement. During emergency shooting situations, the shooter can fire and get solid hits even if they cannot bring their sights up to eye level.

Along the same vein, gunfights are fast, stressful, and, as often as not, require the shooter to make shots from awkward positions. This includes shooting from around cover or while moving.

Those who train with a laser sighted firearm find that they are able to achieve solid hits on targets even though the shooting situation is less than ideal. The key words in that last sentence are "those who train". No sight system eliminates the need to practice.

Lastly, we will consider poor light shooting situations. Even with a luminous Tritium filled front sight,



acquiring a practical sight picture in bad light is difficult. This is where the laser sight truly shines (no pun intended). The red (or green) laser dot lights up like Christmas inside buildings and under the heavy shadows of street lamps giving the shooter an immediate sight picture.

The Wrap

While I have never been “anti-laser”, I have been a skeptic. My first reason for skepticism was the fragile, precarious way laser sights were mounted and the second cause was the rampant misunderstanding of laser sights by the general public.

As long as the shooter understands that lasers are not bullet guidance systems and that practice and training are still necessary, I say go for it. Until next time we are together, shoot straight and shoot safe.

