

Pursuits that end in gunfire ... Training to make the transition

The Street Survival Newsline with Calibre Press

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Pursuits ending in gun fire are not exactly a new trend, but now that so many of them are captured on video, this creates additional training opportunities. How many pursuits end in an armed confrontation? Even one is enough for law enforcement to address the issue. After reviewing numerous incidents, I have to wonder... are we adequately preparing ourselves to transition from a pursuit to a gun fight?

How often, at the conclusion of a pursuit, do you witness an officer immediately abandon a cover position, sprint to the door of the suspect's car and try to "persuade" the occupant(s) to exit the vehicle? What are the consequences of running up to the car vs. the consequences of staying behind cover? What are the safest tactics to employ at the conclusion of a pursuit, both physically and verbally? Whether you're a crimefighter, a trainer, or both, consider the following...

Practice vs. Reality

When practicing "*felony stops*" at the academy and at the in-service level, the exercise usually includes a scenario which is a well-planned and controlled method of extracting and securing all occupants from the vehicle. Many agencies have a policy on how to place patrol cars, what to say, how to say it and even who delivers the verbal direction.

In the real world, pursuit termination is rarely as pretty as it was in training. Are we training to "expect the unexpected" at the end of our pursuit? What if the occupant(s) are not in control or not the least bit interested in participating in an officer-controlled felony stop? What happens when the occupant(s) of the suspect vehicle take control of the stop? Do we train for all the options real life offers us?

There are **three basic responses** an officer will find in suspects at the end of a pursuit. They will **fight** (either physically or ballistically), they will **flee on foot** or they will **submit**. (Sound familiar?)

Recently I viewed a videotaped pursuit which ended with the suspect losing control of his vehicle, exiting quickly, taking a shooting posture and charging the officer's car while shooting as he closed the gap. In this video the officer had very little time to respond to the armed and actively shooting suspect. What would you see yourself doing in this type of situation? Exiting the kill zone as soon as possible would certainly be a top priority, aggressive deliverance of deadly force would certainly be another; both of which this particular officer accomplished.

I recall seeing another officer-involved shooting video at the end of a pursuit where the armed suspect lay-in-wait in the driver's seat for the officers to approach. Unfortunately for the violator, the officer was equipped with a patrol rifle, so as the suspect rose up from his reclined seat to take aim at the officer, the suspect's cover and concealment was easily defeated and the officer was unharmed.

Video tapes are extremely useful in the training environment; Calibre Press uses them extensively in the [Street Survival Seminar](#). Remember, when using video it's important to include examples (whether on video or in participatory simulation) of *desired response* by officers, never just allow the viewers to

passively just watch “TV.”

We need to see and practice examples of proper performance and realistic options to use at the conclusion of a pursuit. This can assist in removing that “over-committed attitude” during and at the end of a pursuit. We also need to consider the following:

Vehicle Placement: Consider the reactionary gap relative to the suspect vehicle. As you gauge your distances throughout the pursuit, consider backing off if you are too close. Disengagement is always an acceptable tactic, especially at the end of a pursuit. Back up officers and secondary vehicles have to be cognizant of their placement as well. (Even during traffic stops, parking directly behind the primary patrol car leaves no avenue for escape for the primary vehicle.) The problem is that **precision driving** training tends to be as compartmentalized as our firearms and defensive tactics training, or in many agencies, it's non-existent.

Weapons: One thing the abundance of pursuit videos has made apparent is the obvious variety of weapons officers use at the conclusion of chases when a suspect or suspects choose to use deadly force. Everything from patrol rifles, shotguns, even turning a patrol car into a several thousand pound projectile has been used! The important thing is to know is if your weapon will penetrate the cover of your assailant. Consider all options and know your capabilities of reaching out and touching your adversary.

Conversely, know the limitations of your vehicle as a source of cover. Learn where the best positions are in and around *your* type of patrol vehicle to gain the advantage of a secure cover position

Disciplined Approach: Cops tend to “rush in,” and no where is this more common (and more difficult *not to do*) that at the end of a pursuit. We need to effectively control ourselves and our approach when those vehicles come to a halt; this can be done with tactical breathing, visualization exercises and of course, *training*.

We have to ask ourselves this: am I truly ready to respond in these types of situations? What is the safest thing to do based upon how much perceived time I have? Remember, if you don't train and condition yourself do something, then you can plan on doing *just about anything.....but it may not be the right thing*.

About the author: Officer Lou Ann Hamblin currently works in the patrol division of the Van Buren Township Police Department in Michigan as a field training officer. She holds a master's degree in Human Performance Technology and Instructional Design from University of Michigan, is a certified firearms and defensive tactics instructor in a variety of disciplines, and specializes in training and motivating female officers. She is a Team One Network adjunct instructor and Master Pistol Instructor, and currently serves on advisory boards for [The Police Marksman](#), [PoliceOne.com](#) and is a consultant and presenter with the Calibre Press [Street Survival Seminar for Women](#). Lou Ann can be reached at louannblackwidow@aol.com