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LET'S GO TO TASER SCHOOL

Newest Taser "electro muscular disruption" device—it's the future of law enforcement weaponry!

By Ralph Mroz

The new Advanced Taser M26 has gotten a lot of publicity lately, so everyone reading this probably has some idea of what it's all about—and some questions, too. To set a foundation, let me first provide the basic information.

STUN GUNS, TASERS, BETTER TASERS

The Advanced Taser M26 is a ballistic, conducted energy weapon. Upon firing, compressed nitrogen projects two probes, a distance of 15 or 21 feet (depending on cartridge), at a speed of 180 feet per second. The probes are connected by thin insulated wire back to the M26, which resembles a handgun equipped with a laser sight. (It is, by design, aimed and operated very much like a standard sidearm for ease of use under stress.) Upon pulling the trigger, the probes are fired and a five-second cycle of electrical output is initiated (this cycle can be repeated by pulling the trigger again, or truncated by operating the ambidextrous safety lever on the side of the gun—which operates just like the de-cocker on

Smith & Wesson semiautos.)

The 26-watt M26 is an updated, more powerful version of the older Air Taser 34000, a 7-watt unit. The difference between the older low-wattage technologies and the M26 is more than just the power—it's the effect they have. Five- to 15-watt taser technologies operate on the sensory nervous system—that is, they "jam" the nervous system with electrical noise, which is overwhelming and painful to most people. In the field they were about 86% effective. Which means that on about 14% of the customers we deal with, they weren't. In fact, it became a bit of a game in various testosterone circles (SpecWar units and so on) to be able to overcome the

effects of these units. The M26, however, is an electro-muscular disruption (EMD) device. EMD units, operating in the 16-26 watt range, not only disorient and cause pain, they override the central nervous system and cause uncontrollable contractions of muscle tissue (it does hurt, let me assure you!).

Neither of the aforementioned ballistic units should be confused with stun guns, which are low-wattage, non-ballistic units in which contact must be made with the assailant. Stun guns conduct their low energy only between the approximately two-inches-apart electrodes on the stun unit, while ballistic Tasers conduct the energy between the generally 1-3 feet separated probes.

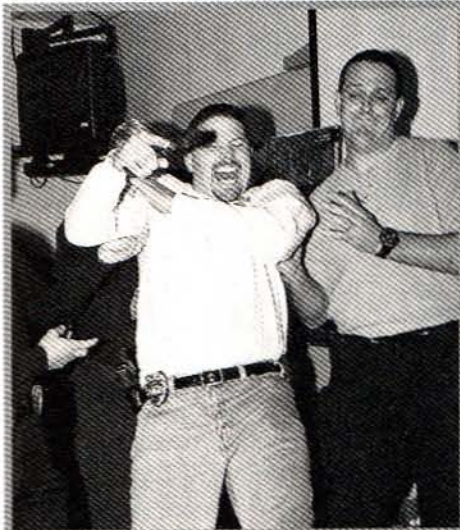
Stun guns are even less effective than low-wattage tasers. (Just to confuse things a little more, Air Tasers can be used as stun guns without their ballistic cartridges in place, but this is not their primary use.)

Bottom line: no one to date has been able to fight through the effects of an M26, although some mighty tough fellas have spent years trying



1) A police officer takes aim with the Advanced Taser M26. The unit operates very much like a pistol. 2) Instructor Trainer Jay Kehoe cuts the dozens of leads attached to the probes stuck in the practice dummy. 3) This practice dummy took a lot of hits—these are only some of the shots instructor-students took during this class.





Yes—it works! The object was for the officer playing the perp to raise his dummy gun and point it at the Taser operator. No can do! Note that assisting officers can indeed hold onto the shocked subject with no ill effects. On the street, a person being tased can be handcuffed while being shocked.

to! As of year end, a conservatively estimated 10,000 people have been tased in genuine law enforcement encounters and the success rate is over 94% (well over the success rate of any firearm). The few non-effective incidents were due, not to the individual being able to sustain the "hit," but due to probe misses, thick clothing, operator

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errors, low batteries, and other "Murphy" factors.

To this incredible effective-
(Please turn to page 78)

TASER INSTRUCTOR SCHOOL

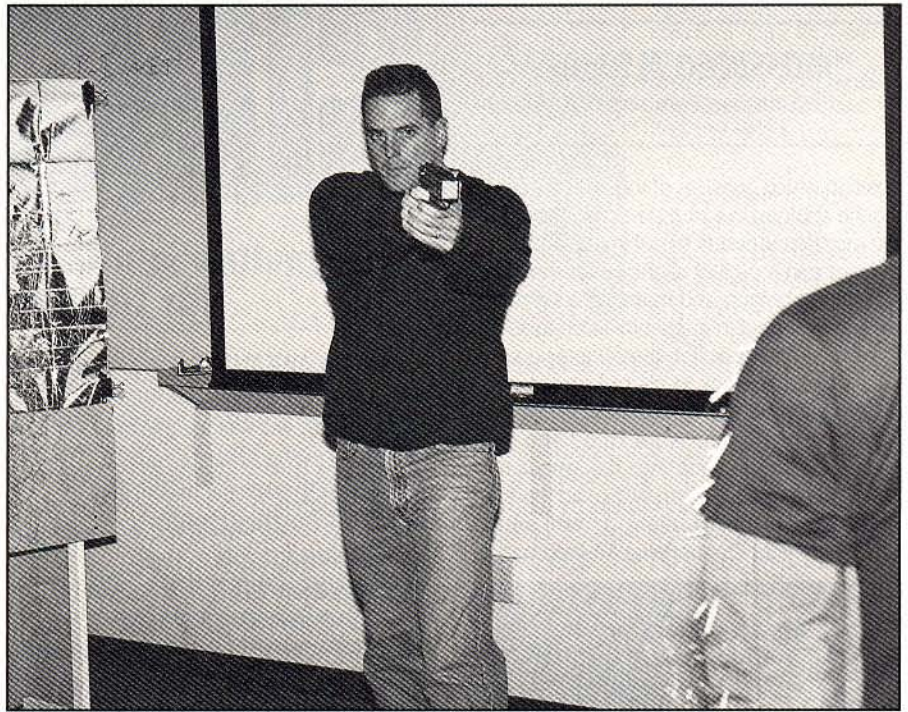
Continued from page 13

ness, add in the facts that the M26 runs on standard AA alkaline or Nickel metal Hydride (NiMH) rechargeable batteries, cost less than most standard duty sidearms, it is field proven, completely non-injurious, can't injure bystanders, won't damage buildings or property, works through most body armor, and requires no clean-up or decon (like aerosol sprays), and the M26 sounds like a neat tool, doesn't it?

SEE THE FUTURE

It is, in fact, the closest thing we have to a phaser set to stun. Actually, except for the wires, it is a phaser set to stun. It is the future of law enforcement weaponry, in my opinion. IMO, it will have an even greater lasting effect on law enforcement use of force than OC did, and I suspect it will supplant the firearm for many encounters—not because it's non-lethal, but because it's so effective! A bullet from a firearm may or may not have any effect on you, and the chances are that the first one won't (even .45s, you 1911 bigots!) But a hit from the M26 is 94% likely to stop you IMMEDIATELY! Them's better chances than from any sidearm! Given a lethal force encounter in which the M26 was viable (I had a clear shot at the perp, and he was within the M26's range) I would bet my life on the effectiveness of the M26 before any handgun caliber round.

As of year-end 2002, 1888 agencies and over 30,000 officers have adopted the Advanced Taser M26. Instructor training is provided by Taser International at various times and locations (check their excellently laid out and thoroughly informative web site for details). I recently had the pleasure of attending one sponsored by Connecticut POST and taught by Lt. Jay Kehoe of the Glastonbury, CT PD (it was a pleasure except for the part about taking a hit from the M26). This was one of the most professionally developed classes I've ever attended in the law enforcement area. The material (both the presentation material and the written manual) was thorough and extremely well organized. The presentation ran off CD-ROM—which is available to all instructors as part of the package—and included many interesting video clips of actual uses. This was one example of the ways in which Taser International, as a high-tech company, uses technology itself. Also, new information is posted to their website quickly, new instructor and user materials are available there for download, and the company keeps in reg-



What the business end of the M26 looks like. This officer is firing into a practice dummy. A metallic taser-specific target is on the stand behind him.

ular touch with its instructors via email.

The student course on which the Instructor course is based starts with a safety overview. Essentially, Taser International says to treat a Taser just like you would a real gun. Initial segments then provide an overview of Taser technology and the Taser units themselves. Several videos are shown of actual uses, and tactical and policy considerations are discussed. A discussion of how EMD devices work—and why they're safe—is provided with field results presented. Medical findings are displayed and comparisons to other taser and stun technologies made. The results of agency tests are presented and the cost of an "average" officer-involved shooting (with a firearm) is calculated. Of course, the mechanics, manual of arms and use protocol for the M26 is explained, too. There is an extensive discussion of batteries and the cartridge mechanism.

Students get to fire probes into a special (conductive) target to get the feel of the M26 and their technique with the tool is developed. Maintenance and maintenance procedures are reviewed and relevant legal cases presented. (Note here: the trend with the courts, it seems, is that sooner or later agencies are going to have to explain why the non-lethal, non-injurious Taser was not deployed if it could have been.) Contingencies are covered, and a test is given.

Then the fun begins. Lt. Kehoe put us through simulated tactical scenarios in which we got to use the M26 and become familiar with its manual of arms under a bit

of stress. Like any tool, it does require training and repetitions. Finally, we all got to take a hit from the M26, and it's an experience we'll not forget.

IT'S OBVIOUS

Someday soon we're all going to be carrying a Taser. It's just too good a tool: it's cheap, extremely effective, does no harm, and the courts will mandate it. The M26 spent some time in development, and it's clear that lots of LE input went into the effort. It was designed to take advantage of the time that an officer already has in firearms training by operating and pointing like a pistol. Yet it's available in bright colors to differentiate it visually from a service pistol. There is a dataport in the unit which records each use, and thus provide proof against excessive or abusive use by officers. Each cartridge is individually encoded with a unique serial number for control and documentation. When a cartridge is fired, up to 40 small confetti-like ID tags are released with the cartridge's serial number on it. Half of these tags are brightly colored so that they can be found, and half are transparent, so the bad guys can't mess with the evidence. Again—more evidence that it happened the way you said it did. Finally, each M26 comes with an internal laser aiming device in addition to its fixed sights.

If you have not tried out an Advanced Taser M26 yet, you really owe it to yourself and your agency to do so. It is the future!