

# Solent Shoot Out

by

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The sun burns down on the dirt street of the two-bit frontier town. Out of the deep shadows cast by the eaves of the ramshackle buildings on each side emerge two men—gunmen. Hands at their side, handy to their six-shooters, their narrowed eyes drilling into each other, probing for weaknesses, the two desperadoes slowly approach each other from opposite sides of the empty street.

Suddenly the high noon silence explodes into a blur of action and noise. Then, when the smoke and dust settle, there is only one gunman. The other is worm meat.

Match racing is just a little bit like that. In a match race there is no second, only defeat. Before the match properly begins there is this deathly pas de deux with each party probing and sizing the other. Then in a spurt of activity that is often too fast to follow, one somehow outmanoeuvres and so masters the other.

Liken the gunman's brain to the match race helmsman, his piercing eyes to the tactician, his hands poised near his guns to the crew waiting by winches and lines to provide instant firepower.

Just as illstarred gunmen have paid dearly for finger trouble thumbs catching in holsters bullets through their own toes instead of through the enemy so crews have been known to lose matches by bungling manoeuvres.

Match racing is the most unforgiving form of yacht racing and hence the most tense. We know of at least one tactician who is sometimes sick and always unable to make small talk on the way out to the starting line. Errors, whether of tactics, timing or handling cannot be hidden within a fleet and can hardly ever be remedied. And the nice thing is, from the spectator's point of view, that it is always easier from the sidelines.

Carrying the Western simile further, note that the world's best match racers presently come from California. Just about the fastest gun anywhere is Deadeye Dick Deaver. A few weeks back, at the biggest shoot out of them all, the Congressional Cup at the Long Beach corral, Deaver was winged by his old pardner Dennis Durgan, yet he had already won this twice before and last summer was the only one to walk away completely unscathed from the French set-to at La Rochelle.