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Pallak at home on the range

MIDDLETOWN: The longtime Monroe resident is competitive in a sport that doesn't attract many women.

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Sue Pallak sighted down the barrel of her .22 caliber Hammerli pistol, focusing on a bull's-eye target 50 feet away.

The scene was a pistol match held two weeks ago by the Middletown Pistol and Rifle Association. Pallak was competing against four other club members – all men.

Pallak and the others had already fired 20 rounds each. Ten rounds remained. Pallak and company were waiting for the signal to resume firing.

Pallak, the 2001 New York State Indoor Conventional Pistol women's champion, was in that frame of mind where "you are standing there with a blank mind," she said. "It's very easy for your mind to jump to your family or to your job. And you don't want that to happen."

Pallak remained locked in when the target switched into shooting position. She fired five rounds in the blink of an eye. Five more rounds followed moments later.

She finished tied for second with 266 points out of a possible 300. Her fiancé, John Paris, came in first with 291 points.

Pallak, 48, shrugged off her performance. A longtime Monroe resident, she'd been busy in recent weeks preparing to relocate to Rifton. She had little practice time.

"I shot a 266, which is lower than the average for my (expert) classification," she said, "which starts at 90 percent of 270 (out of 300)."

Pallak, an accountant, is among the MPRA's best pistol shooters. She also is the only woman who competes in club matches. Seven of the club's 168 members are women.

The sport doesn't attract many women, according to Pallak, who also competes at the Empire State Games, in the Orange and Ulster County pistol leagues and out-of-state tournaments. She estimated "less than 10 women" competed in the state indoor championship in March. She said about 10 women competed in the Orange County Pistol League's 2000-01 season.

She is the OCPL president.

"I think a lot of women get a firearm because they want to have one for personal protection," she said. "So they come, they learn how to handle it, and that's as far as their interests go."

Pallak has been competing since 1993, around the time she joined the MPRA.

"If a woman starts to come around, I think she will find that other shooters, both male and female, are very supportive," Pallak said. "There is no talking down because of being a woman."