

## **How to become a combat archer**

To become a combat archer, you must first pass a weapon/shield armored combat authorization. The first step is to get all the equipment you need. You will need to buy, make or borrow a complete set up armor that will pass inspection. You will also need a weapon (probably sword) and a shield. Your weapon must have a thrusting tip, because thrusting is a required part of the authorization.

The next steps are to study the rules and practice fighting. Depending on your authorization marshal, the questioning could be a simple “have you read the rules?” or a complete interrogation.

For most people, 4-8 practices with someone who is experienced at teaching should be enough to get you ready to pass the authorization. You do not need a high level of skill to pass the authorization; it is mostly demonstrating that you are safe to yourself and your opponent. You should be able to throw a good onside and offside blow to the head, onside blow to the leg and both face and body thrusts. You should also be able to make a good, quick decision about whether a blow that hit you was good or not. You need to be able to fight on your knees and with your off hand. Finally, you should show some ability at defense and not react poorly when your authorization partner gets very aggressive.

For the combat archery authorization, the hardest part is the question and answer period. Make sure you read the rules thoroughly. You will need a full set of gear that passes inspection. Get everything inspected before the day of your authorization attempt. The more practice in armor you get shooting the bow or crossbow you will use the better. With a handbow, you need to make sure the string will not catch on any of your armor and the APD (for fiberglass arrows) will not snag on a gauntlet cuff. During the authorization, the main issue is once again safety. Do not have any of your shoots go off the field, towards spectators or hit marshals. Make sure you know how to react with a bow/crossbow in your hand when a sword and shield opponent rushes you.

## **Overview of combat archery weapons and ammunition**

Both handbows and crossbows are broken into two categories: light and heavy. A light handbow has a draw weight of at least 20# and at most 30# at 28” of draw. A heavy handbow can have a draw weight of up to 50#. A light crossbow has an inch-pound rating of at least 400 and at most 600. A heavy crossbow has an inch-pound rating of at most 1000. To determine the inch-pound rating for a crossbow, multiply the pull weight of the crossbow when cocked by the travel distance of the string from rest to cocked (NOT the distance from the front of the bow to the cocked position as with a handbow). Heavy handbows and crossbows must be marked with a 4” band of red tape on the upper limb or right prod.

No metal may be used in the construction of any combat archery ammunition. For all arrows, the maximum draw length is 28". Measure from the back of the head to the base of the nock. The color yellow may not be used because it is reserved for siege ammunition. Your name and kingdom must be on a label on all ammunition. It is a good idea to have your local group name on the label as well.

Heavy ammo may be used by both light and heavy weapons. The three types of heavy ammunition are siloflex, single tennis ball, and Fellwalker style fiberglass shaft (heavy crossbow only). Siloflex arrows and bolts have three possible heads: tennis ball, rubber stopper with foam and Balder blunts. For a rubber stopper head, a size 6.5 rubber stopper is inserted into the siloflex at least 1/2 inch and secured. Between 1/2" and 1 1/4" of foam is put in front of the stopper. Finally, a side wrap of foam must cover the front foam and at least 1/2" of the stopper with a thickness of 1/8" (usually 2 layers of craft foam).

When used on siloflex shafts, Balder blunts have the support structure cut off so they can slide over the siloflex. Foam must be added to the front of the Balder blunt when used on siloflex.

Single tennis balls must not be yellow. Dyes can be used to change the color, but they cannot be covered with tape. They must also weigh less than three ounces.

The Fellwalker style of fiberglass-shafted ammunition is only allowed on heavy crossbows. The 1 1/4" diameter UHMW head must have at least a 1" hole to accept the shaft, and 1" of plastic left in front of the shaft. It must have between 1" and 1 1/4" of foam in front of the head, and 1/8" thickness of foam sidewrap covering from the front of the foam to at least 1/2" over the UHMW head. The tail on a Fellwalker bolt must be a UHMW disk 1 1/4" diameter with at least a 1/4" hole to accept the shaft and at least 1/4" of UHMW in front of the shaft.

Light ammo may only be used in light handbows and crossbows. Light ammunition consists of fiberglass shafts with two possible heads and two possible APDs. For the head, the allowed constructions are Balder blunts or UHMW heads. The fiberglass shaft must be covered with tape from behind the head to the front of the APD.

Balder blunts must be securely attached, and no other foam is necessary.

UHMW heads must be 1 1/4" diameter, have at least a 1/2" hole to accept the shaft, and have at least 1/2" of head left in front of the shaft. Between 1/2" and 1 1/4" of foam must be put in front of the head. A sidewrap of 1/8" thick foam (usually two layers of craft foam) must be added to cover from the front of the foam to over 1/2" of the head.

For the APD, there are two possibilities. The first is an Asgard APD. It has an integrated nock. It can be attached via either tape or glue.

The other possible APD is a short length of siloflex. It needs to be securely taped on. The nock cannot project back more than 1/2" from the back of the APD.

## **Other combat archery rules**

Combat archers must wear full armor, with the exception of their hands. They may use half gauntlets for both hands. If using a handbow, it is recommended that the hand holding the bow has a full gauntlet. For the Kingdom of Northshield, your hand must be fully covered if you are using a thrown weapon.

All ammunition must be inspected before every shot. Fiberglass shafted ammo must be inspected by a marshal before every shot. Siloflex and tennis ball ammo may be inspected once by a marshal and re-inspected before subsequent shots by the archer (if allowed by local rules). Any ammo that falls out of a quiver and on the ground must be re-inspected as if fired.

Archers may carry backup weapons. When switching to a backup weapon, the bow/crossbow must be safely disposed of. Both hands must have full armor coverage after switching to a backup weapon.

## **Combat archery at various wars**

Combat archery rules can vary from place to place. Here is a brief overview of some of the rule changes for Pennsic, Gulf Wars and Estrella. These rules are based on the latest information I can find, and may change before the next time the event is held.

One of the biggest changes at Pennsic is the stricter rotation standard for heads and APDs on fiberglass-shafted arrows. Only about 1/8" of rotation is allowed. If you are using UHMW heads with under drilled holes, your heads should be fine. For APDs, if you are using a glued on APD any rotation means the glue joint has failed and the ammo should not pass. If you are using taped on APDs or heads that are not pressure fitted, make sure the tape is secure and check and re-tape any that are loose before getting equipment inspected at Pennsic. Another change at Pennsic is that no wood is allowed. This means no wooden nocks in siloflex arrows and no real cork dirt barriers in the back of siloflex arrows or bolts. Single tennis ball ammo is not allowed for combat archery (it is still allowed for siege). Fellwalker bolts are not allowed. Finally, no gleaning is allowed. This means that siloflex arrows and bolts cannot be picked up, re-inspected by the archer and used again.

The biggest change at Gulf Wars is some additional limits on crossbows. Light crossbows may only have a maximum draw weight of 75#, in addition to the 600 inch-pound limit. Heavy crossbows have a limit of 90# and 800 inch-pounds, instead of the 1000 inch-pound limit in the society rules. Fellwalker bolts are allowed, but can only be used by light crossbows (600 inch-pound and 75# limits). The minimum range you can shoot someone is ten feet, rather than the society minimum of "clear the bow".

Estrella limits the amount of ammo combat archers may take on the field. Unless otherwise specified for a specific battle, you are limit to 24. Crossbows with fiberglass rod prods and homemade fiberglass prods (cut down from fiberglass handbows, also called Unredy crossbows) are prohibited. Estrella also limits the allowed ammunition. Only siloflex with rubber stopper, siloflex with a tennis ball head and fiberglass with the larger 2" UHMW plastic head (Fellwalker style) are allowed for both handbows and crossbows.

## **Some inspection guidelines**

All combat archers should inspect their own equipment before presenting it to a marshal for inspection. This helps make things quicker and easier for the marshal, and allows you to spot and fix problems.

When inspecting a handbow for use on the combat archery field, pay particular attention to the string. Shooting a bow while wearing armor can cause the string to rub on leather, metal or plastic, which can greatly shorten the life of the string. Also check that there are no structural issues with the bow.

Crossbows should have the trigger mechanism checked, to make sure that it will not discharge accidentally. The prod and stock should be checked for structural issues. The string should also be inspected for signs of wear.

For all ammunition, make sure it is constructed according to specifications. For handbow ammunition, make sure it cannot be drawn more than 28" (measure from back of the head to base of the nock). Make sure the correct amount of foam is used, including sidewraps if required. Check that the heads and APDs (for fiberglass) are securely attached. Check that the head has sufficient give, and that it springs back when released. For fiberglass-shafted ammunition, flex the fiberglass and make sure it is structurally sound.