

— It's All In The Timing —

BY ROBIN TAYLOR, USPSA STAFF

Call it a quest. A “wild hair.” One of our regular contributors was working on an article for another publication (about the value of training on steel targets), and needed a really spectacular photo showing what happens when a bullet hits steel. Showing a plate falling over isn't exactly exciting, but what about the bullet? If you could catch it, THAT would be cool.

Patrick Kelley of Moses Lake, Wash., sends us these photos from his ongoing effort to catch a bullet at the moment the bullet strikes a steel plate. He's looking for that moment when the bullet becomes plastic, but hasn't yet blown to smithereens. At press time he hadn't got there yet, but these

images of jacket splatter were too spectacular to pass up.

Yes, there are high-speed cameras that can do this easily, but how do you get that image *without* the many thousands of dollars for fancy camera gear?

Since a person can't easily build a shutter that will open and close in, say, 1/1,000,000 of a second, Kelley opted to leave the shutter open, and catch his image by timing the *flash*. He lacked any of the fancy gear normally used for this kind of thing, but he had a lot of older camera gear and a lot of mechanical aptitude. The resulting setup (complete with exposed wiring) would make any fan of “Junkyard Wars” proud.

Using a jury-rigged sound-activation unit hardwired into a flash, Kelley set up his camera (a Canon 20D) in a darkened indoor range. He left just enough light in the background to make out the silhouette of the target, aligned his sights on a lighter part of the background, and slid the gun sideways onto the target.

“Bang!”

Kelley would fire a shot (tripping the flash), and when his vision recovered, walk over to the camera. Depending on what the camera saw, he would adjust his distance to the target and try again. Since sound is relatively slow (compared to bullets or light) adjusting the distance to the target and/or sound sensor changes the timing of the flash relative to impact.

After a number of empty frames, and frames showing the plate falling, he hit upon these.

The bullet, by the way, is a Speer 180-grain .40, as loaded into CCI Blazer ammunition.

His challenge now is to somehow shorten the flash du-

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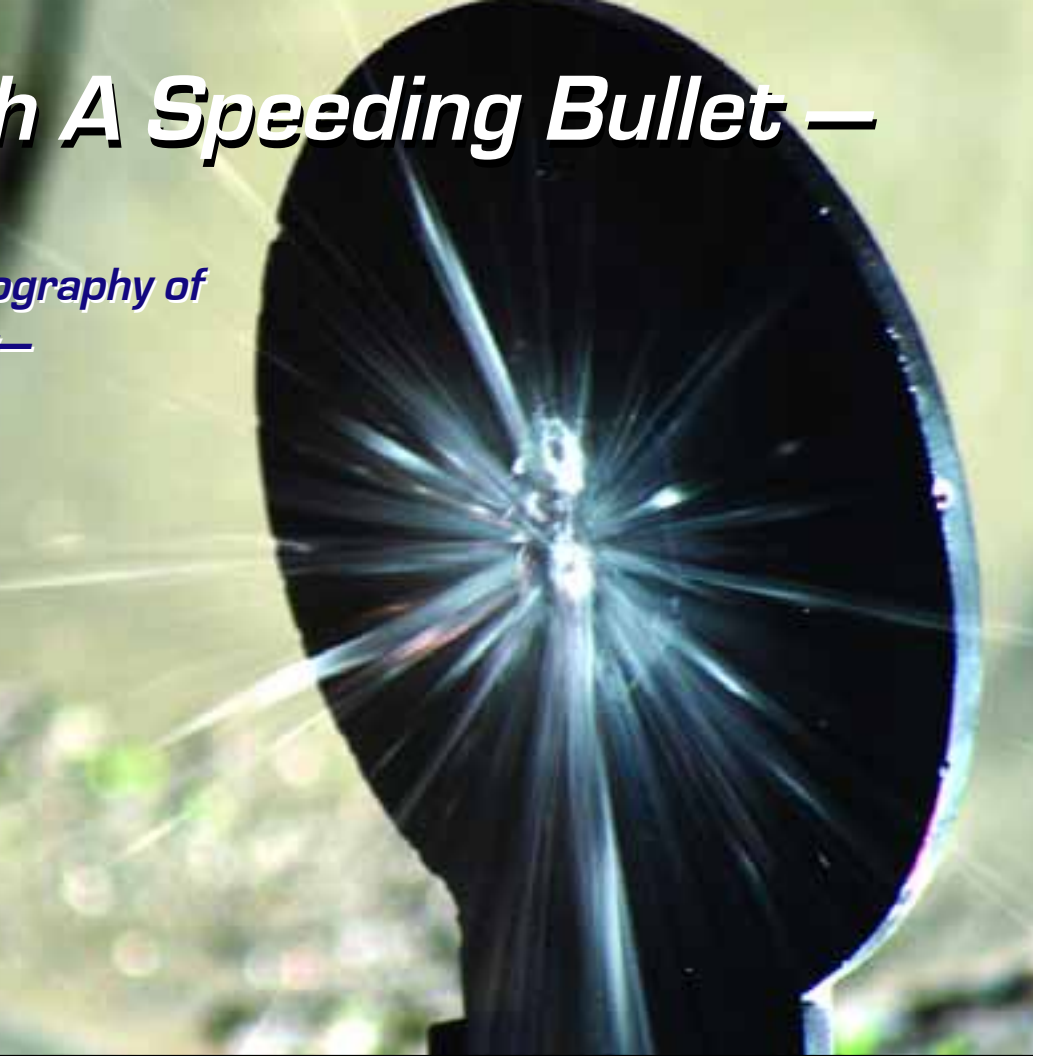
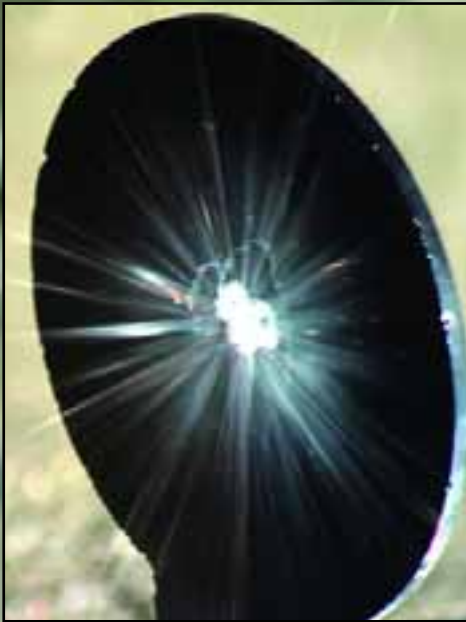
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—To Catch A Speeding Bullet—

—The Surprising Photography of
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ration. We look forward to seeing how that works out. Watch for more of his work here in *Front Sight!*



Another magnificent splatter. Note the rainbow effects as the copper jacket turns to shrapnel.

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