

THERE IS AN UNDISPUTED AIR OF EXCITEMENT OF JUST BEING AT THE NATIONALS... AN UNINVOLVED OBSERVER COULD CERTAINLY ENJOY THE PEOPLE-WATCHING AS SHOOTERS DRESSED IN COLORFUL VESTS, HATS AND SHOOTING SHIRTS ADVERTISE SHOOTING CLUBS FROM DISTANT PLACES OR FAVORITE GUNS AND ACCESSORIES.

BELOW L TO R: ED, BRIAN AND TOM THOMPSON. FOR TOM AND BRIAN THIS WAS THEIR FIRST NATIONALS.

Sitting in the food service pavilion at the Nationals in San Antonio on Saturday afternoon, my two brothers Brian and Ed and our friend Dick Vance, are sharing opinions with me on the dynamics that make this big shoot add up to a 'total greater than the sum of its parts'. It's my first trip to the big show and I can't understand why it is so much fun – beyond being another big shoot. The Nationals is an experience that occurs on so many different levels. Like a finely cut gem, it has several facets.

There is an undisputed air of excitement of just being there. I have to believe that anybody might come under the spell of the intoxicating atmosphere. An uninvolved observer could certainly enjoy the people-watching as shooters dressed in colorful vests, hats and shooting shirts advertise shooting clubs from distant places or favorite guns and accessories. The lively chatter of friends greeting friends over lunch leads one to conclude that this is a warm and

embracing crowd – there are no strangers here.

A walk down vendors' row is an exciting trip in more ways than one. Just looking at the latest in guns and gear can draw you in. But vendors' row is also a place where you meet your friends. Anybody who is not shooting or eating is usually browsing the trade show, looking for something new. Merchandise purchased here is not only practical, it also serves as a souvenir of the shoot.

Being there in San Antonio, in the gentle warmth of the South, is a thrill in its own right. The visit is not complete without a trip into town for a look at the Alamo and dinner along the River Walk. The city is the second fastest growing metropolis in the USA, yet for all its sprawl, it is an easy city to get around in. With its friendly demeanor, it feels like a small town. San Antonio has a perpetually festive atmosphere with roving Mariachis, colorful restaurants and outdoor markets.

National

TOM THOMPSON REVIEWS HIS FIRST TRIP TO THE NATIONALS IN SAN ANTONIO

Newbies



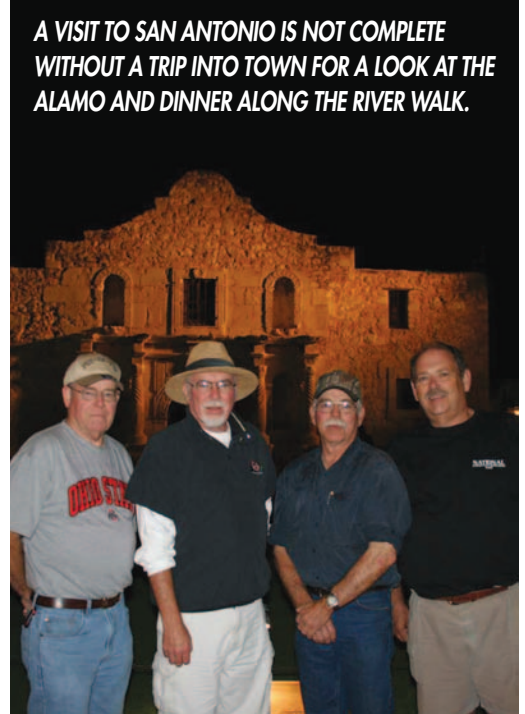
Then there is the shoot itself. The Main Event was three hundred birds shot over four days of seventy-five birds a day. Each course was identified by a color designation. More side events are offered than one can hope to shoot. This being my first trip to the rodeo, I think I tried to take on too much on some days. But it is hard to pass up such great shooting opportunities.

In addition to the Main Event, I shot FITASC, the 100 bird K-Kup and the pump gun event. Except for the FITASC, all four of us shot the same events, plus brother Brian took on the challenge of all three sub-gauges. Dick also shot the competition 5-Stand. The dawn to dusk shooting takes a toll on us old guys. Brian, who was also attending his first Nationals, shot eight hundred birds in competitions. Dick and I shot six hundred, and Ed, who kept all the rest of us in place and on time, shot five hundred.

The surprising thing about the targets was that they were all great presentations. There were plenty of speed changes and transitioning targets. With lots

of curl and twist, the course setters did not rely on distance to beat us. In four days, over six hundred birds, I only choked tighter than improved cylinder three times. There was one big ugly tower station on the K-Kup course, but others on my squad hit half of them while I 'O'-fered it. I rated the birds at the Nationals as easier than expected and very fair.

From day one, the buzz at the shoot was that the Green course of the Main Event was the 'tough' one and that Yellow was the easiest of



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ALWAYS NICE TO HAVE A MEMENTO.



PUMP GUN COURSE.



WHEN AT HEADQUARTERS, A VISIT TO THE HALL OF FAME IS WELL WORTHWHILE.

the four courses. I learned long ago to pay little heed to such talk, and just take the birds one by one

as they come. My scores ran completely contrary to conventional wisdom. My best

score came on Green while Yellow 'ate my lunch'. The variable factor to me was more about how tired I

was when I shot a particular course.

My best score came on Sunday's pump gun event when I scored an 86 and tied Brian for second place in B class. Dick shot ahead of me on that course, and he set a blistering pace, losing only five targets, posting high score (95) to win the event and title "National Pump Gun Champion".

As we began our 1350 mile drive back to Ohio on Sunday evening, the four of us had much to talk about as we relived the experience of the greatest event in sporting clays. We recounted our scores, assessed our abilities against the targets, and relived the magical fun of four days in San Antonio that will last forever in the minds of all who have a capacity to treasure such moments – multiplied, of course, by the many facets beyond just the shoot. ■

Behind the Scenes

From Derek Moore's Notebook

The Nationals have always had a special atmosphere not found at any other shoot and although the stats for this year's event are impressive, they do not tell the whole story. Meeting, shooting with, or just being around the cream of our sport – both shooters and range owners from all over the country – makes this event so special.

● The Hall Of Fame Banquet at the Radisson Hill Country resort on Thursday night was an outstanding success with inductees Valerie Johnson, Linda Joy Sosebee and Bruce Ney all being presented in fine style.

Mike Hampton Sr. presented

two time National Ladies Champion (1990 and 1992) Valerie Johnson and her long list of accomplishments putting her in both the National Skeet Hall of Fame and again now for Sporting Clays.

Linda Joy, a friend for many years, was inducted by her long time friend Scott Grange. He and



Linda worked together for all but the first few months of her relationship with Browning. Scott was her lifeline and he spoke very warmly of her. It was good to see Linda again – with husband Hugh Sosebee and son Hugh. She has retired from sporting clays, having won most of the awards available to win.

Multiple Veteran Champion Bruce Ney was introduced by Dan Cluff, his shooting buddy for the past 10 years. He accepted the award with the humbleness that we all know well. He has made his mark on the sport and made many friends doing it. He is someone I am proud to call a friend.

A special trophy was

presented by Mark Kiddie representing The Boomer Esiason Foundation, for which he is a spokesman. Mark has worked hard from the onset promoting their annual shoot. This year a special Trophy in recognition of support went to Dieter Krieghoff for his tireless sponsorship support from the very beginning. It was good to see him recognized.

● The Advisory Council and National Delegate meeting was held in the Beretta Pavilion on Wednesday evening and open to all who wished to attend. The US Open is at the Cajun Elite in Jennings, Louisiana (May 27 to June 1st 2008). Voting for the 2009 US Open was made and the winner was Elk Creek Hunt Club in Kentucky. Also of interest to older shooters, NSCA Life



Membership for age 60 and over is reduced by half to \$250. Husband and wife combination (both 60) is \$375.

- The courses were moved around this year and I thought that worked well. The Krieghoff Kup was on the old Red course which made room for the Red, Yellow, Green and Orange courses all the way across the back of the property. I thought the layouts were much better than in previous years – the Main Event flow was exceptional.

- From the input I got from shooters, the K-Kup could have used a few more stations (perhaps 14 stations of 6 and 2 of 8s) to move the shooters through quickly, rather than mostly 8s and a couple of 6s. The targets, however, more than made up for the one hour delay.

- The food at the food court was good and reasonably priced – NSCA has that part down pretty well now. Breakfast (\$4) was good. A full array of foods for all tastes were available at all times during the day, hot or cold. Plenty of staff –and courteous too.

- The Target setters this year were Neil Chadwick (K-Kup and Small gauge), Mo Parsons (Red Course and FITASC), Pete Masch (Orange Course), David Rippetoe (Green Course) and Mike Mize (Yellow Course/5 Stand M-AA).

- For the Ladies who were not shooting there was a tour of Fredericksburg scheduled on Friday which went quite well from what I heard. It was an all day event for \$40.

- The 'Top Gun Shoot-off' was held Friday at 6pm in the stadium.

It was fun to watch but the program went on a little long and should be made shorter in the future. It ended around 9pm. Top guns were (in alphabetical order): Dan Carlisle, Joe Carey, Wendell Cherry, Andy Duffy, Bobby Fowler, Doug Fuller, Jim Jamison, Jon Kruger, Cory Kruse, Anthony Materese Jr., Bill McGuire, Robbie Purser, Tony Rivera and Scott Robertson.

Presented in a 'carnival' atmosphere, the top guns displayed exceptional skills while being constantly distracted with whistles, fireworks, bullhorns, balloons and green poison birds (which counted as a miss). If a pumpkin was hit, as they often were, there was a fine to be paid and that money went to the Ronald McDonald House.

Champion was Dan Carlisle, Runner-up was Doug Fuller and

Robbie Purser was third. The final tally of monies raised for the Ronald McDonald House was a little over \$1100.

- With the All American teams shooting together at the same shooting time, spectators could follow them if they wanted to watch them shooting head to head. An event of this magnitude is amazing to be a part of, it becomes "us" against the targets and if someone is shooting especially well, they can expect to have the support of those around them to help them shoot even better.

- As always Bruce Herring was there – his young men scoring and keeping the discipline of each stand with outstanding manners and top notch eyes watching the targets for any sign of a break. A fine example they make for our youngsters – in fact, for all of us.