



Value for Money

WITH CHRISTMAS ALREADY A MEMORY AND MANY A NEW YEAR RESOLUTION ALREADY BROKEN, THOUGHTS TURN TO THE NEW CLAY BUSTING SEASON THAT KICKS OFF IN FLORIDA NEXT MONTH – BUT WILL SHOOTERS GET VALUE FOR MONEY THIS SEASON?

MICHAEL BRUNTON

Flights and accommodation are booked and the enforced break is nearly over. For those keen to support the season's first Big Blasts, the Rhino Rally, Seminole Cup and Browning Briley Mardi Gras are just weeks away.

But this season, for the first time in many years, could be very different. The stark reality of difficult economic times is clear to all. A new political era dawns this month, the effects of which will take time before any initiatives to overcome the current global recession become evident. In the meantime, 2009 is likely to be tough with most discerning shooters keeping a tight rein on disposable income while demanding value for their dollar.

First up to test the current temperature of the economic waters will be the manufacturers when the doors to this year's Shot Show open on the 15th January in Florida. It's the world's largest trade exhibition showcasing firearms and shooting related

products. It provides an important forum for the industry to show its current and newest products that will sit on the shelves of gun and sporting goods shops in the coming year. The show attracts visitors from every State and more than 75 countries – last year the attendance was in excess of 58,000 with 1950 exhibitors taking up 715,000 sq. feet of floor space. The show organizers are confident that this year's event will be equally successful. Let's hope so.

UP OR DOWN

Range owners, promoters and sponsors of Big Blasts and clubs across the country are sure to be anxious right now about attendance figures at upcoming events. No doubt some will simply cross their fingers and hope to match last year's entry figures – an unlikely scenario. Perceived wisdom in these difficult economic times is that entries to many events will be down, some Big Blasts may not even take place this season, entry costs will be up, prize funds will be down and the number of registered targets shot in 2009 will be considerably less than in 2008.

In reality, the current state of the economy means that if the sport wants to maintain its successful growth of recent years, then value for money entertainment is the best driver to that success. Whether it's a Big Blast or a regular Club shoot, organizers must improve and highlight the entertainment value of their events. Cash and product prize funds may be important when it comes to marketing, but



will only be won by a small proportion of entrants – often the same faces, event after event. For the majority of competitors, ease of participation and entertainment is what they seek, being with friends and enjoying their sport – and that entertainment will have to be provided at a realistic market price that represents value for money. Forget that, and shooters are sure to vote with their feet!

No doubt the shooter support for the Rhino Rally, Seminole Cup and Browning Briley Mardi Gras in the coming weeks will give us all a good indicator of just what effect the state of economy is having on our sport. And with that in mind, elsewhere in this issue we highlight these upcoming Big Blasts.

20TH ANNIVERSARY

Congratulations to Anthony Matarese Jr., the well deserved 2008 Sporting Clays National Champion. The 20th Anniversary National Championships was a true 'Festival

of Shooting'. There were many that didn't make the trip to the San Antonio Shooting Complex, but those that did thoroughly enjoyed a great week. Record numbers were attracted by the kudos of the event and reduced entry fees. Hopefully, our extended coverage of the Championship in this issue reflects the undoubted success of this premiere event that truly was entertaining and great value for money.

Elsewhere in this issue we feature several gun tests and bid farewell to the Beretta ASE. Together with our regular instructional articles, product reviews, ballistic comment, our ongoing and popular 'Ask the Experts' feature and the new 'One to One' interview series, this is another busy issue that I hope you enjoy.

Finally, my best wishes to you all this New Year, and I hope the coming season brings with it the fun, entertainment and success you wish for – all at great value for your hard earned dollars. ■