

SHOOTING EXTRAVAGANZA...

For as long as one can remember, much of the talk amongst those in the sport has been about what we need to do to increase participating 'numbers' and provide a favorable image in the face of mounting political and public opposition to our sport.

TV is the obvious media to help improve public awareness of our sport – but to date, clay target shooting has not been TV-friendly. Enter ClayStar Entertainment Inc!

This is a company that was formed to design and produce shooting shows using the made for television game Make-A-Break. The two principals are Raymond Forman and Ed Prechel of Top Gun Shooting Sports. Their intention is to reach the vast numbers of non-shooters via television using familiar and highly desirable stage technologies and effects which are seen around the world at the biggest shows, concerts and events by the world's biggest performers.

Their plan was simple. To set up and film an extravaganza that would form the basis of a 90 minute video that could be edited to a 30 minute TV pilot show. Longer term, the show's success would hopefully attract 'sponsors' that could initiate a multi-part series of TV shows –possibly even with an international dimension.

It was on 28th October that the pilot show took place at the Ozark Shooters Sports Complex in Branson, Missouri. By all accounts it gave a new, entertaining image to our sport that will have appeal to many people who never even knew the sport existed.

Now, that may seem a bit arrogant to some – but to the more than two thousand in the audience who withstood the cold night air; the dozen or so professional lighting, sound, laser, video and pyrotechnic crew; the nine cameramen; the eight players; the referee and line judges;



the two gun caddies; the two show hosts; the statisticians; the stage hands and the show director, the show was a significant event in the national promotion of the sport. And if the chat rooms on the internet are anything to go by, many of you agree!

A Make-A-Break playing field was quite literally turned into a massive stage set. There were over 100 pieces of intelligent lighting as well as a full laser module and eight smoke machines – which all created an amazing atmosphere to entertain the audience. Added to this there was over four hundred pieces of pyrotechnic effects to add the ‘wow’ factor to the whole show. Never in the history of any sport has a playing field had laser light beams as the boundary lines, or high energy music throughout the games to energize the crowd, or pyrotechnic displays in time to the music to mesmerize the audience. This was MTV meets ESPN at its very best!

The production company that was hired to build the set was Production Design International Inc. (PDI); a company based in Toronto and Nashville. PDI has for the past three decades been designing sets and providing unique light, sound, laser and pyrotechnic displays for some of the biggest acts and performers in the world.

EQUIPMENT GALORE

In terms of the amount of equipment that was required to put on the show, there were two 53 ft. tractor trailers full of lighting, sound, laser, stage, video and tower structures, and another 5 ton cube van packed with pyrotechnic pieces. In addition, there was a trailer loaded with 100,000 lbs. of concrete ballast for the light, sound and video towers, as well as two others carrying the heavy lifting machinery. When all the trucks were seen together they made quite a convoy! The electrical requirements for the show were provided by three huge generators with a combined electrical output of 1200 amps – just about enough to light up a small town.

The theatrically lit stage that the players shot from was 20 ft. wide by 16 ft. deep and 3 ft. high. To enhance the visual and stage effect of the whole evening, tracer ammunition was used by all the players for the numbered targets – which looked remarkably like something out of Star Wars.

ON STAGE

There were players’ entrances on both sides of the playing field, 150 ft. apart – one with a red arch and the other with a blue arch. As each player came through their entrance, they were back-lit through billowing smoke with either red or blue light which created a high degree of drama for the event. To heighten the entertainment value, each player had been asked to choose a piece of music and to adopt something of a unique persona.

To many shooters, giving the details of the music at this event might be considered hardly important. However, since the show was more about selling shooting to non-shooters than about shooting itself, it was of the utmost importance to understand the energy that the selection of music created – and the ‘showmanship’ in how it was delivered.

After an off-camera, informal introduction and explanation of the Make-A-Break game, the show



SOME OF THE CONTENTS OF JUST ONE OF THE TWO SEMI TRAILERS LOADED WITH LIGHT AND SOUND EQUIPMENT.

began with modest lighting and the 45,000 watt sound system pounding out AC/DC's 'Are You Ready for a Good Time', which, after a brief (choreographed) black-out, led into AC/DC's 'Thunderstruck'. This was a visual and sound feast of clever lighting, effects, pyrotechnics, laser show and sound that you could virtually feel.

THE PLAYERS

Once the audience had caught their breath, the first player to be introduced to the audience was Jim Jamison, who appeared from the red entrance to the very identifiable theme music from the James Bond movies. In order to really get into his character role, Jim emerged wearing an elegant black tux, and, in true Bond style, was accompanied by an eye catching blonde (clutching his left arm) dressed in a figure hugging black dress and fur jacket. The crowd was thrilled with their appearance – which was made even more entertaining when they were interviewed on stage and the 'Bond girl' proceeded to casually remove his jacket before the match began. Jim had great fun playing the part, and



JIM JAMISON AND BRIDGETTE.



CORY KRUSE AND EMMA.



the blonde, who happened to be Gregg Wolf's girlfriend, Bridgette, was a real sport in taking part!

Jim's opponent was none other than Cory Kruse – who, according to the role he chose to play, was the 'bad boy' of sporting clays. He came out arms raised in triumph and defiance to the sound of Queen's *I Want it All*. During his on stage interview he told the audience he was first going to beat 'Bond' and then he was going to "...steal his girl". Hardly anything to do with clay shooting, but all highly entertaining stuff from the audience's perspective.

Unfortunately for Cory, 'Bond' demonstrated why he's known as 007 by hitting enough of the number 7s to beat the 'bad boy' in two straight games!

The second match saw Andy Duffy against Bill McGuire. With a cool entrance, Andy, 'The Iceman' to the crowd, stood with hands-on-hips indifference, just outside his entrance, to loud applause as 'the man to beat'. Peering through his dark sunglasses while pausing to stare at the crowd, to the sound of John Cougar Mellencamp's *The Walls Come Tumblin' Down*, he cast just enough of a mean look to enhance



BILL MCGUIRE.



ANDY DUFFY.

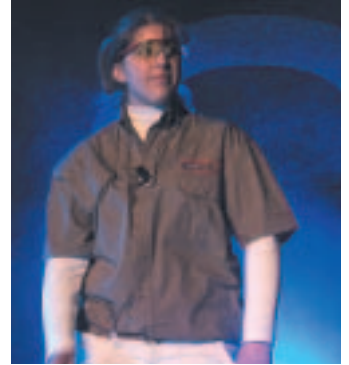
the image he was portraying. As for his opponent, Bill McGuire, he appeared arm in arm with yet another blonde (his gun caddie Emma) to the strains of Toby Keith's *I Ain't as Good as I Once*

Was. With a theatrical flare, the 'gorgeous girl' gave him up as too old and he shrugged with a forlorn look to the crowd – who gave him probably the biggest applause of the night. The outcome of this match was probably not what most would have predicted though, when 'The Iceman' was melted by 'the Old Man' – two games to one.

The first player in the third match was young gun, Brett Dorak – a recent Junior who had done so well under the lights and pressure of the Great Outdoor Games shooting tournament. Brett came into view through the smoke and



BRETT DORAK.



ASHLEIGH HAFLEY.

lights of the red entrance to the strains of *Sugar We're Going Down* by Fall Out Boy. With one arm and finger pointing to the night sky, Brett wasted no time walking along the carpet to the stage. Brett's opponent, who was the only lady shooter to perform in the show, was the newly crowned NSCA Ladies National Champion, Ashleigh Hafley. The crowd roared in approval when she appeared to the sound of Pat Benetar's *Hit Me with Your Best Shot*. This match was arguably the 'nail biter' that we all hope for when watching a sports



event. Brett won the first game, but the second was not to come so easily. He led for most of it but Ashleigh came from behind to tie the game; forcing a shoot-off on the number seven target. After they both missed the first two sevens, Brett missed his third, then, to huge applause, Ashleigh smashed hers just inside the laser boundary. Now, with stage nerves behind her, she went on to win the third game and take the match.

The final match saw Gregg Wolf emerge from the red arch to the sounds of 'Paper Cut' by Lincoln Park. Gregg adopted an image of being yet another 'young gun' in search of a title. But his opponent was the effervescent Tommy 'The Breeze' Browning; a crowd favorite who came running out of his entrance, arms in the air, to the sound of Lynard Skynard's 'Call Me the Breeze'. This final match in the opening set came to an early end however, when the



GREGG WOLF.

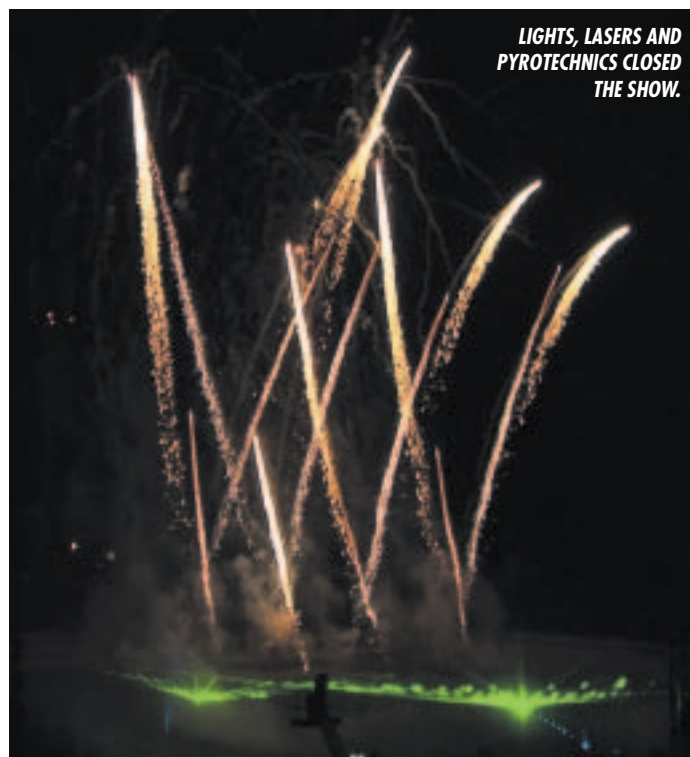
young gun was blown away in two quick games by 'The Breeze'.

In an effort to provide the audience and television viewers with some familiar sports protocol blended with a little theatrics and on stage interaction, ClayStar employed the use of 'gun caddies' to carry the players' guns from the entrances to the stage and to provide them with their ammunition during the matches – as well as anything else they needed, like bottled water. It was hot under 'them' lights.

SEMI FINALS

After a short intermission, the first semi-final matched Jim Jamison with Ashleigh Hafley. Although James Bond might be an old movie icon, it was the young girl who stole the hearts of the crowd and the stage crew. Unfortunately for her though, after putting up a good fight she had to concede in two games to Jim. He does love that number 007. To 'The Final Countdown', by the band Europe, and some eye catching pyrotechnics, Jim raised an arm in victory – while Ashleigh looked on with her distinctive, determined look of 'there'll be a next time'.

'The Breeze' met the 'Old Man' in the other semi-final – however, it was anything but a breeze for Tommy. Bill gave him quite a workout, taking the match to three



LIGHTS, LASERS AND PYROTECHNICS CLOSED THE SHOW.

games. After the third game, and again with Europe's 'The Final Countdown' playing and pyrotechnics exploding just off-stage, Tommy raised his arms in victory while Bill remained completely magnanimous and congratulatory in defeat. Now, considering these two drove to and from the event together, you can imagine the conversation on the drive home!

THE FINAL

Without much of a break the two finalists then walked on to the stage; 'Bond' versus 'the Breeze'. No effects, no fanfare – just serious shooting business. Whether 'Bond's' tux was now pinching too much in the wrong places or whether 'the Breeze' caught his second wind, it was Tommy who managed to take the final match in two quick games.

The crowd went wild, 'The Final Countdown' blared once more, the pyrotechnics flashed and banged, and with arms raised in

deserved triumph, Tommy Browning became the undisputed winner of the first show. Then, with a sudden burst of congratulatory enthusiasm, all the other players, the show hosts, the line judges, referee and gun caddies all joined on stage to celebrate his victory.

The show wasn't over yet however. ClayStar had asked PDI to put together a show closing that would remain unforgettable to everyone on the grounds. So, to the mega sound of Kenny Loggins' 'Danger Zone' (from the movie 'Top Gun'), they put on a complete laser and pyrotechnic display that boggled the mind.

Normally, the effects, lights, lasers and pyrotechnics PDI displayed during their finalé would have been a fitting close to a show of world stage proportions – but to a clay target shooting event this was beyond anything imaginable, and was definitely unforgettable. Just ask any of the players who participated – or anyone who was lucky enough to be there! ■



TOMMY BROWNING – THE ULTIMATE WINNER.