

# A European Adventure

LATE MAY, EARLY JUNE, MOST OF THE TOP EUROPEAN SPORTING SHOOTERS LOOKED EAST TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC FOR THE EUROPEAN FITASC CHAMPIONSHIP, NEAR PRAGUE – AND GREGG WOLF AND I DECIDED TO JOIN THEM. A REPORT BY **WILL FENNELL**



SECOND LEFT: WILL FENNELL TOGETHER WITH HIS SQUAD. INSET: GREGG WOLF IN ACTION.

Last year I got the chance to go to Germany as part of TEAM USA – had a fantastic time, learned a lot about the game and enjoyed the ‘international competition’. Traveling to Europe, other than the ‘plane ticket, isn’t any more expensive than going to a major shoot in the USA – so I’ve decided to do my best to travel abroad to a major event at least once a year.

After studying the shoots in Europe for the 2003 season, looking at my work schedule and studying the US shooting program, I decided that the European FITASC Championship was an opportunity not to be missed.

## CHAMPIONSHIP REVIEW

Before giving my thoughts on the

European ‘shooting scene’, here’s an overview of the event. The competition produced some truly outstanding shooting as the cream rose to the top on a technically challenging course that used the steep wooded valleys to good effect. 2002 World Champion Richard Faulds led from start to finish to win with 190/200 – a remarkable average of 23.75 per

Parcour. He was pushed to the very last pair however by a typically hard charging George Digweed who finished just one target adrift after stumbling to 22 from his final 25. In the bronze medal position was another British shooter, John Dunne, who experienced a roller coaster week. After opening with 48/50 on day one he slumped to just 40 over his second 50. There then followed two days of unbelievable shooting as he shot 100 straight for a 188 total – believed to be the first to shoot 100 straight in a major FITASC Championship. He also set a new record with five perfect 25’s over the whole competition.

The Ladies title went to Italy’s Katusca Spada, who has threatened to win a big one for a couple of years now, while the Junior winner was France’s Antoine Boutoille. The return of A.J. Smith, now a Veteran, was confirmed as he won that class by ten clear targets with a score of 183. Dutchman Hans Oosterveen took the Super Vet crown. What a competition!

## PERSONAL THOUGHTS

It is much easier to travel and shoot in Europe than I thought. Gun ‘paperwork’ can be quickly dealt with and with firearm entry and exit pass presented at the airport we simply carried our guns in our rental car as we drove around the countryside! Everybody (locals and competitors) was very welcoming and friendly (even the French!). Gregg and I had an absolute ball – and came away ‘fired up’ to improve our game and be better prepared for the upcoming World Championship in Kansas.

This Championship was the first time I’d experienced new style FITASC with 5 stands per layout! As yet, we see little new style

FITASC in the USA but let me say from the outset that, new style or old style, I love them both. But, new style with 5 stands seemed to me to be getting a bit too much like English Sporting or Super Sporting. With 8 Parours with 5 stands each, you have one stand that has 5 singles only and the other 4 stands have 3 singles and a double. No matter what the format – new style, old style, four or five pegs, hard targets or soft – it doesn't matter. You have to shoot what you are presented with and do your best against the course and compare scores later!

Ahh the targets! They were awesome. The grounds were in steep, forested, mountainous terrain with plenty of shots below your feet. It reminded me of shooting FITASC at the Homestead – only bigger hills and taller trees!

There weren't any targets more difficult than the 'hard' targets we see here – only 6 targets out of the 200 were further than 65 yards, but even then they showed plenty of belly. But the kicker is that most of the targets were in the 45 to 55 yard range. Basically, the way the course setter increased the level of difficulty for the whole shoot was to take out all of the 'gimmie' or soft targets. There were no targets that you could take for granted – so the course slowly bled your score for the 4 days. It was easy enough to miss at least one target on any peg and if you did so, you shot a 20x25 per Parcour – good for a score of 160x200 that would land you in about 150th place at this shoot!

Probably the biggest difference between the targets at home and what I experienced in Europe was

simply target speed. They throw targets a lot faster, period! Maybe 25% faster on average – especially if they have a presentation that is less than 35-40 yards.

Even so, the level of competition in Europe is amazing. The intensity of the competition was unbelievable – it was like there was electricity in the air. There are about 10 guys over there that have taken the game to the next level – I think it's because they shoot against such a high level of competition on a regular basis.

I'm convince we (US shooters) can play at their level, but have a lot of work ahead of us, including shooting against them as much as possible. It's been popular here for shooters to say that we don't shoot enough 'hard targets' and that's why US shooters generally struggle overseas. Well, what

made these targets hard wasn't an abundance of targets that were more difficult than I normally see, it was the lack of 'easy' targets. If we were to follow that lead, I think it would raise the level of our game.

I'm saving \$\$ and frequent flyer miles now for my next trip to shoot abroad. I'm torn between next year's World FITASC in Portugal, where my new Portuguese friends promise to help show me around the country, or the big Clay Shooting Classic in England. Either way, I'm looking forward to a good trip and a chance to improve my game against the best shooters in the World. I hope to see more fellow US shooters traveling to Europe with me – I think it would be good for us as competitors and good for our sport here at home.