

If I would have predicted it eighteen months ago, you would not have believed it. Studying the data truth today, leaves one incredulous. Membership and target numbers are in from the NSCA, and for the most part, all numbers have stayed relatively flat. The number of shooters from 2008 through 2009 stayed flat. The number of active clubs has held flat.

In the worst economy in two generations, with clubs struggling and shooters facing unemployment, foreclosure and portfolio leakage, who would believe it? With trap and skeet participation way down, who'd believe sporting clays would hold the line? With some big events cancelled and our finest clubs losing participation, how would it be possible to have such a glowing report? Let's pick the reports apart.

20 million is our benchmark here – in actual count 19,367,000

targets registered in '09. In '08 the target count was only ahead by 30,000. In the parlance of our sport, there may be a little chip out of it, but it still scores as a hit. 2007 was the high-water mark at 19,804,000 targets. That's not a big blip on the ticker. Shooter numbers improved by more than 600 in '09 (those actually engaged in shooting).

But but but – what about the numbers at the major championships, weren't they down? The short answer is no. On the average, we held the line. The Nationals drew 30 fewer participants. Much of that decline came from locals in Texas, where the decline was 43 participants. The US Open on the other hand grew. Elk Creek drew the fourth highest Open numbers in history, attracting 224 more shooters than the '08 event at Cajun Elite. The story on the Open is like selling real estate – location, location, location!

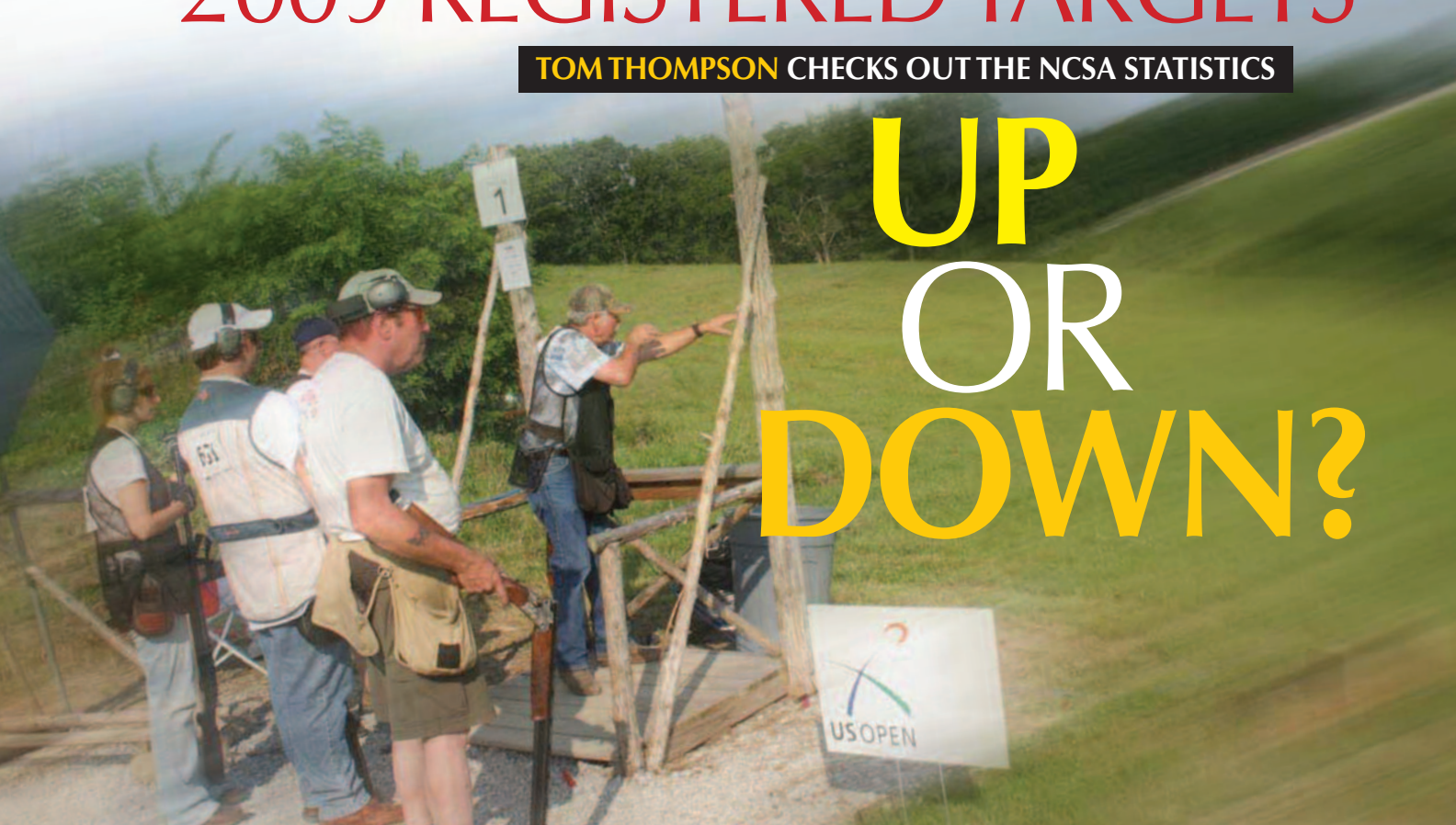
Zone shoots were off somewhat from '08. Only Zone 2 and 7 experienced growth (Zone 7 went up by 87 competitors). The most dramatic decline occurred in Zone 6, where the counter dropped by 138. Taken together, Zone participation was off by 156 from the previous year. Zone shoots averaged 188 in '09 vs. 210 in '08. (The benchmark set in '07 is 256.)

OK then, let me get this straight – some events are up, and some are down. How does that explain the 'hold flat' circumstance? That yo-yo effect is precisely what caused the pattern to hold flat. There was no strong trend line at work. The strengths were no more obvious than the weaknesses. Florida, Texas and California are the bellwether States of sporting clays. These States have traditionally had the most of what it takes to play the high end shooting sports games.

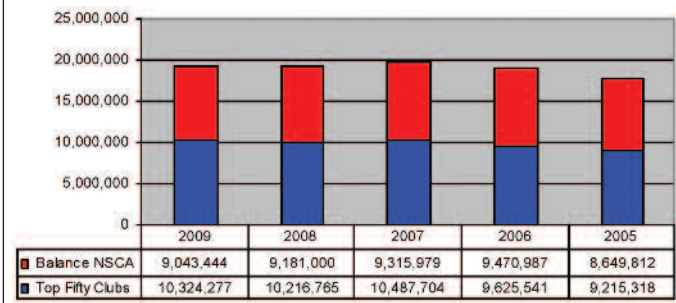
# 2009 REGISTERED TARGETS

**TOM THOMPSON CHECKS OUT THE NCSA STATISTICS**

# UP OR DOWN?



TOP 50 CLUBS AS PERCENT OF NSCA TOTAL TARGETS



**FIFTY CLUBS ACROSS THE COUNTRY SHOOT HALF OF THE TARGETS. THE UPWARD TREND OF INCREASING TOTALS OVER TIME DOES NOT INDICATE AN ECONOMIC CRISIS THAT MANY CLAIM IS HURTING SHOOTER PARTICIPATION.**

These States have the demographics showing plenty of disposable income, older folks with time to shoot and good weather to extend the season.

Florida has shown five consecutive years of target number growth, to reach 1,156,050.

California peaked strong in '07 with 800,000, but the five year trend line average of 540,000 has been flat.

Texas has seen no decline over the five years – with numbers inclusive of the National Shooting Complex. The Lone Star State has witnessed steady growth from 3.2 million straight up to 4 million targets.

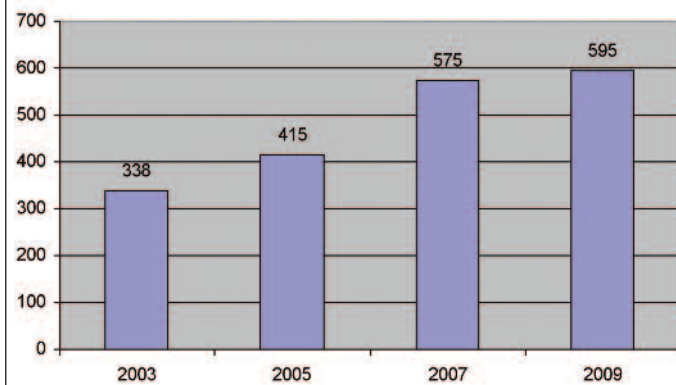
Trend-lines in some industrial States show a complete reversal of fortune. Michigan, Indiana and Wisconsin saw declining target numbers. But Ohio, Kentucky, New York and Pennsylvania all

caught in a similar industrial decline, were able to generate target growth over the five year trend even though membership growth there was negligible to non-existent. Most of us tend to be quite predictable by our consistent practices.

To this day, about 37 percent of the NSCA membership does not fire a shot at a registered bird. Even so, turnout at events tends to hold the line well, unless acted upon by an outside force. Hill 'n Dale Club in Ohio draws consistently the same numbers at each monthly registered event. The Ohio State Championship hovers a few degrees above 200 participants every year. Most clubs are doing more marketing just to hold the line.

Here's a longstanding fact. Our best shooters do most of the shooting. Master class and AA constitute 15 percent of the membership, yet they account for 43 percent of the targets shot and they get 57 percent of the punches awarded. One of the surprises in the new numbers is that E class

SHOOTERS WITH 5000 BIRDS OR MORE



**HI-VOLUME SHOOTERS ARE THOSE WHO SHOOT 5000 OR MORE NSCA REGISTERED TARGETS IN A YEAR. THERE WERE 595 LAST YEAR.**

shot 278,000 more birds than in '08 – that's a 23 percent growth factor. E class participation grew more than all other classes combined. That growth is likely accounted for by the nearly equivalent decline in D class participation – most likely new shooters traversing downward after an initial year in D class.

So what's the bottom line? NSCA targets thrown held the line at 19 plus million by falling one tenth of one percent from '08. Sporting Clays was down by 57,000 out of 16 million thrown. League shooting was off by 66,000. Small gauge was up by 14,000. FITASC was up by 50,000, and 5-Stand grew by 21,000. Things just tend to equal themselves out. Twenty-eight States saw their target numbers go up, 22 went down. The top fifty clubs in the country threw more than all the rest combined.

Dave Lauzen led the way among shooters, with more registered targets than any other NSCA member. The Illinois shooter registered 18,025 birds. Todd Simmons was second on the Hi-Volume shooter list with 16,525. The top 50 Hi-Volume shooters shot at 620,387 targets. The number of Hi-Volume shooters (5,000 and above) grew from 338 in '03 to 595 in 2009.

As for predictions for the future, not a chance – my crystal ball is a little clouded from all the target dust. Early results for the year are already trending toward a mixed review. The Rhino Rally was down, the Seminole Cup was up and the Browning-Briley Mardi Gras was way up. I don't think there's a definite pattern developing. ■

2009 – TOP 15 HIGH VOLUME SPORTING CLAYS CLUBS IN US

NATIONAL SHOOTING COMPLEX	TX	1114327
ELM FORK SHOTGUN SPORTS	TX	517150
ELK CREEK HUNT CLUB	KY	497500
CAJUN ELITE SHOOTING CLUB	LA	401200
M&M HUNTING PRESERVE & SC	NJ	354675
QUAIL CREEK PLANTATION	FL	323925
NORTHBROOK SPORTS CLUB	IL	282650
CARIBOU GUN CLUB	MN	238900
RIO BRAZOS HUNTING PRESERVE	TX	231600
FOSSIL POINTE SPORTING GROUNDS	TX	229675
BRADFORD SPORTSMEN'S FARM SC	FL	223275
HOPKINS GAME FARM	MD	222500
ADDIEVILLE EAST FARM	RI	214400
HILL 'N DALE	OH	204100
DESERT HILL SHOOTING CLUB	NV	203700

2009 – TOP 10 HIGH VOLUME SHOOTERS IN US

DAVE LAUZEN	WARRENVILLE	IL	18,025
TODD SIMMONS	IDEAL	GA	16,525
BOB DAVIS	DECATUR	IL	16,500
MONTIE SIMS	TEMPLE	TX	16,375
DAVID CLIFFORD	CYPRESS	TX	15,625
RICHARD FULLER	EVERMAN	TX	15,400
JON KRUGER	CHICAGO	IL	15,400
RICHARD KICENIUK	ANNANDALE	NJ	15,400
JOSEPH KENNEDY	LOS ALTOS	CA	14,850
TED SAPOZNIK	VANCOUVER	WA	14,675

**LEFT: THESE CLUBS MAKE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT UPON THE SPORT. OUT OF 648 CLUBS, 252 THROW NO REGISTERED TARGETS. THE TOP FIFTY CLUBS THROW MORE (10,324,000) THAN ALL THE REST COMBINED. RIGHT: THE TOP TEN HI-VOLUME NSCA SHOOTERS (THOSE SHOOTING 5000 OR MORE) TOTALED 159,000 BIRDS.**