

Shooting for Charity

ROBERT PATTERSON REPORTS FROM THE NWTF WHEELIN' SPORTSMEN CAROLINA CLAY SHOOTOUT

As the popularity of shooting sports continue to grow, more and more fund raising organizations are using Sporting Clays outings as an additional opportunity to raise money for their respective causes. Most readers are familiar with the National Wild Turkey Federation and their efforts, but many are not aware that the NWTF has added the Wheelin' Sportsmen to an already impressive list of outreach programs. Wheelin' Sportsmen NWTF provides all disabled people the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors through local chapter events nationwide, such as hunting, fishing and shooting.

With more than 56 million disabled individuals in the U.S., the program fills a much needed void. Through this program, chapters host numerous Wheelin' Sportsman NWTF events across North America involving disabled individuals in the outdoors. One such event was held at Back Woods Quail Club in Georgetown, South Carolina October 9-12th. Local chapters along with the veteran staff at Back Woods put together the largest Wheelin' Sportsmen event to date. The event consisted of a four day program that included a 100 target All American Qualifier FITASC

event, a 100 target Preliminary event, a Wheelin' Sportsmen day, and a 200 target Main Event.

FITASC BEGINS

The FITASC event began on Thursday afternoon as one squad of shooters chose to take an early run at the challenging Parcours. All four Parcours of 'old style' FITASC were set on the wide open cut over fields that are very familiar this time of year in the south. Two of the Parcours were on 'virgin ground' and it was obvious that lots of imagination and creativity had been put into

each layout. Most of the targets were very breakable as singles, with a few that tested skills with speed and distance. Perhaps the most contributing factor to the obvious difficulty of the Parcours was the mischievous combinations of report pairs. Many of the singles that most competitors found delightfully 'hittable' were presented differently as they attempted to make a speedy recovery from the first target in an attempt to get to their original hold point for the second target. This, along with speed variations, had shooters either way in front or dreadfully behind. When the Thursday rotation was complete the high score posted was an 84/100 by local Master class shooter Mike Sellers. He would have three long days to wait to see if his score would stay at the top.

WHEELIN' SPORTSMEN

Friday played host to a variety of activities, the FITASC event continued as well as the 100 target Preliminary event. But perhaps the most interesting of all the events was the Wheelin' Sportsmen event. Around 10:00am, handicapped individuals began to arrive. These individuals were coming to take advantage of the opportunity to shoot Skeet, Trap, 5-Stand and Sporting Clays. Each individual was given unlimited ammo, guns if needed, and someone to assist



BRADLEY HOGAN OF PURE GOLD CHOKES SHOWED HIS SUPPORT BY ATTENDING THE WHEELIN' SPORTSMEN EVENT.

while they participated in the events. All of this, along with lunch, was included for each handicapped individual at no charge. The expense was absorbed by the NWTF Wheelin' Sportsmen program. Many of the people that participated had never shot a gun before and were not even aware that there was an opportunity to do so. By the end of the day, many targets had been broken and many lives had been changed – and a glimmer of gratitude shined from the eyes of the participants.

PRE-LIM STARTS

While the Wheelin' Sportsmen folks were banging away, competitors were attempting to get themselves dialed in for the 100 target Preliminary event. By surprise to many, but not to him, Junior AA shooter Casey Holder posted the only score in the nineties to take high over all.

After the Friday rotation of FITASC was complete, only three

shooters managed to find the eighties – Bill Hemingway (81/100), Casey Holder (81/100) and Jeff Sessoms (80/100). Mike Sellers was still on top but there were still a lot of sharks in the water!

As the sun went down in the South Carolina sky, the local forecast was calling for a good chance of rain for most of day and night Saturday. It would remain to be seen who was a fair weather shooter and who was not.

MAIN EVENT

It seemed as though the weatherman was, unfortunately, correct in his forecast for a change. Just enough light rain and scattered showers to aggravate most of the competitors hung around all day and made everyone have to dig a little deeper to keep themselves focused. The 200 target Main Event was laid out over 14 different stations.

The course made great use of the variety of terrain that makes up



A HOST OF PRIZES WERE GIVEN AWAY AT THE SATURDAY NIGHT AWARENESS DINNER.

the vast area that Back Woods Quail Club has available for Sporting Clays. Open fields, ponds and woods made wonderful settings for targets that seemed to be just what the doctor ordered for most of the competitors. Setting targets for events like this is always a challenge according to target setters Will Fennell and Rick Hemingway. Whenever you have

lots of recreational shooters and hunters you have to be careful not to set the targets too tough. Rick and Will did a great job presenting targets that were very hittable but challenging. A host of curling, off speed targets combined with great use of towers and terrain produced lines that were difficult to read. Slow and far and fast and close kept shooters scratching their heads while trying to figure out leads. After the first day, only one shooter managed to post a score in the nineties. Scott Robertson turned in an impressive 95/100, giving himself a comfortable lead over Wick Copeland (89/100) and Joe Cantey (88/100).

AWARENESS DINNER

On Saturday night, after shooting, a NWTF Wheelin' Sportsmen awareness dinner and banquet was held for those attending the shoot and the general public. Over 300 people turned up to enjoy a night that included a Southern BBQ feast, a premium open bar, auctions, raffles and games. The weather cleared up just in time for the after dinner activities.

Fourteen time All American and ESPN Outdoor Games gold medallist Scott Robertson

performed a spectacular trick shooting show. Spectators of all ages enjoyed a very entertaining performance and as the last lights went out the Back Woods staff started preparing an entirely different 14 station course for the last leg of the Main Event.

LAST DAY

The weather on Sunday was absolutely beautiful. Clear skies and temperatures in the high seventies to low eighties graced the final day of the Carolina Clay Shootout. As competitors from the morning rotations completed their rounds, the talk was as familiar as always with two day events. Some said it was tougher than Saturday, some said it was easier. It would remain to be seen what the leaders thought as they were all shooting in the last rotation.

Wick and Scott were actually shooting in the same squad, which made for a very interesting round. Once again, Scott was the only shooter to stay in the nineties, but only just. He finished with a 90 and a two day total of 185/200 and high overall honors. Wick fell off the second day finishing with a 78 and a two day total of 167/200 and a Master fourth finish. Veteran star Joe Cantey turned in a very solid 88 giving him a 176/200 to secure Master first. Lynn Berryman and Mike Sellers finished Master second and third respectively.

In the Concurrents, Anna Collins won the Ladies division, Troy Peak took Super Veteran honors, Joe Cantey won Veterans, Casey Holder was the high Junior and first time NSCA competitor Chase Limehouse won sub-junior by a very impressive forty-six targets!

All in all the Main Event ran very smoothly. There were no long delays and the referees were all professional and fair. Registration went smoothly, as always, and the

NWTF and Back Woods Quail Club paid out close to \$9,000 in guaranteed cash and much more in prizes that included guns and limited edition prints and decoys.

As the Main Event came to a close, so was the last rotation of the FITASC. Mike Sellers score of 84/100 had managed to hold off shooters all weekend, all he had left was one squad, which just happen to consist of Will Fennell and Scott Robertson. When their round was completed only Will, with an impressive 87/100, could scrounge enough breaks to beat Mike's 84/100.

So the events were complete and shooters were grateful to go home with checks in hand from their guaranteed winnings and options. Shooters commented on how nice it was not to have to wait for their winnings to come in the mail. "The folks at Back Woods had the checks ready before we left." This is just one small way that the staff at Back Woods Quail Club goes the extra mile for the shooters.

The event marked the beginning of a great relationship between the NWTF and Back Woods Quail Club. It was agreed that the same event would take place next year around the same time. Dates will shortly be announced.

The NWTF Wheelin' Sportsmen would like to send out a heartfelt thank-you to all of those that attended and helped in making this event a huge success. All proceeds from the Main Event, dinner and trick shooting show went to benefit the Wheelin' Sportsmen outreach program. To learn more, or to find a Wheelin' Sportsmen NWTF event near you, visit their website at www.nwtf.org/wheelin

Back Woods Quail Club will host the 2004 Zone 4 Championship May 14-16, 2004. For more information go to www.backwoodsquailclub.com