



THE ALL-AMERICAN SPORTING AND WORLD FITASC CHALLENGE

WOW!
SAYS **STEVE FISCHER**

Every once in a while a tournament gets it right – I mean really right. Pick an adjective. Any one will do. Great. Excellent. Spot on. Fabulous... my choice was Wow! The All-American Sporting Clays Championship and World FITASC Challenge, held late July, came out of the box in top form. For a first timer, this event was planned and executed with the sophistication and polish of a veteran major event. The icing on the cake was certainly the location. Elk Creek Hunt Club, located in the mountainous and rugged Northwest corner of Kentucky, represents some of the most beautiful terrain found anywhere in the U.S. The steep ridges and hollows across several hundred

acres gave the target setters, Mick Howells and Mike McAlpine, a cornucopia of possible presentations for some truly memorable and spectacular shots.

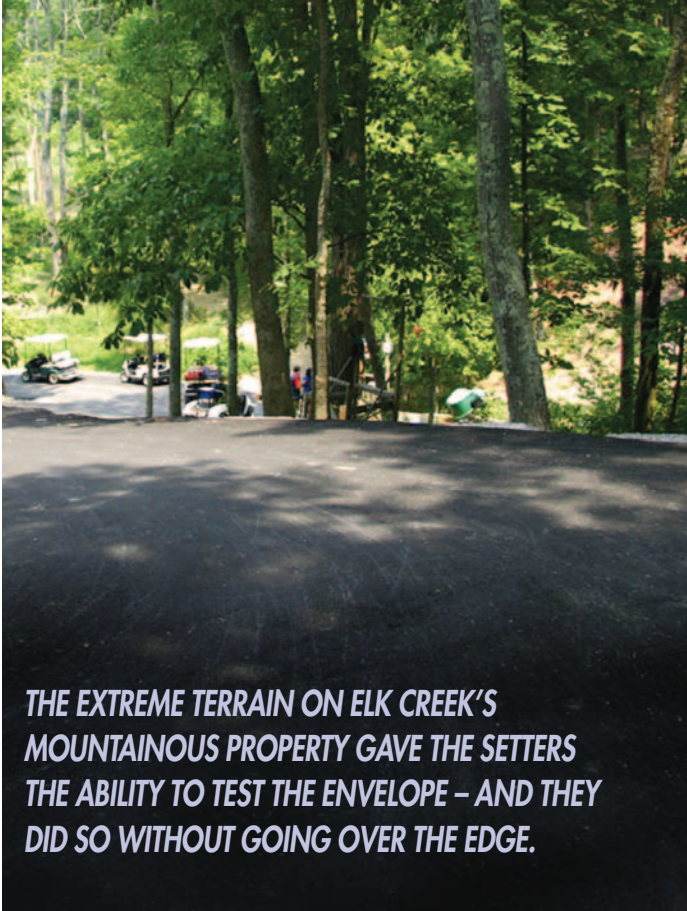
HOW THIS EVENT GOT STARTED...

This event was the brain child of Mark Kiddie and was initiated as a charity event benefitting the Boomer Esiason Foundation that since 1993 has been a major contributor to the fight against Cystic Fibrosis. Boomer's illustrious career as a NFL star

Quarterback helped give some 'muscle' to aid raising the needed funds to help researchers find some answers (and hopefully a future cure) to this

debilitating disease. Striking as close to home as it gets, Boomer's son, Gunnar, is a victim of this dreaded disease and the Boomer Esiason Foundation has become more than just a worthwhile charity to the Esiason family.

Mark Kiddie had an already long relationship with this charity and since 1999 had put on a yearly "Sporting Clays Pro-Am", a corporate style event that raised money for the Foundation. This year he decided to take it up a notch by switching the emphasis to the many sporting clays and FITASC competitors, hoping that a large cash purse would be a major



THE EXTREME TERRAIN ON ELK CREEK'S MOUNTAINOUS PROPERTY GAVE THE SETTERS THE ABILITY TO TEST THE ENVELOPE – AND THEY DID SO WITHOUT GOING OVER THE EDGE.

factor in drawing the shooters to the event. As a shooter and competitor, Mark's insight and experience with sporting clays and FITASC would lead him to Elk Creek as the perfect spot for this event. With the aid of the BEF, who generously added a huge \$80,000 in prize money, this event was

brought to life. An added benefit to the competitors was the fact that about two-thirds of the entry fee costs were tax deductible.

With attendance reaching over 500 shooters, it's pretty obvious that Kiddies' ideas were spot on! Participation by sponsors was more than generous. Belterra Hotel and Casino provided their

huge main theater and stage for the Saturday night auction and dinner (which included the auditorium, tables, linen and service to guests without charge) along with about \$20,000 to boot! Likewise, the Outback restaurants of Cincinnati supplied a delicious dinner, also without charge. Shooters had plenty of time before dinner to peruse the many auction items and welcomed the visit from Boomer Esiason, who gave a short but meaningful talk about CF and how it has affected his life and that of his family.

Jack Cassidy, another long time supporter and all around funny guy, was the Saturday night auctioneer – calling out the bidding on several super items such as a three day pheasant hunt, shooting lessons with Andy Duffy and a Bruce Ney specially painted Remington 1100 in the orange and black stripes of the Cincinnati Bengals football team with a signature from Boomer on the stock. Since there were two top bidders for the gun, they decided to have Bruce build a second one – giving the other bidder his choice of team colors and quarterback signature! When it was all said and done, \$60,000 dollars was raised from the auction and other bid items on display. Generous sporting clays competitors clearly opened their hearts, as well as their wallets, for this worthy cause.

ON TO THE EVENTS

Two hundred sporting targets were on the menu for the Main Event. Mick Howells set the Red course while Mike McAlpine did the Blue. These two master target setters also split the duties of six FITASC new style Parcours with Mike setting one through three and Mick setting four through six.

As a devotee to the game, I feel confident in saying that the FITASC offered some of the most entertaining and fun layouts I have shot in quite some time. The extreme terrain on Elk Creek's mountainous property gave the setters the ability to test the envelope – and they did so without going over the edge. All presentations were visible throughout the day, attesting to the fact that the setters paid close attention to where the sun would be during the hours the event would be shot.

Everything from up close and fast, to long, high, under your feet, over your head – and just about everywhere imaginable – came from the fertile imaginations of the target setting duo. I never heard so much as a single word of fault on either the sporting or the FITASC event.

The 5-Stand was particularly interesting in format, changed from the usual bill of fare found at



VIEW OF THE MAIN CLUBHOUSE AND VINEYARDS.

many such events. There were two separate 5-Stands that would provide the shooter with a 100 target event. Each of the two layouts would be shot first time around with 25 targets presented as report pairs and the second time around as simo pairs. The competitor would shoot the pairs as reports and, then staying on the same layout, would shoot the same menu but as simo pairs. When the first 50 targets were completed, the shooter would then move to the second layout – and repeat the process. Overall, a neat way to shoot 5-Stand, although I thought the first layout played a bit tough with long and fast targets coupled with some short windows on the simos. The second layout was a bit more user friendly, giving a little more time to acquire the second target in the pairs.

NOVEL IDEA

This event provided an event first that certainly falls into the category of noteworthy. A new computer program was used that allowed shooters to enter themselves into the event (unless entry was faxed) at the times they



MARK CROOK, A FINE YOUNG SUB-JUNIOR SHOOTER, SQUADED WITH (L TO R) LEÓN TAN, JON KRUGER, FREDDY MODDERS AND BROTHER SCOTT IN THE FITASC EVENT.

wanted, together with options and who to shoot with. If there were additions or changes, shooters did it themselves. When entering online, shooters received a confirmation they could print out, rather like buying an airline ticket online. The system also kept scores updated as they were posted. Particularly neat was that when on line, and as the event was underway, you could click on the name of a shooter and it brought up the individual sporting stations or Parcours and gave the scores shot on each. Truly an amazing and welcome innovation. No more

wondering where Wendell Cherry missed a target or two. You could click on his name and see every station and how he scored on each. Connie McElroy of Shoot Promotions was a major player in the development of this excellent program and I think you will see this aid to handling the necessities of registration and score keeping spread like wildfire throughout the country. The entire results utilizing this new program can be viewed at Connie's web site: www.shootpromotions.com

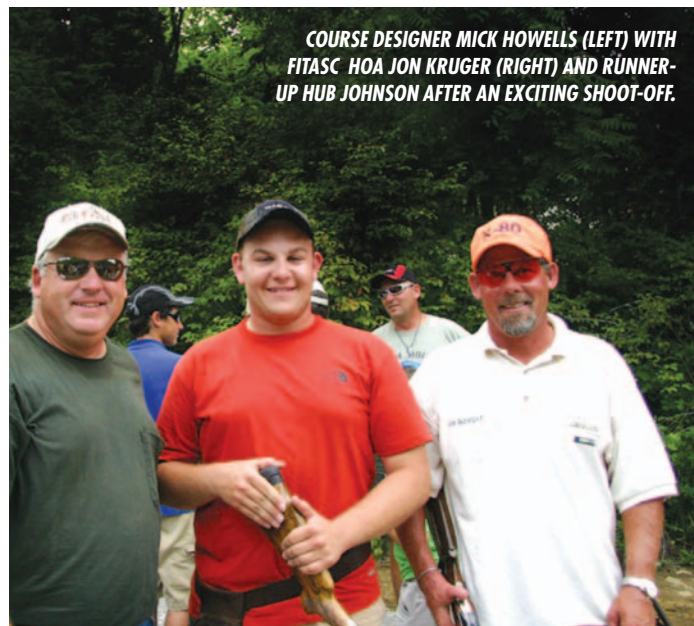
troops with his superb talent. He scored 98 on McAlpine's Blue course and 94 on Howell's Red course for a loss of only 8 targets and a top score of 192. Runner-up was Jon Kruger, scoring 94 on Blue and 96 on Red for 190. The next five shooters – Tim Jewell, Kevin DeMichiels, Brandon Powell, Tom Mack and Scott Robertson – took Master1 through 5 tied at 189. From there on down, the scores dropped one off, almost all the way through the 139 Masters in attendance.

AND NOW, THE WINNERS

The battle for top honors (and the big bucks) in the sporting event came from the top of the food chain of sporting clays. Literally, the top 50 shooters pretty much made up a "who's who" of sporting clays in the U.S. – with only a few top guns missing from the roster. A \$60,000 purse would be divided into the classes and concurrents with \$5000 waiting for the winner and 14 additional money awards in the Open classes. The concurrents weren't left out either. There was a \$1000 purse for the HOA and additional moneys paid down to 5th place.

The 2007 Champion was Wendell Cherry, again wowing the

In the concurrent races, Super Veteran Ron Shafer topped the list at 169 taking home a neat \$1000, with W.Ray Newman second at 165, followed by Joe Cantey III at 164. Veteran honors went to Gary Greenway's big score of 186 with Jim Williams (180) second and Jack Concannon (176) third. The Junior concurrent contains a wealth of up and coming talent and the scores certainly confirm that fact. Top gun went to Brandon Powell (189) followed by Hub Johnson (182) and Joey Bolton (180). Sub-Juniors, also a category quickly filling with superbly talented youngsters, found Dave Radulovich in top spot with 179. James Byran (175) took second place and Mike Everson (167) was third. In the Ladies, the top score



COURSE DESIGNER MICK HOWELLS (LEFT) WITH FITASC HOA JON KRUGER (RIGHT) AND RUNNER-UP HUB JOHNSON AFTER AN EXCITING SHOOT-OFF.

was a three way tie at 161 between Ashleigh Hafley, Tina Jewell and DeeAnn Massey.

FITASC CHALLENGE

229 shooters participated in this 150 target event with a \$20,000 purse, adding just a bit of extra pressure on the competitors. Mike McAlpine's #2 layout would prove to be one of the toughest, with #1 a close second. A couple of tough and fast "down the hill" crossers from the first peg on #2 layout were quite formidable – and took their toll on many of us. Mike's targets were a bit more technical in presentation and difficulty, while Mick's featured some of the longer shots – 'big' battues and rabbits. One could marvel at the spectacular view overlooking most of the layouts while shooting some equally spectacular targets!

By the close of shooting on Sunday afternoon, Jon Kruger and Hub Johnson would find themselves in a tie at 140 and a shoot-off for FITASC honors. 25 additional targets were set on the #4 layout and we all had the pleasure of watching two extremely talented shooters battle it out over some seriously tough targets. The final peg of the shoot-off featured a nasty 45 yard rabbit angling away from the shooter, as well as a true pair of chandelle standard and battue that were set high in the sky doing a criss-cross pattern overhead going



away from the shooter at light speed – or at least very close to it. Hub put up a valiant effort, but in the end, Jon Kruger would finish in the top spot with an additional \$3000 in his pocket. Hub would take home second place and \$1000.

In the Seniors, the top three places were all tied up at 139 with Brandon Powell, John Woolley and Gebben Miles finishing one, two, three. The Veteran

Champion was Jim Jamison (128) followed by Jim Williams (125) and Ken Kluttz (124). Super Veterans was won by Joe Cantey (127) while Ron Shafer (120) took second and W. Ray Newman (117) third. The Junior concurrent is still dominated by some outstanding shooters and Hub Johnson is certainly one of these, finishing first in his concurrent, complimenting his tie for HOA with Jon Kruger. Second place went to Brandon Powell (139) with Joey Bolton (133) in third. In the

Sub-Juniors, Scott Crook topped his concurrent with a 127, followed by David Radulovich (125) and Able Spire (124). Dr. Paula Benbow won the Ladies with 126. Debbie Wall (124) was second and Ashleigh Hafley (122) third.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Two things came together at this event that made it very special. A superb ground with some of the finest terrain for sporting and FITASC one could hope for, as well as a deserving and special charity. That, coupled with the professionalism shown by the many people who organized and put on this event was second to none, and showed over 500 shooters how well an event of this magnitude can be run. Elk Creek, the Boomer Esiason Foundation and Mark Kiddie did a masterful job of putting on this event, and the smiles on so many of the shooters faces and the high praise from those who competed in this event is 'proof of the pudding', so to speak. There is no doubt in my mind that Elk Creek would be an excellent choice for a future U.S. Open – and the voices of most of the competitors at this event echoed that opinion. ■

VETERAN SPORTING WINNER, GARY GREENWAY.



"SMILING" RON SHAFER WON THE SPORTING SUPER-VETERAN TITLE.

