

THE *COST* OF SPECIALTY TARGETS

BY NICK SISLEY

WHAT TARGET TYPE DO YOU LIKE BEST? IS IT
A STANDARD THAT QUARTERS AWAY QUICK
AND THROUGH THE TREES OR BRUSH? OR
MAYBE ITS ONE OF A VARIETY OF SPECIALS –
CHANDELLE, RABBIT, MIDI, MINI OR BATTUE?

The bottom line is that all shooters want a good mix of targets that are so essential if we are to experience quality practice, challenging league birds, but especially for sporting clays and FITASC championships. But the cost of speciality targets is increasing. With most clubs keeping a careful eye on the bottom line, are we likely to see fewer rabbits, battues and midis being thrown at clubs and future Big Blasts. While the increasing cost (dollars and cents) of speciality targets is of concern, not getting the right mix and balance of specials and standards could have an even greater cost – dissatisfied customers!

RIISING COSTS

The cost of everything is on the rise – including shooting sports. As this article is being written, the price of lead has fallen, but the price of raw lead is still very high. Will that price go up or down in coming months? We'll see. Targets also cost more. Phil Murray at White Flyer confirms that all their targets are up in price compared with a year ago with their battue, rabbit, 90mm and 60mm all up about 10 – 15 percent. I received these prices from one White Flyer distributor.

- Standard All Orange – \$8.90

135 per box (6.5 cents each)

- Biodegradable same price as standards
- Rabbit – \$9.75
117 per box (8.3 cents each)
- Midi 90mm – \$9.50
144 per box (6.6 cents each)
- Mini 60mm – \$19.00
250 per box (7.6 cents each)
- Battue – \$18.00
180 per box (10 cents each)

A 90 pack of standard targets at a big “Mart” store was \$3.96 (4.4 cents each) not all that many months ago. Current price for that same box of standards is \$7.66 (8.5 cents each). That’s quite a leap in price. Of course, gun clubs don’t pull their pickup trucks up to a “Mart” to load up with birds, but that example does give you an idea about how much target prices have increased in some instances.

The component of a clay target that is most influential in this price rise is tar, which, of course, comes from crude oil – and everyone knows how a barrel of crude has gone out of sight the last couple of years.

CAC Associates is a distributor in Ebensburg, PA that deals in Remington targets. This distributor says that there is only

one manufacturer of pitch that works with the clay target producers, and if that company shuts down for cleaning, repair, vacations, whatever, this puts a lot of pressure on target producers can’t produce. Here are some current CAC prices for Remington targets:

All Orange	\$9.50
Orange Dome	\$9.30
All Black	\$9.20
International	\$10.70
Rabbits	\$10.30 (117 per box)
Midi 90mm	\$9.95 (144 per box)
Mini 60mm	\$19.45 (250 per box)
Battue	\$18.85 (180 per box)

CAC Associates told me that these prices are up roughly 18 percent – compared to 2007 prices.

SPECIALTY TRAPS

The good news is that, at least for the most part, the traps that throw our targets are not up in price – yet. In fact, one of ATK Champion Target’s machines has gone down appreciably in price. Their SST Electric (capable of throwing 50 birds) sold for \$1700 in 2006. That

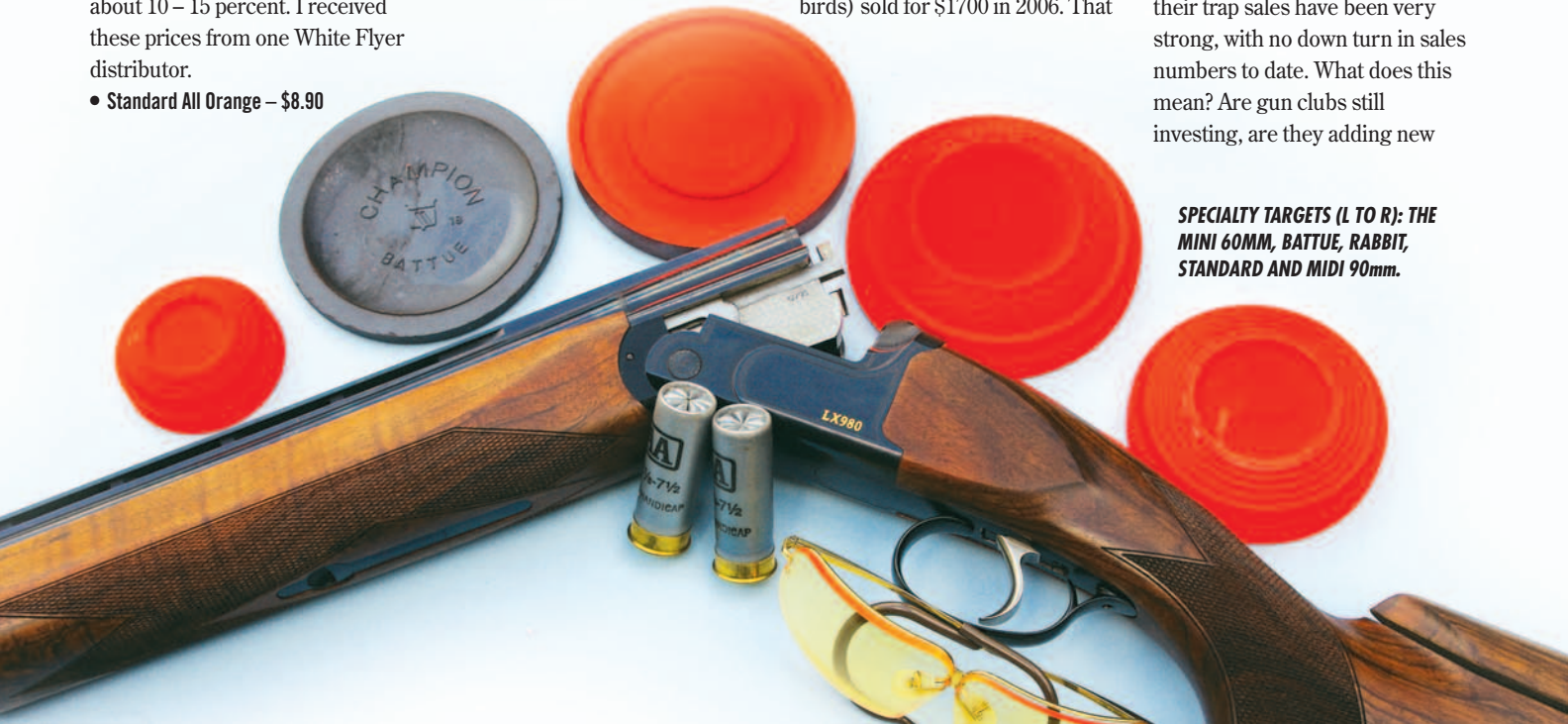
180 SPORTER. THIS CHAMPION TRAP HOLDS 180 BIRDS AND CAN BE ADJUSTED SIGNIFICANTLY TO THROW VARYING PRESENTATIONS.



trap’s suggested retail (not always the actual cost) is now \$1400. Champion’s entry level trap was new for 2007 – their Easy Bird. The price is still the same at \$500 MSRP. This might be a trap to consider for one or more individuals to invest in – if they have a suitable area nearby to safely shoot for practice.

Champion’s most expensive trap is their Auto-Flite Master – 550 target capacity MSRP at \$7200. Jason Nash at ATK told me that their trap sales have been very strong, with no down turn in sales numbers to date. What does this mean? Are gun clubs still investing, are they adding new

SPECIALTY TARGETS (L TO R): THE MINI 60MM, BATTUE, RABBIT, STANDARD AND MIDI 90mm.



stations so they need more traps, and/or are shooters themselves buying traps at a respectable clip for their own practice? The answer may be all of the above and more.

At Promatic I first talked with Andy Perkins. He confirms that some of their traps are up in price, some as much as \$150 compared to two years ago. Their least expensive trap is the Elite at \$800, while their Super Sporter 8 is seen most often at clay courses. This is a tilt and turn model with high capacity at \$3095.

I had a particularly interesting report from Promatic's head honcho, Julian Coy. He told me that over the last couple of years there has been a significant increase in cost of the raw materials used in their traps (probably other trap manufacturers are experiencing the same problem). Such rising costs are mainly associated with metals used in trap manufacture – like steel, alloy, copper and

stainless steel. World metal prices have gone up – and seem to be consistently rising. Coy went on, “We’ve done our best to shelter our customers from these increases, but to give one example, we fit high grade stainless steel throwing plates to all our commercial traps to avoid rust and pitting. The cost of that stainless has more than doubled in the last 12 months.

“Some of our trap prices have remained static, while others have risen. However, remember that the average commercial customer will make our traps last 10 years, and some stretch this to 20 years. If a trap can throw 35,000 targets a year, the added cost is one 400th of a cent, hardly significant or even measurable

“The increased costs of targets like rabbits, battues and others are of more concern than trap price increases. We don’t want to see specialty targets disappearing from the competition scene – or even the league or practice sector.”

Here’s what Promatic has done to help range owners offset rising target costs.

- The company has a new counting system that offers so much more control over target costs. Club operators can charge a different rate for rabbits or minis, for example. Clubs can charge, as an example, 30 cents for a standard and 35 cents for a battue or rabbit. Further, different rates can be charged to members, guests and non-members – and not only for sporting but the other clay target games as well. Coy says that customers who have implemented their Promatic Claymate system report reduced waste and revenue increases of 30 – 40 percent. He thinks this system is the best way for any shooting ground to fundamentally change

its financial position for the better. It is for the good of everyone in the sport to have profitable clubs.

- Rather than pay for more expensive specialty targets, Promatic is trying to get more out of standard clays with the innovative technology they build into their machines. Recently this company introduced a Sporting Doubles Thrower, a Downhill Thrower and a Ranger Chandelle Rabbit – which can flip a standard clay mid-air to present a totally different bird. These traps allow target setters to produce a much wider range of presentations while still using cheaper standard targets.

- Much of Promatic’s research and development goes into what Coy calls “Zero no birds.” It has simply become too expensive for club operators to have target breakage. This is particularly true of rabbits, minis and battues.
- When it comes to the mini target, the company has traps with their own specific mini carousels, knife edges and let-down ramps to dramatically reduce breakage.

How about sales? Coy says, “Large projects have slowed, but that sales slack has been picked up by smaller clubs increasing their spending. Several of our traps have seen dramatic growth while demand for others has declined. Customers want value, and in the current market wants financial help. That’s why we have launched

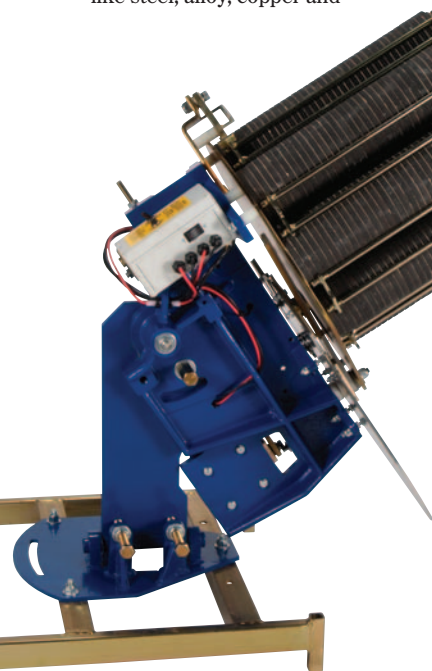
Promatic Commercial Lending to provide flexible financing for clubs that are finding traditional banks unresponsive. The market is difficult to read, but I think we will end the year with around 10 percent growth, which is lower than the 15 percent growth we saw in 2007 – but still points to a healthy industry.”

DIFFERENT PRESENTATIONS

An important factor with trap selection, as far as specialty targets go, is to choose traps that are capable of throwing multiple target types. Purchasing a trap that can only throw so-called standard targets severely limits the interest that a club can create for its customers.

At Atlas Traps I talked with John Cere and Scott Manspeaker. This company markets four trap models. They have not increased prices since January 1, 2007. All four of their target throwers, the AT400, AT250, AT50 and the Patriot will throw standard, midi

THE ATLAS AT250 HOLDS 250 BIRDS, HAS A COMMERCIAL GEAR MOTOR, A 75-FOOT RELEASE CORD AND COMES WITH A FIVE-YEAR WARRANTY.



NEW FROM PROMATIC, THEIR DOWNHILL THROWER. THIS COMPLIMENTS THEIR CURRENT RANGE OF SPECIALTY TRAPS.



and battue targets. By the end of this year they hope to be able to throw mini 60s from the same models. Also later this year, Atlas will have a rabbit/teal/chandelle model to add to their offerings.

CLUB COMMENT

Sam and Frieda Lancaster were the first club owners I talked to about rising shooting costs. They run Claythorne Lodge in Columbus, Kansas, home of many Big Blasts over the years. Sam says shooting is always off at Claythorne in July and August, but the summer of 2008 saw fewer shooters than ever. Practice shooting up until July and August of this year has remained fairly constant, but I was told that this participation needs to increase.

The target thrown most often at Claythorne is the White Flyer Pheasant (standard). Not only is a harder standard target better for

throwing faster and longer birds without breakage (more spring pressure), they also hold up better in outside storage or when being trucked to individual sporting stations. The Lancasters are hoping they will not have to cut back on the throwing of specialty targets, but it is more expensive to throw most of them, so it might be considered in time.

Chuck Frazier is at Hunter's Pointe Sporting Clays near Washington, North Carolina. He's both a range owner and a target setter. Frazier says there has been no increase passed along to shooters so far at Hunter's Pointe. "One reason for that is because specialty targets comprise only about 10 percent of the targets we throw – and I think this is true at many ranges."

He has a truck that he takes to shoots where he is going to set the targets – in which he can carry as many as 50 traps. For specialty

targets he carries more traps that throw midi 90mm targets than any other. His target costs are about 50 cents more per box of midis – compared to standard targets – but 144 midis are in the box (compared with 135 standard targets per box). Consequently,

midis can be thrown for about the same price as standards.

However, at his Hunter's Pointe he says maintenance costs are really skyrocketing. He uses diesel in his grass mowing machines, has a lot of grass to cut, and during some periods of the year has to cut twice a

WHILE SHOOTERS BEMOAN THE RISING COST OF TRAVEL, HOTELS, ENTRY FEES AND AMMUNITION, GROUNDS AND CLUBS ARE ALSO FACING INFLATORY COST PRESSURES THAT INCLUDE FUEL COSTS, MAINTENANCE, TARGETS AND TRAP INVESTMENT.



week. He thinks the cost of shooting will go up a dollar or two per round of 50 – but this will be more to offset increasing maintenance costs than specialty target costs.

Mike McAlpine, formerly the NSCA Chief Shooting Instructor, is in constant demand as a target setter. He reckons that throwing specialty midi 90mm targets is no different from a cost standpoint than throwing standard birds since the costs are so similar – just as Chuck Frazier advised. Mike doesn't like throwing mini 60mm targets, he says most folks cannot see them, plus these little targets are very influenced by wind – which can vary during a multiple day championship. “Bob Brister was one of my best friends – and he had his share of eye problems later in life. When I set targets I'd ask for Bob's input. If he could see them – most any shooter could! I enjoy throwing battues far more. They're easy to see and can be

thrown in so many different ways,” Mike explained.

McAlpine was setting targets at the recent Boomer Esiason All American Sporting Clays Championship & World FITASC Challenge at Elk Creek Hunt Club when we talked. In 2007 they threw numerous battues at that tournament – but far fewer battues were thrown this year. Because of cost? Probably.

So – the picture is not all bleak for the future of our sport. Clay

target shooting will survive. We may see some participants drop out. We may see others shoot less. We may see some travel less. But clubs all over America are going to continue to throw fun and challenging targets.

WHAT COST?

So there you have it. While shooters bemoan the rising cost of travel, hotels, entry fees and ammunition, grounds and clubs are also facing

inflationary cost pressures that include fuel costs, maintenance, targets and trap investment. Just as we shooters look to 'reduce' our costs of shooting in this difficult economic period, club owners, target setters and Big Blast organizers are sure to want to reduce their costs (if only to hold current prices). Lets hope its not at the expense of specialty targets.

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TOUGH TIMES

I wanted to get a selection of all the target types to photograph to accompany this article. I contacted the sporting course that was closest to where I live – McCrae's Sporting Clays near Worthington, (PA). Not only did I find they had no targets, they had just shut down their sporting course – so another course has fallen to these hard economic times.

Then I contacted Chestnut Ridge Sporting Clays and Dave Yurko (724-694-9831). Dave says shooting has considerable fallen off. He and his brother acquired the club in 1999, when clay target prices were close to half what they are now. Shooting is down at Chestnut Ridge, but the club continues to hang on. (Dave did have all the different sporting target types needed – so thanks to him).