

Declining Entries

The growing popularity of sporting clays is well documented by statistics from NSCA headquarters. In 2000, membership was 15,060, there were 595 clubs, 1,946 registered shoots and the number of targets thrown was 10.72 million. In 2005 there were 20,816 members (+38%), 656 Clubs (+10%), 2,337 registered shoots (+20%) and the number of targets thrown was 17.85 million (+66%).

Good news indeed. So, why are entries to many of this year's Big Blasts down on previous years? I believe there are two very separate reasons – lack of growth in the number of 'competition' shooters as a proportion of the growing total NSCA membership, and secondly, monetary and time pressures that force 'competition' shooters to be more selective as to which events they plan to attend.

The membership of the NSCA, not surprisingly, has long been made up of what might be termed 'competition' shooters and 'recreational' shooters. Though the total membership has grown by 38% in five years, the number of 'competition' shooters has not grown at anywhere near the same pace and is never likely to exceed much more than 20-25% of the total membership. It is from this small sector of the membership that the growing number of Big Blasts have



to attract the majority of their entries.

So are there too many Big Blasts? Over the last decade the State, Zone and National events program has been complemented by a growing (and still growing) number of major sponsored events. While most of these independently sponsored championships are NSCA registered, they have grown in popularity because of the wide variety of venues, attractive prize funds, give-aways, quality target presentations and strong advertising – ensuring that sponsors capitalize on a prestigious marketing opportunity. So successful has the growth of these events been, that in the last few years the competition diary during the Spring and Summer months has become overloaded.

The downside is that the growing number of Big Blasts must attract entries from a virtually static number of 'competition' shooters – inevitably entries suffer.

We should also not forget that the available discretionary funds to make these expensive and time-consuming events week after week

are not available to the majority. Add in the rising cost of fuel, air fares, hotels and ammunition (for 600-700 targets over four days), the time away from business and/or family and it soon becomes obvious as to why entries at so many premiere events are on the slide.

So what of the future for Big Blasts? Over time, market forces and shooters voting with their feet will redress the balance – established well-organized events will no doubt continue to attract support while others may fall by the wayside and new-to-market events will be few and far between.

But, over the same period of time, the NSCA, shoot organizers and clubs must do as much as they can to make 'competition' shooting more attractive, enjoyable and value for money. As individuals, we must encourage friends and colleagues to embrace the opportunity to test their skills in serious competition. Only by growing the pool of 'competition' shooters within the NSCA will future State, Zone, National and Big Blasts restore entry levels to those of previous years. ■

ENTRIES TO SOME OF THIS YEAR'S BIG BLASTS HAVE NOT HELD UP COMPARED WITH PREVIOUS YEARS. IS IT A MATTER OF COSTS, PRESSURE ON RECREATIONAL TIME OR JUST TOO MANY BIG BLASTS?

MICHAEL BRUNTON
PUBLISHER