

‘*Memoirs*’ of The National Muzzle Loading Shotgun Championships at Yeaveley - July 2016



Dave, The Hairy Shooter, and myself travelled over from deepest Suffolk to attend the Summer National annual event held at Yeaveley Shooting ground.

It was our first trip to this event, but I dare so, not our last. We stayed reasonably close by to the ground at a fine old hostelry, The George & Dragon, in Ashbourne. What I delightful old market town Ashbourne is, I’ve never seen so many pubs per square quarter mile! A busy night life, lots of people milling about and all the locals are very friendly people indeed. I can recommend the Smiths tavern as a traditional drinking establishment and the Thai restaurant in the basement opposite, is well worth a visit- excellent food and service.

The day of the shoot, we were awoken early by much happening in the market place outside the hotel. Land Rovers shunting trailers into position, metallic clanking of pen sections and the fine sound (and smells) of sheep. It was the annual Sheepfest being set up for one day only. Had we not been shooting that day, it would surely have been worthy of a visit.

Breakfast was surprisingly not available at the hotel, so we loaded up (the car not the guns!) and ventured out of town to the nearby travel Lodge, surely they did breakfast?, no they didn’t! A rather nice lady on reception did however point us in the direction of a café on the Ashbourne industrial estate. So we proceeded there (stomachs rumbling) and found The Runway Café, excellent full English and very reasonably priced, another recommendation.

By now the dull morning had turned to showers, as we set the Garmin for Yeaveley. The closer we got, the heavier the rain. When we’d parked up at the ground, a run to the clubhouse was in order to avoid an early soaking!

The clubhouse was open, but in darkness- awaiting the generator to be started! Just Martin, Clare and one of the kitchen ladies were about. The Clubhouse, and in particular the lounge bar, was something else! Reminiscent of a Scottish or Scandinavian log cabin, the smell of timber, leather, old log fires and alcohol was perfect. Taxidermy and shooting related collections and pictures whiled away some time before the genny fired up and the kettle began to sing!!

The other competitors slowly began arriving, as the rain got heavier and heavier, telling tales of floods and axle deep crossings. 10am came and went, nobody dared venture out. A group of young lads attending a stag event appeared (not sure about the leopard pattern shorts, but it takes all sorts!)

10.30am I do believe it is easing off at last. Martin, always first to make a move, decided to go for it. Others, including myself and The hairy one, followed, donning waterproofs from the vehicle just in case of a return of the deluge.

Onwards to stand 1 of the 5 for the day. We both decided upon 3 cards, all for the single percussion competitions, and started on the re-entry open, to see the targets and get our eyes in. A reasonable start and onto stand 2 by which time the rain had stopped and it was getting decidedly warm with the wet weather gear on, so off it came.

Stands 2 and 3, not so good scores some crafty birds there. Then the grouse butt for stand 4, reasonable success with the R-L looper, but could I get that dead cert slow incomer, no, frustrating or what!!! A walk into the woods followed over precarious wet footbridges and eyes all about for wayward archery arrows to reach stand 5 and the much talked about driven pair from the high tower. The short trek between loading table and stand was in a dip and already waterlogged, what would it be like come 4 o’clock? Many people struggled with these, some turned and took them as crossers, I enjoy these birds, I believe I only dropped 1 or 2 from the 12. Must be the game shooter in me!!

2 further cards, getting better scores each time but I still couldn’t get that slow incomer on stand 4!!!

It got to 2:45 and I was undecided as to whether to get the double out and have one last round. Dave had had enough, but I thought I’ve brought the gun over, might as well shoot it!! Not a bad round, but could have done better as always. Finally hit the slow incomer with the J C Reilly, so that was a relief. Stand 5 by this time, was like the proverbial quagmire, particularly in the stand where footing was precarious to say the least. Still some nice doubles were broken, look out you pheasants when the season starts! It won’t be long now.

Back to the clubhouse for tea and to learn that there were once again shoot-offs for some of the medals. Martin, The Hairy shooter and I all tied to be in the shoot-off for the single barrel percussion Warwickshire Shield event. So out with the single again, a rather nice Isaac Askey 12b ex Mr Capewell, thanks Peter, very pleased with it. Surprisingly Martin missed the first bird, with Dave and myself killing it, so martin took bronze. An extended shoot-off then took place for gold. Was it nerves, was it bad shooting, was it thoughts of missing drinking time? Who knows, I finally got one after Dave had missed, and it was all over.

So off to the pub, The Shire Horse at Edlaston. Good beer, good food and good sights of Sarah and her guests appearing for her birthday celebrations! So we said our goodbyes, then back to Ashbourne to drop off the car and do some serious drinking and celebrating.

The next morning we set off on the long hot journey back to Suffolk, recounting tales from the weekend and looking forward to the next national event and a certain return to Derbyshire next year.

I can still smell sheep!!!

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