

Competitive Shooting Is Not My Thing

Last Winter, while we were in Florida, our son Jeff, who had recently retired, visited us. Jeff is very involved in hunting, fishing, ecological projects for the American Woodcock Society and motorcycle riding. A few years ago, he raced Ducati motorcycles...as a concerned wife and frightened parents watched him go 180 miles per hour down the straightaway! In the first two months of his retirement, he has already ridden his bike to Colorado to visit his grandson, Nick, and to New Hampshire to visit his sister, Jill, who is there on a traveling nurse assignment. I bear some responsibility for Jeff's interest in motorcycles as I purchased a Honda 100 to use as secondary transportation during a Summer teaching assignment in the Naval Reserve, also in Colorado, where our boys, Jeff, Jay and Jon got to ride trails behind our rental home after I got home from work each evening. Jeff's fire was lit for motorcycle riding in the early years and has never been extinguished. As the years have gone by, Jeff's interests expanded to all things outdoors. So, it was surprising to me that Jeff accepted my offer to take him golfing while he visited us in Florida. Jeff had played a few times before and did quite well on our several outings, even paring a hole from time to time. He only lost a couple of balls on the course we played, which had water on nearly every hole. We had lots of fun. Jeff is good sport. When we finished, he said, "Dad, will you go to a clay pigeon shoot with me some time this Summer?"...and with Summer so far away...I said, "Sure."

Several months ago, Jeff sent me a flyer regarding a shoot to be held in New Castle, Pennsylvania on July 13. I agreed to go. On July 2 I had to have two stents put into two major heart arteries. After the stents were inserted, the doctor said I could return to all normal activities after one week. Although I do not consider shooting a shotgun to be a normal activity for me, the doctor said it would be alright to keep my commitment to Jeff.

Jeff picked me up at 6:00 AM on July 13 and we headed to New Castle, PA, a ninety minute trip. Jeff had brought two twenty gauge shot guns and two hundred shells...we were ready for action. I had brought my own ear muffs that I use when mowing our yard. I wore my "Retired Navy" hat in hopes of giving myself some semblance of credibility to all of the other shooters, but no one mentioned it. There were more folks wearing camo outfits than "Greg Norman Shark" golf shirts but no one made any comments.

After a short instructional meeting by the leader, the nearly 100 competitors headed to the seventeen different stations for, you guessed it, a "shotgun start."

Each team went to one of seventeen stations, like the one shown below. A shooter could not load his gun until the barrel was positioned between the two vertical arms. Only then could the



shooter load two shells into his gun. When the shooter was ready, he shouted "pull" (He should have shouted push because the clay pigeon was actually activated by a button...but old

customs die slowly). The moment the shooter fired his first shot another target was released. Three rounds of two shots completed one turn at a station. Six shots at stations 1-16 and four shots at station 17 completed the round for each shooter... 100 shots. "The Blrds" came from all angles... above, each side, sometimes climbing and sometimes dropping. The device firing the pigeons is shown, uncovered, at the right. Most were discreetly hidden.



Some contestants were more prepared for competition than others as is noted in the picture of one shooter in his specially designed John Deere ATV.

The event took about three hours, which was a leisurely pace for everyone. I stopped shooting after seventy-five targets because my arm was hurting too much...probably because I didn't position the stock properly against my shoulder or because I am an old man with thin skin.

The picture at the right shows what my arm looked like the next morning. Not painful but major bruising. (Note that golfers rarely get bruised, even in tournaments!)



What a great day with my son! He was a great mentor and host and never made fun of my skill level. He gave me helpful hints and I improved as the day went on. Before going, I had hopes of hitting at least one moving target, as I had not shot a shotgun, or any gun, since I had been in the Navy. I hit fifteen “birds” out of seventy-five shots...

twenty percent. Exactly at the Medoza Line! (Note: The Mendoza Line is an expression in Baseball, named after Mario Mendoza, whose poor batting average is taken to define the threshold of incompetent hitting. The cutoff being .200 or twenty percent. From this day forth, clay pigeon shooters will speak of the **Glenn Alan Saltzman Line (The GAS Line)**, or, twenty percent of targets hit...the threshold of incompetent shooting!)



Jeff's shooting skill is far superior to mine, but wait till we play golf again. What a great day of more father-son bonding... although our scores were far apart, our bond has become closer than ever. I love you Jeff...thanks for including me.

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