

'Memories' of The Hornsey Wood Open Pigeon Match, Rugby and District Trap Club, Crick, July 2016



So I arrived at the Hairy Shooters house just after 05:30 hrs, it should have been 6am but I couldn't sleep, the anticipation was too great even though I'd shot at Crick last year! Fortunately Big Dave was up and about, just as well really.

We were soon loaded and got on the road, anticipating an 08:45 arrival in time for a fine breakfast before the competition. It was quite misty for the early part of the journey, keeping our speed down, would we make it in time? We shouldn't have worried, arriving at the Crick Wheatsheaf just after 8 and hoping to see Bushy and Goaty at their breakfast table and steal a sausage from their platters!! It wasn't to be, they were still tucked up in bed as we left again and made our way to the shooting ground, a short drive away.

We were the first competitors to arrive, the ground staff were busy loading up these funny white and orange winged targets which were to give us so much enjoyment later. Chef roared off into town to fetch eggs, as we eagerly awaited the famous breakfast.

A big thankyou to Martin and Clare who had once again done a fine job in organising the event and arriving the previous day to set up loading tables, barriers and marquees in readiness for the match. Slowly the remaining muzzle loaders arrived, all looking forward to shooting the Helice for either the very first time, or to try and hit the little blighters again after previous attempts!!!

Breakfast was excellent, as predicted, including black pudding which some say had later been found in the gents urinals!! It is worthy of note that a sign above the urinals stated "Please would those with a short bat stand closer to the wicket".....

There were 28 entries for the coveted pigeon trophy, which was displayed enticingly at the stand throughout the match. It would indeed be an achievement to win it. The entrants, from all over the country(16 of who represented the Anglian Muzzle loaders), were split into 5 squads and we were to shoot 5,5,5,3 and a final 2 targets in rotation to make the 20 birds. Doesn't sound many does it? but it took all day!! It is a fine spectator sport, so whilst waiting for your squad to go again, you can watch the others and have a chat, a drink and a bite to eat. Thank goodness for the covered areas as it was starting to get very warm!!

Well, what a brilliant form of shooting, the closest thing you'll ever get to traditional boxed live pigeon shooting banned from Britain in the 1920's. We only used the 3 centre traps of the 5, and with a reduced distance to the traps, but even that proved difficult for most equipped only with open bore muzzle loaders!

It's your turn, The lonely walk up to the stand, the pressing of the button to start the motors (when you remember!), the distinctive whirr as they run up to speed, the wait before you dare call for the bird and then..... The flap drops at random on one of the three traps, and the Helice takes off like a whirling dervish, its trajectory and path unknown. Shoot it quick to knock out the hard plastic centre from the wings, so that it lands inside the barrier fence to score a hit and not get the fatefull miss horn!! The collection of the broken targets after 18 birds shot, proved just how much punishment these critters will take and still be able to fly! Broken wings, some blown off completely, but the white centre still firmly in place, albeit peppered with shot marks. The jury is out on whether bigger shot or denser pattern is the answer?

The vast majority of competitors failed to reach double figure scores, testament to how challenging these ZZ targets really are. Bev Keeble and myself both managed 11- just outside the medals! A nail-biting shoot off between Dick Eggington and John Richardson on 12, saw Dick taking silver and John the bronze. The outright winner and worthy champion, was Ian Hall with an excellent 14, even with a mis-firing gun towards the end of the match!

Thanks to the Rugby and District Trap Club, for use of their ground and assistance once again, for another memorable competition. Also thanks to the score board ladies. We will be back next year for sure, hopefully seeing some new faces trying out this excellent game. Maybe not so warm next time please!!

So it was back to the Wheatsheaf for celebrations, commiserations and an excellent meal for many of the competitors. The tale of the Ashbourne Clam was retold by The Hairy Shooter to an incredulous audience and much drinking and laughter was had, especially those that stayed the night in fine accommodation. To revive the gambling past of the traditional live pigeon shoot, a small side bet had been placed prior to the day, I had great pleasure in relieving the hairy One of twenty pounds, for beating him on this occasion!

The drive back home to Suffolk was 29 degrees, hot in the non-air con equipped courtesy car, the Subaru still awaiting its new engine! Hopefully she will be back together in time for the Stoke Orchard Autumn nationals which we look forward to immensely. One last thing before I go, a special mention to the trombone man and HMS Goate and all who sailed in him, oh how we laughed!!

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