



Reload!

The Newsletter of the Connecticut Travelers

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TEN MILE RIVER TURNS UP THE HEAT!

By Stefanie Steinkraus

On April 22nd the Travelers had the pleasure of being guests at the beautiful Ten Mile River Preserve in Dover Plains, NY for their annual "Tax Time Revolt" shoot. Gary Hall, an old friend of the Travelers and manager at this exclusive private club, had his staff produce a memorable day for the 138 attending Travelers. As the turnout well shows, our members enjoy shooting new venues. I saw old faces, new faces and even some new old faces... it was wonderful to catch up with old friends and make some new ones.

The CTSCA relies on clubs like Ten Mile to keep our sport going – how many times have we heard the gripe "Are we really going to shoot *there* again?!" and subsequently the entries were low. But Ten Mile was a turning point for this year – a new club, superb targets and a lunch that rivaled the great food at the Old Newgate Coon Club!!! (I am still dreaming of the strawberry short cake!).

Enough boring prelude--let's get to the facts: 138 Travelers – great weather – great target presentations, in short a perfect day. We pulled into the lower parking lot at the main club house, packed our gear and then a six-seater golf cart took us up to the upper club house where coffee and pastries awaited the crowd. (Just one word of warning: when you get on the back of that golf cart watch your head – it has a roof... yours truly was excited to get up there and I banged my head so badly that a week later I still had a lump!!).

It was chilly at 10 am. The sun was out but spring hadn't yet decided to come to stay and

everyone was wearing a layer more than they wanted. By Noon the course had warmed up nicely--T-shirt anyone??

What can I say about the targets!? Different: There was something for everybody. The high score was 89 – not in the 90's – so I guess it's safe to say they were *Travelers tough* (a term not seeing much recent use). Long crossers, battues, rabbits, short windows and blue sky....

Station two featured a rabbit on the other side of a ravine and an outgoing trap-like target. The rabbit ran on the top of the ridge with a blue sky as backdrop and nothing to obstruct your view. Still, many a rabbit survived and will have the opportunity to mate and repopulate.

Something many of us have never seen before was the station that tested our concentration by throwing three different pairs! Pair one was a left to right screaming crosser with a 35-yard, high battue on report. The second pair was a right-to-left, low crosser with the same left to right screamer on report, and last but not least, we were challenged by a following pair of battues. Let me tell you, it was hard to remember which target came next. After having battled this "trinity" we moved on to the pond where we found ourselves in "feathered" company: a pheasant which wasn't too worried about all the shooting kept wandering in our line of fire. The presentation was nice (and the view of the lush, rolling Harlem Valley hills made it memorable) – a left to right outgoing crosser with a high incomer from the other side of the pond which stalled and just asked to be missed

over the top or to the. All the stations were well thought out and shootable... The most fun though was the socializing with the fellow Travelers.

At about 12.30 pm the noisy part of the day was over and everybody got carted downhill again. After packing the guns away and making our way to the fully stocked bar (such a treat!!) we gathered outside in the sun for a great buffet luncheon. Al gave a short rundown of the upcoming events, thanked our host and all the helpers and then turned the action over to honor the winners.

For anyone who has never shot at Ten Mile I suggest you mark your calendar for June 3rd when the Travelers return to Ten Mile because it's truly an experience.

HOA	George Parsons	89
Cl. 1 Champ.	Preston Moore	87
Cl. 1 RU	Kurt Anderson	86
Cl. 1 3 rd	Ed Shine	85
Cl. 2 Champ.	Brian Griffin	89
Cl. 2 RU	Bill Bretschger	83
Cl. 2 3 rd	Rich Shannon	82
Cl. 3 Champ.	Keith Anglace	82
Cl. 3 RU	Mark Latakas	81
Cl. 3 3 rd	Joe Cimino	79
Cl. 4 Champ.	Brian Flanagan	85
Cl. 4 RU	Don Brenton	78
Cl. 4 3 rd	Jeff Hunter	73
Cl. 5 Champ.	Lori Litherland	63
Cl. 5 RU	Stephen Rice	62
Cl. 5 3 rd	Emile Dorizzi	56
Cl. 6 Champ.	Philip Battaglia	57
Cl. 6 RU	Carol Thomas	48
Cl. 6 3 rd	Bill Hawley	41
Lady Champ.	Stefanie Steinkraus	74
Lady RU	Sue Uliano	72
Lady 3 rd	Paula Moore	72
Vet. Champ.	Lavert Cypher	86
Vet. RU	Bob Repella	85
Vet. 3 rd	Paul Elia	84
SenVet.Champ	John Lawlor	88
Junior Champ	Peter Magiolo	67
Junior RU	Mike Griffin	62
Junior 3 rd	Kristen Hachmann	55
Guest Champ	Jim Ryan	84

CTSCA POSTPONES MAY 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

This month's shoot the "May Minuet" usually held at the Tamarack Preserve, Millbrook, NY has regrettably been cancelled due to increased usage of that facility by its own membership. This would have been the final leg of our 20th Anniversary celebration so that event is obviously on hold until we secure alternate arrangements. Our sincere thanks go out to Tim, John and the rest of the staff at Tamarack who have been gracious hosts to us all these long years and we look forward to crossing paths with them again in the very near future. We hope to reschedule our anniversary celebration to an alternate venue for later in the shooting season if possible.

WEBSITE UPDATE

We just wanted to let everybody know that the wheels are spinning on the Travelers website. Traveler Eric Passero has been busy securing a hosting company, registering the domain name, and getting the underlying technology put together. These activities are done behind the scenes but are essential pieces before the website is launched.

At this point, we need a little help from the membership. We're looking for digital pictures (the older, the better) of Travelers activities that you would like to share with everybody. Please send your pictures to pictures@ctsca.org.

Look for updates in the coming months!

IT'S NOT THE GUN

By Phil Steinkraus

When I was a kid, the bicycle everybody wanted was the Schwinn Sting Ray Orange Crate (in orange) or Apple Crate (in red)--a kind of bicycle version of the motorcycle choppers made famous by the film *Easy Rider*. Every kid knew this bike was the ultimate status symbol, the kind of machine that could impress a starlet like Tatum O'Neal or Kristy Mc Nichol, should they ever materialize in our neighborhood. I wanted this bike and asked for it from my parents – for Christmas, for my birthday – every chance I got, and for what seemed an eternity. My father, a

man of wisdom who also possesses an highly developed sense for the value of a dollar, knew from experience that the real bike to have was made by Raleigh, that venerable old company that used to stand for all great things British.

So one special Christmas day, there by the tree sat a new Raleigh bicycle—a five-speed in blue with a banana seat and ape-hanger handle bars – hell it might have even looked the part, I suppose, but it still wasn't a Schwinn chopper. I rode that bike and it served me well over the years, but I always had the feeling I'd been gypped. My dad hadn't cared what I'd wanted. He'd just gone ahead and imposed his will on my Christmas gift.

Flash forward seven or eight years: The girl down the street whom I would soon... Oh well, guess I won't go into that here. Anyway, her family was having a garage sale and out on the front lawn sat a Schwinn Sting Ray chopper in orange. It was beautiful and in near perfect shape. I went over and caressed it. As a young adult with a drivers license and three or four twenties in my wallet, I could now easily afford to indulge myself! I swung a leg over – so this is what the world looked like from atop a Schwinn! I rode it a couple of yards on half-inflated tires and then it hit me! This bike was a piece of crap! Compared to my old Raleigh, it was like riding one of those cartoon bicycles out of the Flintstones—this thing had absolutely zero finesse. If the Raleigh was the bicycle equivalent of a classic sports car, this Schwinn was a clap-trap, low-rider. My father had been right; he'd looked for quality and workmanship, while all I had cared about was style over substance and the fad-frenzy of the Schwinn.

Please file my adolescent anecdote away for later as I intend to show that it has everything to do with sporting clays guns.

This game is one hell of a challenge. It's a big commitment in time, resources and intellect, and it's relentless on its insistence that we all abide by the laws of reality. Whether you're a good or a lousy shooter, your score is posted out in the open for all to see. Fragile egos don't last long, as the time spent on the learning curve required to earn your spurs demands the shooting of so many embarrassing scores, the true egotist can't hang in there long enough to

ever get good at this game (as in: I just had my 46th bad day in a row!)

There is a calm, Zen-like quality to good shooting that comes with maturity. No shooter can truly live out their full potential without this requisite maturity – and there are no shortcuts. Sure, some newer shooters may go on a tear and seem to win everything for a while, but I've never seen an immature personality or unseasoned competitor succeed over the long term without the requisite mileage and maturity that comes with it.

That's why I'm flabbergasted when I see experienced people of supposedly sound judgment trade in and out of shotguns with a manic rationale usually reserved for children trading Pokemon cards. Many of them often have multiple guns in the mix: One may have barrel work being done, another is being restocked, and a third may even be an "old reliable." This particular last gun ought to now be regarded with contempt, but alas, as it's the only one left that's shootable, it's owner grits his teeth and gives it a half-hearted pat of affection, patiently awaiting the day when the new gun arrives and he'll finally be delivered to the clay shooter's land of milk and honey.

A few years ago, a top pro I know was invited by his sponsor to switch from their autoloader to their new high-end, over-and-under target gun. After months of frustrating trial-and-error, shooting lackluster scores in competition, this pro finally threw in the towel and gave the new gun back. Being competitive was his first priority and trying to become one with such a radically different shotgun just wasn't worth the sacrifice.

None of the accoutrements of this game – the clothes, the golf cart, the motor home and even the upgraded shotgun have anything to do with our main objective: Breaking more targets than the next guy. Do we want to shoot or make a fashion statement? Do we want to compete or be admired as the guy who shows up with a new and interesting gun at every competition? Why would anyone ever think that unloading one gun just to buy another is going to solve their shooting problems?

I'm not talking about that 32-inch side-by-side your buddy's getting rid of because he

could never really shoot it, or the fine English guns another friend got so keen on collecting; a collection which, now that the Divorce Express has pulled into the station must go – and fast, lest the soon-to-be-ex-missus realize just how much money was tied up in those smelly brown leather boxes in the laundry room closet! These scenarios all make sense. There are sound reasons for selling all of these guns.

I'm also not talking about the guy who simply buys an updated version of the same gun he already shoots, knowing full well that any adjustments to be made will be minimal. I'm talking about the guy who can't decide whether he prefers Italian, German, Spanish or English workmanship, so he keeps an example of each on hand at all times and selects one depending on which side of the bed he wakes up. This isn't a knock on gun collecting. I like guns as much as the next guy – I have a closet half-full of them myself, but my target gun is like my long-suffering wife: Come hell or high water, she's a keeper and it'll take one hell of a set of legs before I consider an upgrade!

What makes my jaw hit the floor every time though is when I see someone's *Excalibur* on the gun dealer's rack; that *Wonder Boy* of a shotgun that moved them through the classes and won them titles and admiration being flogged for a down payment on something else. Why would anyone who's had proven success with a particular gun ever dream of selling it? They'll explain their rationale to you of why it's the right thing to do and how the new acquisition will elevate their game to a much higher level. I can only theorize that the real reasons for gun switching must be rooted deep inside the human psyche. Irrational behavior and perhaps even delusional beliefs help justify the switch: That theory can trump hard-earned experience, that state-of-the-art-equipment can trump sound technique, and that technological bells-and-whistles can trump old-fashioned hard work and practice.

With proper regular maintenance it's near impossible to wear out a modern, good quality over-and-under target gun. The argument for switching on the grounds of wear and tear, therefore, just doesn't hold up. A more convincing rationale might be that the new gun is

on the cutting-edge of competitiveness, it's the state-of-the-art model all the top pros are shooting, and if the need ever arises to unload it, there's a ready market. The most likely reason any of us ever has for switching guns probably has to do with the same reason I coveted that Schwinn chopper: Two parts conspicuous consumption, one part vanity.

There's a great old line "Ninety percent of all advertising is a complete waist of money – now if you can just show me which ten percent works!" Nothing makes us feel more impoverished than to be told we need a new car, television set, gun – fill in the blank with any consumer item you wish. When we combine this with the shooter's natural inclination towards technology and hardware, we've created the perfect environment for effective marketing—it's just a matter of getting whatever it is you're pushing under the prospective buyer's skin.

Before I get too far ahead of myself, let me reiterate that the purpose of a sporting clays gun is to break targets. It must be accurate: The barrels must shoot straight, the chokes must closely approximate the appropriate patterns at appropriate yardages, and the gun must be reliable. Add to this a reasonable fit, and not too much recoil and you're done, right? You'd think so, wouldn't you?

Because the gun is the most outward expression of our personalities while we are shooting, people often look for ways to differentiate themselves. When we stop using a gun for its sole intended purpose of breaking targets and start using it as an extension of our personalities, we become vulnerable to suggestion – we're all fairly content with our clays gun until someone informs us those 28-inch-barrels seem awfully short, and that all the big names are now shooting at least 32's. A minute ago ignorance was bliss, but now we've got an itch—and it'll take one hell of a lot of maturity and will-power not to scratch it.

The conventional wisdom from the top competitors I've spoken to is it will take a shooter anywhere from six months to a year to really learn how to shoot a new gun. That's assuming you've already put the necessary work into getting it right (i.e. stock fit, trigger work, custom chokes, adjustable comb, etc.) Are you

willing to give up a year of your shooting life or maybe longer just so you can be the only kid on the block with a set of prototype, 36-inch barrels?

For the last several years, barrel lengths have provided us with the most obvious evidence of the fickle fashions of clay shooting. My gun dealer friends tell me they can't give away 27- or 28-inch target guns anymore. Not that there's anything wrong with these shotguns: They won't blow up in your face when you pull the trigger, and some of them even have screw chokes! Unfortunately they are clayshooting's fashion equivalent of the short-sleeved, polyester leisure suit with shoulder epaulettes and extra-wide lapels.

The thing I'm told we should all lust after now are 34-inch-barrels. The idea behind them is that the longer sighting plane will reduce the perceived lead on that 70-yard-crosser, thus making us more apt to be on line and increasing our chances of breaking it. Never mind that we almost never see these really long shots on a clays course anymore and that the added weight of those longer barrels probably won't do your skeet-in-the-woods game much good--particularly on those close, fast ones you already can't hit with your short barrels.

Add to this package the fixed choke – a truly brilliant, retro modification that had me scratching my head the first time I saw it and still has me scratching my head now. The theory goes that it is ballistically suspected that fixed chokes throw superior patterns. It has to do with the drop-off or gap from the barrel wall to the inside choke wall of a screw choke gun. If that tolerance were too close to flush, there would be a possibility of the shot charge catching the lip of the screw choke and blowing it out the end of the barrel. Obviously fixed-choke guns don't suffer this gap problem, so theoretically they're better: Better at throwing exactly the same pattern over and over again, regardless of whether the target is an in-your-face battue, a 30-yard, quartering midi or a 60-yard-trap target.

If sporting clays can be regarded as golf with a shotgun, then playing this game with fixed chokes is like playing 18 holes with a seven iron! Sure it can be done but is it optimal? If screw chokes give us the appropriate pattern at a given

distance for a target, then fixed chokes give us one big compromise on every station of the course. And just which two chokes would you order with those barrels? Better too tight than too loose I always say: A pair of I-Mods or perhaps Mod, I-Mod should do the trick. This combination will work on any target you'll ever encounter – and it'll also guarantee you'll be overchoked 90% of the rest of the time!

This may all just be an example of the theory being correct but extremely impractical – kind of like burning mink coats as an alternative fuel source to petroleum-based-energy. Sure it works, but at what cost?! True, one great man captured every title in the universe shooting a fixed-choke gun, but if any of us think devolving back to fixed chokes is going to have us shooting like king-what's-his-name, then I'm happy to pass on the number of an excellent psychiatrist who specializes in delusions of grandeur!

In this real world, screw chokes were an improvement that made shooting easier. It gave us flexibility, options, and an edge. The shooter who knew what his chokes could do always had an advantage over the shooter who didn't. I'm now baffled at how any seasoned competitor can look at the whole fixed-choke concept and think it's going to improve their game.

I've developed a conspiracy theory about this whole barrel length, fixed-choke, merry-go-round and it goes something like this: The biggest problem the gun manufacturers have is they are competing for market share against themselves. Their products for all intents and purposes never wear out, and the supply of old guns in the market far outstrips demand for new ones. That beautiful, hand-made Belgian Browning from the 1960's is for sale on the same gun shop rack as the new, mass-produced, Japanese Browning and at exactly the same price! (It is a historical fact that when the Singer Sewing Machine Company faced an identical dilemma, they offered trade-in program for the still serviceable old machines and then proceeded to cut them all in half with a blow torch, bringing about a brilliantly permanent solution to the problem). If poor old Browning is suffering from the used market, just think what the companies that produce guns for the \$5000 and above segment are going through. They sell you the

gun on the promise, “It’s the last gun you’ll ever have to buy.” And they’re right – It lasts forever.

They need to get the consumer to *want* to buy a new gun. They can do this by trying to push a higher grade version of exactly the same gun, which is a hard sell as a prospective buyer knows exactly what the product is and that a cosmetic upgrade isn’t going to make him a better shot. Or they can convince him he’s got an entirely inappropriate, outdated set-up. As everyone’s shooting those long, fixed-choke barrels now – that’s what the manufacturers should push. But now they’ve only created demand for barrels when what they really want is demand for complete guns. Did I hear someone mention matching serial numbers?

The experts will condescendingly inform us that matching serial numbers (barrels to action to trigger group) are terribly important in maintaining the originality and collectability of any fine shotgun. They would have us believe that to just swap new barrels onto your old receiver would render the package nearly worthless! What we need, therefore, is a whole new gun (Anybody want to buy a Schwinn Sting Ray chopper?!)

Consumers are fickle, and the only thing that’s guaranteed in this life is that what’s in style one year is sure to be out of style the next. Right now everyone is lusting after 32- and 34-inch barrels. Perhaps the next US Open or World FITASC Championship will be won with short barrels and at this same time next year, I’ll be ranting that the wholesale move to 26-inches is another example of consumerism run amuck.

A handful of the self-evident truths I’ve discovered after 15 years in this game are:

- 1) Practice often trumps experience.
- 2) The only way to improve is through long-term commitment and smarter, hard work and;
- 3) Buy the right gun for the right reasons, properly sort it, find a shell you have confidence in and then shift your emphasis to working on technique and performing under pressure.

Once the gun is properly fits and shoots well for you we’ve created a baseline constant for our shooting and if we shoot badly, we know

it’s not the gun. If we have a lot of experience with a particular load, we also know it’s not the shell. Finally, we’ve eliminated enough variables to distinguish between a bad day, a technique problem and a course we just can’t seem to shoot well. This may all sound like common sense, but the number of competitive shooters I know, who passionately believe that their trip from B-class to Master starts with a UPS box from Ulm, Germany, would blow your mind.

Just as the solution to losing that pot-belly, growing more hair or enhancing our private, male selves doesn’t come in magic pill form, the solution to better shooting doesn’t lie in switching guns. As mature adults, we should all know this by now.



Attending the Ruger All-Around:
Ye Olde Newgate Coon Club Scholastic Clay Shooting Team “The Northwest Connecticut Clays Crushers”

Left to right: Joe and Patsy Gimelli, Greg Esker, Bridgette Holm, Jacob Esker wearing the CTSCA donated vests

(Chelsea Girolamo and Jordan Frigo had already left when this picture was taken)