



The Big-Bore Boom

Above: Dr Steve Botha taking on the charging buffalo.

Right: I had the privilege of firing Andrew Tonkin's immaculate and very accurate .470 Rigby double.

The allure of the big-bore rifle will probably never die, even if the world runs out of dangerous game tomorrow. Although few of us ever get the opportunity to hunt dangerous game, big-bore shooting is alive and well in South Africa.

Many enthusiasts use their heavy calibres on plains game in bushveld and semi-open terrain. The big-bores are incredibly effective on large antelope and, as most big-bore shooters use heavy bullets at moderate velocities, meat damage seldom becomes unacceptable.

Among the best shooting aids ever designed for hunters are full colour, life-size targets of game animals. On these, the positions of the vital organs have been drawn in with thin lines (invisible at normal shooting distances). These targets prompted rifle and hunting associations to introduce new shooting exercises and even new shooting disciplines. Although



By KOOS BARNARD

competition shooting is not everybody's cup of tea it has inspired participation and a growth in the shooting industry.

Safari & Outdoor of Pretoria plans to host a number of annual "Dangerous Game Shoots" for big-bore users. One such shoot was held towards the end of last year, the second one was held on 10 March this year

and a "Super Shoot" is being planned for 1 September when visiting hunters from the USA, UK and Australia will also take part.

The March shoot took place at the Magnum United Shooting Range at Donkerhoek near Pretoria and was attended by over 100 shooters. I went along to share in the fun. At big-bore shoots all shooting is usually done at short range and you shoot against the clock, so, it is the fastest man with the highest score that wins. To level the playing field, shooters take part in four different



classes; medium bore (9.3 and .375), large-medium bore (.450/.400, .416 and up to .475 No 1 & 2), large bore (.500 Jeffery and up) and doubles (minimum calibre 9.3).

It is no surprise that the medium-bore class (mainly 9.3 x62 and .375H&H calibres), is by far the most popular, though the .375 Ruger is steadily gaining popularity. There are good reasons for this; medium bores make excellent all-round calibres for bushveld use and with appropriate loads can be turned into useful calibres for hunting in semi-open terrain where longer shots are needed. As 'big-bores' go, their recoil is manageable, they are not hard on riflescopes and mounts, while ammunition and reloading components are readily available – at less cost than for the truly large big-bore calibres.

At Donkerhoek, shooting distances ranged from about 15 to 65m with the courses simulating 'real life' dangerous game situations. When big-bores are mentioned most of us immediately think 'open sights' but nowadays many 'big-bore' shooters use scopes. PHs who always have to be ready to take instant back-up shots are the ones who still favour open sights... for good reason. Their shots are usually only needed (in fact, 'desperately' needed) when things go wrong and a charging animal, wounded or not, is now only 10 to 15 paces away... and closing in fast. The PH's client has the comparative luxury of choosing when (or if) to take the first shot at an unwounded and stationary target from maybe 35 to 80m.

When shots need to be taken really fast at extremely close range, open sights are preferable as your field of view is unrestricted and, because the sights are closer to the barrel, your bullet is more likely to hit to point of aim. A scope can get in the way when the shooter tries to cycle the bolt very fast. It is also faster to reload an unscoped rifle. At Donkerhoek some shooters found out the hard way that 100m zeroes do not work for close-range shooting – their shots went too low and missed the 5-point bull's-eye scoring zone.

However, most big-bore shoots are set up bearing in mind that, beyond about 20m, most of us can shoot faster and more accurately with a scoped rifle. At the Safari & Outdoor March shoot some 90% of the shooters used scopes and their scores were appreciably higher than those of shooters who opted for open sights. The open-sight users included experienced hunters who regularly use iron sights for hunting. While just about all the medium-bore class rifles were scoped, most of the large-bore class



Above: A big bore in full recoil – the nyala target at 65m was challenging to hit with open sights. Below: The leopard range. Most competitors used scoped rifles for all the ranges.



rifles were not. Wouter Roets and I were two of the very few who used unscoped .375s.

The range set-up was certainly entertaining. All shooting was done from the standing off-hand position except for the nyala where you could use a tripod. The nyala range, requiring four shots in total, incorporated a warthog target. The warthog at 35m had shotgun clays placed in the brain and heart/lung areas. You had to take one shot at each clay: misses cost you a 10 second penalty. For the nyala at 65m, the normally marked scoring zones, counting five, four and three points, were used. Throughout the shoot, wherever four shots were required you could load only three rounds, which forced you to reload (you could choose when to do so). Placed in shade, the nyala was quite difficult to see with open sights early in the morning.

The leopard range also required four shots, all from about 20m. The lion range

required only three shots – two at stationary 'lions' at about 15m and the last at a charging animal. I had been doing quite well... until disaster struck. I had missed one of the 'warthog' clays and the time penalty hurt my score. To rescue my score, I decided to go flat out for time on the lions but I jammed my rifle after the first shot. Seconds ticked by as I struggled to clear it. My second shot was a hasty one scoring a four instead of a five and my last shot was even worse, scoring only a three. If that had happened during a real encounter I would have been in serious trouble.

My shoot ended at the buffalo range which again required four shots, three at stationary targets and one at a charging animal. The stationary targets were placed about 30m away and the charge started from about 15m out – you had to shoot while the target was moving. After the disastrous lion shoot I decided to go a little



Above: Bryan Betton (left) and Stefan Fouché of Safari & Outdoor. These two gentlemen and Mauritz Coetzee organised the shoot. Right: Relaxing after the shoot. We enjoyed sheep on a spit, pap and of course cracked a few cold ones.



slower and managed a full score but my slow time pushed me down in the rankings to 12th place in my class and 20th place overall. That was not the result I was hoping for, but you live and learn (hopefully) from your mistakes.

I am looking forward to the September shoot and aim to maintain the right balance between accuracy and speed. Anyway, it was a great event and apart from the ifs, buts and should-haves, I cannot recall a single complaint about the shoot in general.

HOW TO KEEP YOUR GAME TAME

Ase Utra is one of the largest manufacturers of sound suppressors in the world. Since 1994 they have developed and manufactured sound suppressors for game farmers, hunters, sport shooters, the military and law enforcement agencies.

The patented products are the result of continuous research. Quality in both operation and products is the foundation of the company. Available for calibres from .22 long rifle to .460 Weatherby.

Should you wish to keep your game tame during the hunting season, your answer is a top class sound suppressor.



THE POWDER KEG

60 Hendrik Potgieter Road, Florida North
Tel: 011 472 - 1720 / 1 / 2 Fax: 011 472 1799
e-mail: ecoafrik@global.co.za

The most common 'rifle' problems experienced were actually 'shooter' problems. Jammed actions, short-stroking rifles with magnum-length actions, and forgetting to reload. One shooter, who had worked on his rifle's trigger to lighten the pull, found that the sear would occasionally slip its engagement on the bolt's forward stroke – he was thus caught a number of times, ready to fire but with an uncocked rifle. He announced his immediate 'retirement' as a DIY gunsmith.

The winner in each class received a R2 500 gift voucher from Safari & Outdoor. Their names were also entered for a special lucky draw prize – a Trijicon scope. The other prize-winners were selected by lucky draws, so you stood a chance of winning a prize even if your shooting didn't merit it. Sponsors supplied goods worth some R39 000 in total and these included a Vortex scope, trophy care products, gift vouchers from gun shops, shooting accessories...

At big-bore shoots there are always interesting guns to look at and their proud owners have been known to offer drooling onlookers a shot or two. This year I had the opportunity to try out two interesting rifles, a Ruger in .416 Ruger (my first shot ever with this calibre) and a John Rigby double in .470 Nitro Express. The Ruger is a short-barrelled (20") stainless steel working rifle with a Hogue synthetic stock. It belongs to Hercules Louw of Pretoria who fitted a Nikon 1-6x scope in Ruger rings. Hercules made the rifle heavier by inserting a number of weights into the stock. He used 340gr Impala flatnose bullets for this competition and it shoots extremely well. The rifle's weight curbs the recoil sufficiently to make it pleasant to shoot.

Collector Andrew Tonkin brought a beautiful Rigby double. This side-by-side oozes quality and unlike some other doubles I have shot, it handles and points very well. It is deadly accurate too – I tried it on a buffalo target and, aiming for the nose, placed the two shots right next to each other, exactly at the point of aim. What a wonderful experience it was to shoot this superb rifle.

After the prize-giving ceremony we enjoyed a spit-braaiied sheep, a few cold ones and talked guns for the rest of the afternoon. Safari & Outdoor's Dangerous Game Shoot was very well organised, the prizes were fantastic and I think all who attended are looking forward to the September shoot. **ms**

