



What you need *is practice*



Rifle shooting needs more venues to train and practice, says Andrew Venables – and if there isn't one near you, you can even start your own

In 2003 I spent a memorable few days at Gunsite in Arizona. This is the world-renowned firearms training centre set up by the legendary Lt Colonel Jeff Cooper. When I 'clanged' the kill zone on the American Safari walk and shoot course Dall Sheep target at 385 yards, the gritty ex US Marines Major instructing slapped me on the back and said, "Hell of a shot, boy!" I was instantly addicted to steel reactive targets.

This trip left such an impression on me, I returned determined to set up a rifle training venue here, based on training by shooting at reactive steel targets. Why steel targets? Well, paper has its uses, but it does not give instant feedback, both audio and visual, of the effect of your last shot as the bullet lands. Steel does.

In 2003, there was not really any civilian training on steel targets in the UK. I discovered that no one in the UK or Europe

made bullet-resistant steel targets for recreational shooting. We had to design and make our own at WMS. Our targets have been bought, tested and approved by most UK Special Forces regiment sniper training cells, the army sniper training school, Brecon and the RAF regiment, so I guess we got it right.

We are truly grateful that people from all over the UK and Europe travel to us at WMS to enjoy our unique brand of training and preparation, but where can they practise when they get home? What rifle shooters really need is more safe and enjoyable places to train and practise.

My plan for the future is to help make rifle shooting more accessible to all, and to bring in new people via commercially operated shooting venues or introductions from friends. Not everyone wants to join a club right away – people want to come along, have a go as paying clients, see if they like it and then maybe take it up. This is simple for shotgun shooters, so let's try to make it easier for folk wanting to try rifle shooting.

Guidance on what is required to set up a shooting range can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/firearms>. If no money changes hands, your shooting insurance, through BASC or other sources, should cover you to practice on your own private



Training: Rifle

range. If you operate commercially, you must buy commercial shooting insurance from a suitable broker, as we do.

Over the last seven years WMS has liaised with every known authority and answered every legal, safety and logistical question to demonstrate without doubt that, done properly, it is safe, prudent and informative to shoot bullet-resistant steel targets. I firmly believe that when it comes to promoting rifle shooting, general training and practice, there should be facilities to zero and practise safely and realistically on paper or steel in other suitable locations around the UK. If you are reading this, live in Scotland, Wales, England or Northern Ireland and you own a large tract of land, with a suitable valley, corrie, cwm or quarry that might allow safe rifle shooting to 300 metres or more, feel free to contact me for a chat.

We also offer WMS steel target training days at your own venue. If you own an estate and a suitable valley, glen, quarry or similar, we can come to you. We can work with you on the risk assessment, provide insurance, targets, fine firearms, ammunition and can set up a day or weekend for you and your chums. This may be one way to test the water and see if you want to have rifle shooting as a regular event on your land. You can run up to 28 days of commercial activity without planning. You can shoot recreationally 365 days a year on your own ground, as long as there are no noise or safety issues.

There are two particular sections of the Firearms Act to be aware of. Section 16/1 allows a certificate holder to let a non-



Instant feedback: Reactive steel targets give you a fast indication of how the shot went

certificate holder over 17 years of age use firearms and ammunition on private land over which they hold shooting rights, under supervision. To find out more, visit the BASC website or phone their firearms department. You are a member of BASC, aren't you? If you are not, join today if you value your sport and want to be part of its future. BASC has already touched on this with its 'introduce a friend to shooting' initiative. Individuals who hold certificates can introduce non-shooting friends in this way and help spread the good word about our noble sport.

Section 11/4 of the Firearms Act basically says people may set up Gallery Rifle ranges using .22 and smaller calibres and provide shooting tuition and experiences at the gallery range. Subject to a proper back stop, best practice and no noise nuisance, using moderated rifles a 50m .22 gallery range would fit many locations and embrace .22 WMR and .17 HMR as well. Unlike Section 16/1, Section 11/4 has no lower age limit. This has potential as a great way to introduce young people to sporting rifle

shooting properly. Once again, BASC can advise on best practice and risk assessments and dealing with authorities.

Copies of this part of the Firearms Act are available online. Interestingly, the Firearms Guidance to the Police, at para 18.3, states:

Whether approved or not, miniature rifle clubs are entitled to the exemption in section 11(4) of the 1968 Act. Under that subsection a person conducting or carrying on a miniature rifle range (whether for a rifle club or otherwise) or shooting gallery at which only miniature rifles and ammunition not exceeding .23 calibre or air weapons are used may, without a firearm certificate, purchase, acquire or possess such miniature rifles or ammunition for them. Whilst there is no legal definition of a miniature rifle, other than one which does not exceed .23 inch in calibre, it is generally accepted that this refers only to rifles firing .22 rimfire cartridges. Persons using the range are exempt from holding a firearm certificate only whilst using such miniature rifles and ammunition at such a range or gallery.

I believe that while proper training is prerequisite, practice is the actual solution to really improving your shooting. People might drive 300 miles to train with their choice of trainer and venue, but they shouldn't have to drive more than 50 miles to practise. Sporting rifle shooting at reactive targets is engaging and challenging for those shooting and also entertaining for spectators.

So, there it is: what rifle shooters really need is more places to shoot safely and enjoyably to promote our sport. Let's make it happen – it's for the benefit of sporting rifle shooting in general.

For more information about WMS Firearms Training, contact Andrew Venables on 01974 831869 or visit www.wmsfirearmstraining.com. ■



Prepare and promote: As well as practice venues, shooting ranges can introduce new people to the sport