

# New Strategy



WMS' ground is dotted with quarries that provide perfect backstops for herds of life-size steel deer and other targets



The star of the show; Leica's Geovid HD-B rangefinding binoculars are supremely easy to use and have superb optics

**Jules Whicker** reports back from a new and enlivened Leica press event to showcase their hunting optics

**N**ew impetus has been given to Leica's presence on the UK hunting scene by a change of strategy that sees the firm taking control of its own marketing and distribution. To carry out their master plan, Leica have put together a crack team that includes Mark Symes (a Leica stalwart), Jon Rigby (formerly with Zeiss) and that man of many talents Simon K. Barr!

The first move in Leica's campaign to get the attention of British shooters was to offer a £500 discount off a new set of Geovid HD-R or HD-B 8x42 or 10x42 range-finding binoculars if you traded-in any old pair of binos. Not surprisingly, the Geovids have been flying off retailer's shelves... but as we will see, it's not just the Geovid's price that's unbeatable: their performance is too.

The next was to show the trade and the press just what Leica's hunting optics have to offer, and they couldn't have found a

better place to do this than with Andrew Venables at WMS Firearms Training in Wales.

### LONG RANGE HEAVEN

Located near the town of Tregaron, WMS have access to almost 10,000 acres of fantastic hill country. The venue and Andrew's practical and instructional expertise, enable clients to acquire, practice and develop everything from basic shooting skills to more advanced techniques. The focus is on ensuring that, when a single shot absolutely has to count, the shooter is as well prepared as possible to make it do so. Regardless of terrain, position, angle, or the weather... which, not so coincidentally is what Leica's hunting optics are about too!

So, if you just want to blatt off rounds, go to a range. But if you prefer to learn how to make one bullet find its target, then there is literally nowhere better than WMS. They

make you very welcome too, with admin being taken care of by Andrew's wife Helena; a star in her own right and hospitality available at Tregaron's friendly and comfortable Y Talbot Hotel.

Thus it was that, generously wined, dined, rested and breakfasted and on a gloriously sunny morning- our small convoy of Great Wall pickups (another string to Simon's bow!) headed up into the green hills of West Wales.

## THE GRASSY SWORD

Our first destination was a grassy sward facing a small quarry containing an impressive array of steel targets at distances of between 75 and 110m. Here Mark and Jon, along with Ben Wallbott, of Leica's hunting optics division, proceeded to unpack a cornucopia of Geovid and Ultravid binoculars, Rangemaster 1000-R and 1600-B pocket rangefinders, Magnus and ER-series riflescopes, and Tevid spotting scopes, and to set the latter up on some very smart carbon-fibre and magnesium-alloy tripods.

Following a safety brief, a quick introduction to the product lines, and a chance to ping away at some steel with an open-sighted S&W M&P 15-22 to get it out of our systems, it was 'grab what you like and head up to the 200m point'. As a side note, it always impresses me how reliable those 15-22s are: I think we put 1,200 rounds through two rifles without a single stoppage!

The quality of the optics had been apparent from the start -image quality alone is easily on a par with the dominant German/Austrian names- but at 200m we really started to appreciate the technical benefits of Leica's range-finders.

Before I go on, I should note that, in field shooting, accurate rangefinding is only second to accurate wind estimation in maximising the probability of a first-round hit. A good rifle, good ammo, good ballistics, good optics, a good zero, no cant... all of these count, of course, but a rangefinding error of just a few metres will negate all their benefits.

## HOW FAR?

We'll start with the rangefinding system in the top-of-the-range HD-B binoculars. This computes corrections based on target-angle, temperature, and atmospheric pressure as well as laser ranging. The user can select one of three readout modes: equivalent horizontal range (EHR), holdover or click-value. First, however, you enter some simple data: (1) zero distance (2) units of measurement (metric/imperial), and (3) the ballistic for your ammunition. The latter is easily determined by matching the available data to the table in the instruction booklet. The booklet also



contains an easy-to-follow diagram of the programming process, and because the sequence is largely intuitive you probably won't need to look at it more than once.

As for the three modes, EHR is ideal when using a BDC reticule (or a ballistic turret calibrated for range). Read off the EHR number, then place the appropriate line in the reticule on the target (or dial in the range). By contrast, holdover suits scopes with simple reticules and capped turrets. Take the number of inches/cm shown in the display, estimate its scale on the target, and aim off appropriately high or low. Last but not least, click-value tells you how many clicks of elevation to add or subtract. (You select 1, 1/3 and 1/4 MOA and 0.1 and 0.05 MRAD values at the programming stage). All this means that whatever style of reticule, turrets or adjustment you favour, Leica's range-finding system has it covered. For even more precise predictions there's a MicroSD card port inside the battery compartment that lets you add a custom ballistic curve created using a web-based tool.

## B IS FOR BALLISTIC!

The full functionality described above is only available in Geovid HD-B (ballistic) binocular models, however. Thus the HD-R model has exactly the same glass, build and mechanical operation but lacks the environmental sensors and the ballistic calculator incorporated into the B model. You get an inclinometer that provides an EHR readout, but that's it. This may suit those with incipient technophobia, and possibly even those who like to generate their ballistic solutions on a smartphone. But when you think that all the HD-B's easy-to-use sophistication comes with a price premium of less than 15%, taking things to the next level surely makes sense?

For those who aren't yet ready to change up to some HD-Bs, or who like to hunt light, but still want the full package of rangefinding functions, look no further than the Rangemaster 1600-B pocket model. This diminutive (75x34x11.3cm), featherweight (185g) unit may only boast a 7x24 specification, but the optics are as





The Leica ER 6.5-25x56 LRS riflescope features 0.5cm (0.05 mrad) clicks for precise zeroing



This set of dials (available separately) matches the BDC turret on your Leica scope to any of the ballistic curves in the Geovid HD-B rangefinding binoculars

► impressive as the electronics; I was counting the top course of stones in a wall over 500m away with no difficulty! In fact, the only thing missing is an SD card slot, so you can't run custom ballistics.

We were reminded too that a key benefit of making ballistic solutions quick and easy is to let you focus on the biggest challenge of shooting at range: compensating for wind.

**ON TARGET!**

It wasn't just Andrew doing the reminding, either, as we were blessed with a full-value crosswind that could triple in strength with each unpredictable gust. All the same –after an expertly succinct tutorial from Andrew, and using his 16" Blaser R8 in .308, fitted with a Leica Magnus 1-6.3x24 scope, I was quickly able to get shots into kill-zones, even managing to do so standing, albeit off a smart pair of Danish Quadpod Viper sticks.

Boosted by this, and by a hearty packed lunch, we then decamped further into the hills to face targets at 300m and 700m. Here, a further refinement of Leica's system came into play. For around £100, a set of 12 dials is available for their ASV ballistic scope turrets. Each dial matches a ballistic curve in the rangefinder's database. What this means is that you can simply range the target and dial the turret to match the EHR readout to set the correct elevation.

We already had the correct curve set in the rangefinder, so in principle it was just a matter of fitting the right dial (a 2-minute job), blipping the target, dialling in the range, estimating the wind deflection and taking the shot. This time I used a Blaser LR2. The range was called as 309m. I dialled up the 3, added another click for a 10m increment, corrected for wind, settled the cross hairs on the chest of a roebuck target, and took the

shot. The result was a strike within 3cm of my aim point and about 5cm downwind. Adding a bit of Kentucky windage, I followed it up with another heart shot and three well-centred head shots (it was only a steel target, after all) in short order. More impressive still, the system worked just as well when we switched to a target at 693m.

**KNOW YOUR LIMITATIONS**

This target was much harder to hit though. Elevation may have been spot-on, but at that range group sizes inevitably spread; and the wind ran rings round us, switching direction from L-R to R-L somewhere downrange, and buffeting our projectiles in all directions as they flew toward the target. No one in their right mind would take such a shot at live quarry, however good the kit. In fact, that was the most important lesson of the day: know your limitations and only shoot within them... and I can't think of a better place to find out than WMS.

And Leica's hunting optics? Well, I'd undoubtedly been thoroughly buttered-up by the concerted efforts of the event's organisers, but everything about Leica's optics -style and substance, technological sophistication and ease-of-use, quality and value- came across as genuinely top-notch. In short: great optics, and a real eye-opener of a day!



You can now boost the power of your Leica spotting scope by adding a 1.8x extender that fits between the body and standard eyepiece for a 45x-90x zoom range

**CONTACTS**

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- **Great Wall Motor:**  
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