

SHOOT BETTER

THIS MONTH: Rifle masterclass

SCHOOL OF HARD CLANGS

Andrew Venables is fresh from the success of the first WMS Euston Estate Rifle Masterclass, where shooters of all ages spent the day honing their hunting skills and 'clanging' steel targets

Although WMS Firearms Training is headquartered in mid Wales, we do often get requests to provide training at other locations in the UK, and also to recommend other facilities where people can go to practise their rifle shooting skills.

We have many clients in the south-east of England and the great relationship we enjoy with Chris Rogers, deer manager at Euston Estate on the Norfolk/Suffolk border, enabled us to meet and discuss potential liaisons around the old chalk quarry at Euston. If there is a finer natural

BELOW: Andrew demonstrates the technique he employs for shooting from a seated position

bullet stop in this part of the country, we are yet to find it. This area, a dozen of our signature steel targets and a positive risk assessment led to the idea of the first WMS Euston Estate Rifle Masterclass, to be held on the 25 March... but would anyone sign up?



PICTURES: DOM HOLTAM

« Wow! Yes! Within three weeks of announcing it this date was sold out, leading to the announcement of another one on 9 July, which immediately sold out as well. We have added another day on 10 July and, at time of writing, there are still a few places left. Keeping to our mantra of small numbers working best, we have capped the days at 12 attendees. There are never more than three to four people firing at any one time, with two instructors ensuring that the client/instructor ratio is never more than 2:1.

The days are pitched at stalkers with some experience (though that is not mandatory) who want to up their game through continuous development of their shooting. Is it an 'official' course? No. Does it provide a certificate and a badge? No. Will it help you to safely, humanely harvest deer and other game and to shoot better? Let's find out.



“THE DAYS ARE PITCHED AT STALKERS WITH SOME EXPERIENCE WHO WANT TO UP THEIR GAME”

Helena and I arrived rather late on the Friday afternoon after a bad journey in terms of traffic, though still in time to help Chris set up the facilities, put out the steel and paper targets and do the last-minute checks. We enjoyed a fine venison chilli con carne with Chris and his wife Anna at their home after setting up, and retired to bed at the Elvedon Inn, Thetford.

Saturday dawned, blessed with the sort of weather that convinces me that hunting is a heavenly sport. We met Chris at the gate to the shooting area at 8.30am, put the red flags up as agreed, and waited for the first clients to arrive. The wait was short, with arrivals from 8.45am proving that the early bird gets the first brew of the day.

A quick 'who am I' session around the room showed we had clients from 20 to 70 years of age. Rifles ran from .243 to .308, with .270, 6.5x55 and .308 all adding to the mix. Scopes started with 6x42 models all the way up to Swarovski, Zeiss and Schmidt & Bender zoom jobs. People had brought a mixture of shooting sticks, bipods, rucksacks and slings to use for support. Ammunition was all of the expanding hunting type in various brands with some hand-loads. Some scopes and rifles represented £5,000-plus of investment, some

ABOVE: There was a timed competition to finish

around £500. How would it all work on the day?

Results were interesting. The initial zero session had 90% of participants on the button at 100m with no problem. One client had warned us his scope was not zeroed; it wasn't, so that got sorted out. Following the zero check, all clients were invited to take three to five shots at a standard roe

target using sticks at 100m. This went well and provided the first opportunity to offer tips and guidance on best shooting practice.

A second opportunity allowed attendees to hone their skills shooting from sticks, and the scores quickly went from reasonable to really rather good. At the end of this session, people were asked to fire one shot off sticks at

BELOW: The group assesses the targets



BOOKING

If you're interested in booking one of the few places left on the 10 July masterclass, call 01974 831869. WMS is looking to find other masterclass venues and partners around the UK, so let them know if you have suggestions.



« one deer target. There were 11 thoracic kills and one liver shot. An open mind and a few tips quickly blended to give improvement. The friendly atmosphere with plenty of encouragement and a few laughs really does make for a good teaching environment: safe, relaxed and effective.

Lunch was taken in the range building with everyone chatting about stalking, rifles, sticks, vehicles and all the other stuff we appreciate and rely on. After lunch, shooting started again at 200m, with targets available from 100-200m to give variety and offer practice possibilities to all. After starting to shoot from prone at 200m, people were encouraged to try using sticks at the same distance. The difference between double sticks, tripods and quad sticks soon became apparent. The most common questions being “Where did you get your quad sticks?” “How much?” and “Which brand?”. They are the Viper-Flex Elite from Hammond Sporting.

One of the best ways to learn how to use quad sticks well from 30-100m is to shoot at targets at 200m. After this, 100m seems straightforward. Attendees were amazed at the levels of accuracy possible when the correct method is applied to standing shots taken from quad sticks. Towards the end of the 200m session, they were asked to shoot specific targets and, once again, the levels of first-shot lethality were very good at the end, and not bad at the start.

For most rifle shooters, problems start between 200 and 300m. Wind and gravity become very visible issues, though wind was only a slight problem on the day. How would everyone deal with 300m? By aiming off, perhaps? If so, by how much? Or maybe by dialling the scope turrets up? If so, by how many clicks and where would they find the information? Through shooting, chatting and trial and error, the camaraderie of the day shone through. Everyone was helping to solve each other's problems. Initial misses led to subsequent clangs; solutions were found and targets were hit.

Why would you need to know how to hit a kill-zone-sized target at 300m? Isn't it wrong to shoot at deer over 100m or 200m? Not if the first shot wounded it at 80m and the next time you see it, it stops in a clearing 300m away. That is when knowing how to make a killing 300m shot is vital. Long-distance shooting skills are for getting out of trouble, not into it.

At the end of the afternoon we held a competition, and offered the winner the opportunity to win back the £150 cost of the masterclass. The competition involved three shots on three disc targets: 25cm at 100m, 25cm at 200m, and 50cm at 300m. Sounds simple enough, until you realise the shots were taken standing from sticks, and against the clock. To demonstrate ‘par’ I offered to have a go first and managed three hits in 10 seconds, choosing to dial up six clicks



ABOVE: The winner of the timed competition receives his cash prize

for 200m and 17 clicks for 300m. I used my Blaser 6.5x55 with a Swarovski Z6i and BDC turret.

Everyone had a go. To their credit, most succeeded in hitting two out of three of the targets, and several hit all three in less than 30 seconds with the winning three clangs achieved in 19 seconds. The group was impressed that the second place went to the least experienced and youngest attendee on the day – no bad habits, see! At the start of the day few would have thought this challenge possible at all, even less so against the clock. Everyone had learned stuff and had fun.

We finished up with tea and cake, much exchanging of information and contact details, and talk of stalking opportunities and future shared experiences. Subsequent feedback has confirmed that the day was highly worthwhile. **RS**

