

## FUN IN WHANGANUI: A random 2020 IPSC Nationals report

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Some things never change. Like my minimal physical preparation for the nationals: one club match and a couple of IPSC Classifier stages. Or my mental preparation by entering in a new class this year, Classic, because, hey, how hard could it be to run a stock 1911?

But the best non-changing thing for me this shoot was seeing the indefatigable duo of Tanya Taylor and Margaret Thomason at the registration desk asking for two forms of identification. I may not have shot a competition all of 2019, a virus is currently sweeping the globe this year, but to see these ladies at the registration desk was so comforting that I almost kissed them.

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The first day is scheduled to start at noon and by 10am the Wanganui Pistol Club carpark is busting with cars and competitors jawing and ribbing each other. I hang with Mr O of Hamilton Pistol Club and Mr F of Warkworth Pistol Club for a while; they're comparatively match fit with recent competitions in Rotorua and Hamilton. The carpark chatter gives way as Match Director Rishi Viswani and Range Master Steven Cresswell stride to the highest point at the club and welcome everyone. It's game time.

Nationals is 14 stages over two days: a couple of long courses of fire with the rest an even split of medium and short courses. I'd looked through the match book a few times in the weeks leading up to this weekend but it's not until I do a walk-through of the first stage that I begin to feel the inadequacy of my preparation. I also begin to seriously miss the 15-round magazine capacity of my Standard class pistol. With just seven rounds in each of the magazines on my belt, my usual spray-and-pray approach might prove frustrating. I might have to plan my approach and magazine changes, and concentrate on being accurate.

Squad 6 consists of 15 competitors who've come from the length of Aotearoa: Te Tai Tokerau Northland, Auckland, Waiuku, Tauranga, Awakeri, Whanganui, Kaitoke and Ōtautahi Christchurch. We're a mix of Classic and Revolver class shooters with a sprinkling of Standard and Production shooters. I assume a cluster of the smaller-bodied squadmates are keen international shooters — *We're from Tauranga*, they patiently correct me.

It takes a few stages for me to settle. At the end of each stage, I wince at hearing the word 'mike' called as the Range Office and their assistant score my targets. I'd forgotten how much missed targets lower my score. It's not until the fourth or fifth stage that the I stop hearing that word but the damage is done.

I admire our wheelgun enthusiasts — Mr F of Auckland Shooting Club, Mr P, whose home club I neglected to ask, Mr C of Christchurch Pistol Club, and Ms D of Wanganui Pistol Club — as they rip through each stage. They're a treat to watch: their reloads a blur of action, their double-action trigger-pulls objects of desire, and their accuracy is phenomenal. I worry that watching them has planted the seed of a future change of

class.

It's late afternoon, with a couple of stages remaining, when concentration begins to flag. A squadmate gets disqualified, the first time I've seen it happen. The RO is sympathetic but the breach is clear and the shooter acknowledges it. I've heard about DQs and how they're almost a rite of passage for shooters. Seeing it up close it's a lot less fraught than I expected — the range staff take pains to ensure the shooter knows why they were stopped. The shooter returns the following day to help out even though they could have just returned home.

The second day starts at 7:30am. Despite sleeping through two alarms, I make it to the range with ten minutes to spare but no breakfast. The DQing of another squadmate on our first stage of the day provides perspective: my lack of breakfast is the least of my worries.

As our squad works through our second lot of stages, I'm no longer hearing 'mike' in my stage scoring. On a long course of fire, I spend some time trying to reconcile the written stage briefing in the match book with the reality before me. Someone takes pity on me as we head out for the stage briefing: *Not to scale, mate*. My times may be the longest in the squad but one can't have everything.

After our last stage, Squad 6 is less four shooters due to DQs, but there is a sense of completion and satisfaction, and relief. Ms D takes a squad photo, and there are some hugs and many handshakes. We had finished early, too — around lunch time — where, I confess, I may have had more than my share of the provided food.

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The time between finishing shooting and the prize giving is a time to catch up with people, to commiserate about what could have been, and to attempt some mythmaking with tellings and retellings of exciting stage runs. I also find out that I could have loaded my magazines to eight rounds each rather than the seven rounds I was doing throughout the match.

I'm glad to have attended in spite of my lack of training and inflated can-do attitude. The familiar faces, the friendly and generous nature of the people in your squad. And the rush of blood and adrenaline as the timer goes and you start shooting, trying to remember the plan from your walk-through, to count shots, to count targets engaged, all while running around with a loaded firearm.

Some things haven't changed since my last outing, and I'm grateful.

*972 words with accompanying pix*