

THE ROAD TO THE WORLDS

David Mamea

Where last year I was full of heedless enthusiasm and got as far as the North Island champs, 2016 was different: my enthusiasm was more wilfully blind than heedless; I was reloading my own ammunition; and I was bound for the “Worlds” — the 10th World Action Pistol Competition — (although this was more through chance than anything else). My new home club, Whangarei Pistol Club (WPC), was hosting the Worlds, and volunteers were given the opportunity to participate in the competition, one I couldn’t resist (mostly for bragging rights like, “I competed at an international level!”).

Thames Valley Super League, 14 February

(It’s a brave man who organises a shooting competition on Valentines Day. Just saying, Coatesy.)

In a small valley on the edge of the Kaimais, overlooked by curious livestock, 23 competitors (up from 17 in 2015) gathered to blow out some figurative cobwebs and begin their journeys to the Worlds at year’s end. They came from Thames Valley (TVPC), Whangarei, Auckland (APC), Hamilton (HPC), Tauranga, and Warkworth, and there was one brave soul from Canberra. For my part, I was relaxed because 1). I was confident I knew what I was doing, and 2). I was shooting my very own reloads.

Alas, my reloads were overcrimped to the point that my targets looked like a short-sighted grizzly bear had pawed them. “Your bullets are tumbling, mate,” fellow competitors diagnosed. I ended up at the bottom of the table with 870-27X. (I was listed as being from APC; not wanting word to get back to my new home club, I didn’t correct the official results.) If I learned anything from this shoot, it’s that testing one’s reloads is a pretty good idea.

At the opposite end of the table were familiar names, the top three in each division being: Open — Brent Millard (APC), Hisaya Ishii (APC), Allen Alley (TVPC); Metallic — Peter Hansen (HPC), Chris Skewes (APC), Ishii; and Production — Jay Bellamy (HPC), Mark Tunzelman (HPC), Brett Rennie (APC).

Cowley Cup, Whangarei, 17–18 September

In the seven months after Thames Valley, I learned load development, a painstaking and time-consuming process. I also became much more intimately acquainted with my reloading press than I ever imagined I would be with any kind of machinery. I should have been quite ready for Cowley; but I wasn’t.

There were 27 competitors this year (up from 24 in 2015), all of them from the Auckland, Hamilton, Thames Valley and Whangarei clubs. The Cowley was used as a dry-run for the upcoming Worlds so I was there in two capacities: as a volunteer, and as a competitor.

As a volunteer, I spent the day on the Plates range with Ray Salter (APC), Dean Howell (WPC), and Howick Pistol Club member Philip Gunther. We were a tight, well-oiled team; even when it began

to rain heavily, our range was safe, efficient and thorough. We reckoned that with volunteers like us, the Worlds was in good hands.

As a competitor, I managed 1028-33X, and was grateful to make four digits. I had a further learning from Thames Valley: testing one's reloads before a competition is a smashing idea.

Top three placings for the shoot were: Open — Karl Piper (APC), Ishii, Paul Loftus (WPC); Metallic — Chris, Dean Blake (HPC), Lou Vugts (APC); Production — Jay, Brett, Ray Salter (APC); and Ladies — Joanne Fisher (WPC), Leanne Robinson (HPC), Marie Robinson (HPC).

Pistol New Zealand Action National Championship, Hamilton, 29–30 October

When I arrived at Hamilton Pistol Club, I seriously considered turning right around and driving four hours back home. There were so many people there with pistols on their hips and looks of intense, internal concentration, that I approached Peter Hansen about withdrawing my registration. He pooh-poohed my nerves — besides, there were no refunds on game day. I decided to suck it up.

There were 46 competitors (38 in 2015) from all over: besides the usual suspects, there were members from the Tauranga and Rotorua clubs; and there were international shooters from the United States, Germany, United Kingdom and Australia, who were using the Nationals as a warm up for the Worlds in a fortnight.

My squad included 2014 Bianchi Cup winner Kevin Angstadt (US), Dave Duprez (Australia), Boon Ong (HPC), Warren Piper (APC), John Taylor (APC), and Zach Teich (US) — an intimidating array of experience and skill. We began the day with the dread Plates match. My nerves were shredded when I shot with Warren who dropped every single plate with machine-like efficiency; I shot 220X. As the day went on, my shooting improved, my nerves recovered somewhat, and my squad mates resolved into friendly human beings; I finished with 1234-41X.

Placings: Open — Brent, Karl and Robert Colman (APC); Metallic — an APC sweep with Chris, Karl and Ishii; Production — Jay, Kelvin Carter (Tauranga) and Mark; Ladies — Joanne, Wendy Halloran (APC) and Jeanette Sutton (APC); and International — Kevin Angstadt (US), Benito Martinez (US) and Christopher Mathiou (Australia).

10th World Action Pistol Championships, Whangarei, 8–12 November

I was glad I'd stuck it out at the Nationals. There were familiar faces from only a fortnight earlier — they were still as intense and focussed — but they weren't so scary. One of the internationals, Jim Broughton (UK) saw my wretched practice on the Plates range and suggested that I love the Plates rather than hate them. Something about how he framed it stuck in my head.

There were 87 competitors in total. There were a few more international shooters — including five-time Bianchi Cup winner Bruce Piatt, seven-time Women's Champion Vera Koo, and two-time Metallic Champion Robert Vadasz — and Whangarei club's months of preparation paid off with a smooth competition. As with the Cowley, I attended as a volunteer and competitor.

For most of the Worlds, I was on the Practical range with Paul Jarman (WPC), Murray Waring (WPC), James Haynes (WPC), Dean and Lorraine Elliott (WPC). Not to boast or anything but we

rocked. In between details, I competed — though “participated” would be more apt.

I decided to optimise my Practical match score by shooting the 50-yard line prone. I ended up hitting the target equipment with depressing regularity, the “tang” of projectile on metal ringing for everyone to hear. Another hard lesson learned: unlike *Karate Kid* or that episode of *Glee* when the football team dances to Beyonce, trying out a different technique in the heat of competition is not a great idea. On the Plates range, thanks to Jim’s suggestion, I reached 330X; I suppose I could learn to love the Plates a little bit more. In the end, I shot a personal best of 1391-56X, a measly four points higher than my 2015 best, but still an improvement.

Placings included: Open — Benito Martinez (US), Anita Mackiewicz (Australia), Brent Millard (New Zealand); Metallic — Robert Vadasz (US), Christopher Mathiou (Australia), Chris Skewes (New Zealand); Production — Seichi Ishikawa (US), Jay Bellamy (New Zealand), Peter Hoffman (Germany); and Ladies — an Australian sweep with Anita, Cherie Blake, Melissa Holmes. I must point out that Mr Vadasz placed second overall and he was shooting Metallic: there’s a role model if I ever needed one.

The Worlds ended with a formal dinner where I didn’t recognise anyone at first glance. That’s what happens when baseball caps, t-shirts and cargo pants are replaced with shirt, tie and slacks, or evening dress and open-toed footwear. There was a prize giving, goody bags were made available courtesy of sponsors, and the food was good and plentiful. Overall, the mood was convivial and celebratory — it was a very nice and classy way to end my shooting year.

Epilogue

I’m satisfied with my shooting: improvement is a journey, not a destination (and I’ll tell you another, if you’re not careful). I’m a little worried that I’m taking this sport more seriously than I should. But I’m enjoying myself as much as I did last year — even more so now that I’m reloading and have a pretty good idea of where my projectiles go every time I squeeze the trigger.

Enthusiasm remains blissfully high. And the 2017 season beckons.

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