

Wylve Valley 2008 National Small Gauge Championships Shoot Report

Things admittedly didn't look especially promising after viewing the Saturday evening weather report for the next day. If the rather pessimistic views of the weather girl were to be taken at face value, a canoe and a wetsuit would appear to have been the appropriate equipment for the pursuance of this year's epic battle of the small gauges.

Still, undeterred, and filled with a perhaps an overly abundant degree of optimism, we duly set off bright and early on our annual pilgrimage to the now established centre of the 'universe' (in the UK at least) of small gauge shooting.

The game plan was relatively straightforward, get up early, drink tea, load up the car, and get down to Wylve to partake the legendary full English breakfast, and after a suitable period for contemplative digestion, get stuck into the fray.

The journey was however damp in the extreme. It wasn't too bad when we carefully avoided the major routes approaching Oxford, by taking the scenic alternatives, but once on the A34, the sheer amount of water on the road, and its incumbent spray hazards from trucks, kept our forward velocity down to a cautious minimum. Things remained much the same on the A303, but when about 15 minutes away from the ground, the rain started to ease off, and it was beginning to look as if our optimistic approach had not been in vain.

The splendid valley setting of the ground, and its mud free tarmac road linking all of the extensive shooting stands, proved to be a first class location for this small gauge extravaganza.



After a very friendly welcome at the clubhouse, and a leisurely indulgence in the aforementioned epic breakfast, (that was truly worth the wait), it was time to start shooting. By midday, had started to dry up, and it warmed up considerably, with the rest of the day's competition being rather pleasantly blessed by the weather.

The course was set over nine stands with a total of 75 targets. The natural topography of Wylve's valley allows for the setting of the most excellent array of targets. They were indeed challenging, but eminently hittable, and all of the gauges in the competition; .410, 28 and 20 shot the same layout.

A full variety of clay target types were presented, with near and far 'rabbits' followed by tricky to read curling/quarterming crossers, paired teal and loopers, standards starting way out there, and curling and dropping down the contours of the valley, followed by a fast looper; followed by a single full use midi that came in at height and proved to be the undoing of many shooters. There were also tricky pairs of various targets set against the valley slopes that demanded full attention.



The Pool shoot, (pictured left) shot from a five stand layout, also proved challenging, with loopers, crossers, and teal, as singles, on report pairs, and simultaneous pairs.

The Iron Man competition ran together with the single gauge classes, and involved

shooting a full course of 75 targets with a .410, 28 and 20gauges. This inevitably required the best part of a full days shooting for most of the entrants.

The gauge classes were also set with shot payload limits, 20gauge 28gms, 28gauge 25gms, and .410 gauge 21gms, with all being limited to maximum pellet size of UK 6 shot (2.6mm in diameter). This actually ruled out the use of most European or American 6's in shells such as made by Winchester, Remington and Federal etc, because they are actually the same as UK 5 shot at 2.8mm in diameter. This is a sensible ruling because these larger pellets will travel further downrange than the UK 6 pellets, and can cause safety issues as regards pellet fall out beyond their expected limits of travel.

As Olympic Trap and Skeet targets are shot with 12gauges and a maximum of 24gm payloads, and the new 21gm 12gauge target loads are proving themselves to be more than capable for the destruction of sporting clay targets, perhaps for next year's shoot, a blanket payload limit of 21gm across all of the three smaller gauges might be worth considering?

In any case, it was a brilliant shoot, with the sort of friendly competitive spirit that we have grown used to among the users of smaller gauge guns. Ian clearly went to a lot of trouble to set up the targets, and I am sure that I am not alone in applauding him for his magnificent effort this year.

The catering ladies in the clubhouse put on a splendid array of home cooked food, (breakfasts, snacks, lunches, and puddings), made with locally sourced ingredients, and full marks are most definitely in order here, together with the generous warmth of their welcome, afforded to all of the many shooters and their guests who turned up.

So thanks again to Ian Stones for his support, to everyone at the ground, and to all of you that made the trip; and I'm sure that we're all looking forward to next year's event tremendously. As all shooters are eligible to take part, and smaller gauge ammo and guns are available at the ground, let's see if we can spread the word, and encourage even more shooters to discover the sublime delights of the smaller gauge clay shoot. T.W.