



SCENE AND HEARD IN THE WORLD OF CLAY SHOOTING

SNAPSHOTS

QUEEN HONOURS DIGWEED

George Digweed visited Buckingham Palace on 18 February to receive the MBE for his services to sport by Her Majesty The Queen, writes Vic Harker.

This is a well-deserved honour for a man who, for close to two decades, has ensured that Britain has collected most of the medals and the silverware in the International Sporting Clay Targets' most prestigious events during that time.

Long after George Digweed has hung up his guns, others will still be recounting his achievements. George is one of the very few British shooters who is truly a legend. Other names may come to mind, Joe Wheeler for example. For the moment, however, George is simply the greatest.

Born in Hastings, Sussex, 45 years ago, George did not come from a shooting background or a particularly privileged one. Beginning his working life in the family's butcher's shop, in his spare time he had to shoot rabbits to fund his growing passion for competitive clay target shooting.

Early wins at local events as a teenager fuelled his ambition, and by his early 20s he was one of the country's leading Skeet shooters.

Having honed his gun handling skills and cut his competitive teeth on Skeet shooting, he turned



ANOTHER MEDAL TO ADD TO THE COLLECTION – BUT ARGUABLY THE BEST YET FOR GEORGE

to Sporting Clays where his natural sense of timing and judgement of speed and distance assured his success. In discussing the various aspects of his game, George Digweed is refreshingly articulate. He understands precisely what he's doing and his great success is no mystery to him. As sheer nerve is a key component in competitive shooting, I asked whether he gets nervous?

"I always did and still do," he answered, "on some occasions more than others but it's an important ingredient to maintaining a competitive edge".

As to what prevents most people from winning, George puts it down to "a lack of basic technique, which can be learnt".

Good eyesight, George believes, is the single most important physical attribute a shooter can have and he describes his own as "phenomenal". As no optician has ever looked at his eyes we shall just have to take his word for it, although it has to be admitted he has not missed much in his life.

When it comes to the qualities he looks for in a shotgun he is rather non-committal. He, like so many of the best shooters I've talked to, is no connoisseur of fine guns and certainly is not a gun nut. In his choice of gun I believe that George, again like many top sportsmen in other fields, relies on an intuitive feel for what is right and what he can use.

Gun fit, however, is one technical aspect of shotguns he is interested in talking about. "It's absolutely vital," he says. I would however take a bet that matters of drop at comb and cast are left to his gunmaker to decide upon.

His gunmaker is the famous Perazzi company. George signed with Perazzi in 2000 and as the most successful Sporting Clay shooter in the world, he makes the perfect roving ambassador for the brand and its products. For some time now George's competitive shooting calendar has been reduced to half the year. He therefore focuses mainly on the FITASC International Championships and the increasing number of commercially sponsored shooting extravaganzas. He is welcomed by the organisers for his high profile and reputation, which always bring a certain added prestige to any event he attends.

For the rest of the year George concentrates on his business interests, for George Digweed is now a brand. GD Sporting Agencies, a company formed in 1990, organises game shooting at some of the most prestigious venues both in the UK and abroad.

Kate Digweed has been, apart from George himself, the most important and influential contributor to the Digweed success story from its very beginnings. Clearly a strong and intelligent woman,



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Kate combines the role of wife, business manager, consulting psychiatrist and lifestyle guru all rolled into one. Fiercely protective of George and keenly aware of the vulnerability to exploitation people in George's position can be exposed to, she organises and guides his career to provide a stable environment that enables her husband to employ his talent to its full potential.

As for George himself, he may be a shooting genius but he's also a multifaceted character. An Englishman to the core, a veritable John Bull in both stature and disposition, he can also be both sensitive and perceptive. Our paths have rarely crossed but I can provide an example of his perceptiveness in regard to people and in how to deal with them. It involved an incident in a hotel immediately

after George had won the 1995 World FITASC Championship in Setubal, Portugal. I was in the bar with some Australians, a few of whom I had met before. Once again any hopes they may have had of success in the Championships had been dashed by the big man himself. From the first day of the competition the Aussies had seemed preoccupied with George's presence. Jubilant when he shot a 15ex-25 in the fifth stage of the third day and dropped from first to 48th place, their spirits slowly sank over the next three stages as George clawed his way back to final victory. Then suddenly through the door strode George. Without a moment's hesitation he grabbed the two nearest Australians by their shirt fronts and crushed them together across his chest. "Well boys," he bellowed "and the Lord said unto the

Australians they shall come fourth but they came last". With that he threw the two Australians aside if they were rag dolls and clasped his hands together and shuffled forwards in imitation of a manacled Australian convict. For a moment there was deathly silence in which I prepared to duck the flying furniture. Then with a roar the Australians as one man charged forward in George's direction, not to break every bone in his body as I had expected, but to slap him on the back, shake his hand and try to pour drinks into him. Quite simply George had out-Aussied the Australians. If he had played the English Gentleman with self deprecating words and condolences for their lack of success, they would have swallowed it but they wouldn't have liked him for it, and

George knew that. Instead he had behaved as they would have expected a victorious sporting hero and a man amongst men to act and they loved him for it.

George is indeed an ornament to our sport, if rather a large one. His enthusiasm for shooting goes far beyond self-interest and as his recent open letter to FITASC illustrates he is committed to maintaining standards of fairness and sportsmanship at all costs.

George is not a saint but he is a hero and heroes are important. Heroes by their example inspire other people in moments of crisis in life and sport to strive to be the best they can be. And so those who love shooting in all its forms must salute George Digweed for the honour his country has chosen to bestow upon him. **VH**

NEW SPORT FOR PUPILS

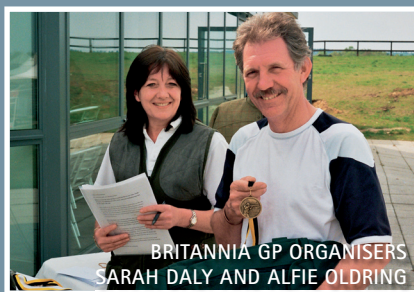
Why would the Britannia Grand Prix (BGP) go to Hounslow when 2008 saw such a successful event at Southern Counties? To give pupils at Isleworth & Syon School the opportunity to shoot, of course!

16 children will be given a series of lessons and preliminaries through March and April, then a squad of 10 will be picked to shoot their own competition with a final at the Sponsors Day of the BGP at Southern Counties on 16 April 2009.

The criteria to make the Southern Counties squad will be not only an individual's shooting talent, but also their commitment to the project and general behaviour on the range. The longer term target is for pupils to have the option of shooting as a sports opportunity.

Every shooter can contribute to this project – even one box of 25 cartridges will make a difference.

The sponsorship pledged as we go to press is over £3,000 including cartridges pledged by Sarah's (Shootcoach) and Alfie's (Frobury Farm Sporting Club) clients. Robert Grainger from Laporte Clay Pigeon Co is backing the project and commented: "A major event such as the Britannia Grand Prix should be supported in taking on this exercise to encourage



BRITANNIA GP ORGANISERS SARAH DALY AND ALFIE OLDRING

children who would not normally have such an opportunity." Other sponsors already on board are Gemini Fire Management Systems Ltd, Browning, Northall CPC, Ian Coley Gunshop, Southern Counties SG and of course the coaches, Sarah Daly, Alfie Oldring and Andy Pye.

Shooting grounds throughout the country have kindly agreed to act as 'drop off' points for cartridges (12g and 20g soft cartridges).

See the Britannia Grand Prix website www.britanniagrandprix.co.uk for the list of shooting grounds acting as 'drop off' points as well as information and entries for the main event. Contact Sarah Daly on 07967 328945 or Alfie Oldring on 01635 297122 for more information.

