

Southern Side by Side

by
Clarke C. Jones

Photos by Trischa Franklin



Somewhere off the beaten path in North Carolina between Raleigh and the sand hills of Pinehurst, in an area known more for basketball and barbecue, is an event of international proportions. On a spring weekend in April, just outside the town of Sanford, Deep River Sporting Clays holds the Southern Side by Side Championships. The Southern Side by Side is the creation of Bill Kempffer, owner and operator of Deep River Clays. This championship recently celebrated its ninth anniversary and has grown from 65 shooters to 900 entrants and from 12 to 52 exhibitors and vendors. Kempffer estimated that approximately 20%

Griffin & Howe offers a three-set David McKay Brown 12-gauge shotgun for \$150,000.



of the entrants were from Virginia. An additional 600 people attended to watch and shop under the vendor tents.

For those unfamiliar with shooting sporting clays, it has been often described as “golf with a shotgun.” A shooter walks a course that usually is 10 to 12 stations, each simulating a probable hunting situation. Contestants attempt to break a clay target that could represent a rabbit running along the ground, ducks landing on a pond, or the flush of a quail or grouse. There are many courses across the country and each offers different scenarios of a shooting situation, taking advantage of the landscape and topography of the area.



Phillip Floyd of North Carolina cleans his Gallazan 16-gauge A.H. Fox FE.



Dr. Charles Ferree of Charlotte, N. C., takes a break after some hot shooting.

“The Southern Side by Side promotes shooting sports and the traditional side-by-side shotgun,” says Kempffer. “The purpose of this shoot is for it to be a fun shoot, where only side-by-side shotguns are shot, many of which are vintage guns such as Parkers, L.C. Smiths, and rare hammer guns.” Kempffer’s efforts have caught the attention of well known gun manufacturers and purveyors of the finest shotguns in the world, such as Holland & Holland and Griffin & Howe.

Operations Manager for Holland & Holland David Cruz, ever mindful of the future of his market, said, “With shooting venues like this, I see the sport growing to the younger and female population. At Holland & Holland, we like to participate in events such as this to provide people the opportunity to see, touch, and possibly shoot or purchase some of the world’s finest British longarms. By doing this...we hope to give a greater experience to these people and get them more involved in shooting, conservation, and the outdoors.”

Guy Bignell, CEO and president of Griffin & Howe of Connecticut, has been a part of this shoot for at least six years. He says, “This is one of the best side-by-side shotgun events in the country. I like coming here because it is a well run shoot and everyone is very friendly.”

Unless you arrive early, you will have to walk a good ways to get to the facility. All along both sides of Cletus Hall Road, where Deep River Clays is located, you will find a line of cars with just as many tags from outside the Tar Heel state as from within it.

In vintage shoots such as this, you do not find a large class system other than: youth, senior (veterans), and ladies. Competition is divided by exposed-hammer guns and hammerless guns. Participants will shoot 28-, 24-, 20-, and 12-gauge shotguns. The hammer guns are usually much older shotguns. Some could date back to the late 1800s. Chuck DeVinne, a veterinarian who drove down with a friend from New

Hampshire, shot both a Stephen Grant 12-bore made in the 1890s and a Lang 12-bore hammer gun made in the 1900s. “The hammer guns are a little more complicated to operate,” said DeVinne, who shoots smaller-bore guns as well. “A smaller-bore shotgun shoots a shell that has less shot, making it more difficult to break a clay target. These factors make shooting a small bore hammer gun more difficult but more fun, in my opinion.”

So what makes shooting enthusiasts and gun suppliers travel long distances to spend a weekend in a small rural North Carolina town? Virginian Zeb Holt, along with a contingent of four others from the Tidewater area, has been coming to this shoot for a number of years. He, like many of the participants, is a collector of fine and vintage shotguns. “What I like about Deep River’s shoot,” said Holt, “is that Deep River has organized this shoot to such a degree that, to me, it flows very well. You have a number of different classes, and some shooters participate in all the classes. The host has refined this shoot in such a way that even with the increase in shooters every year, the whole thing runs smoothly, and there is very little waiting time for you to shoot.”

Holt, who shoots a Parker, said that there is a friendly rivalry among the Parker and L.C. Smith gun collectors. Both sides are passionate about their makes, similar to a Ford-vs.-Chevy rivalry in NASCAR. One of the more anticipated events is the L.C. Smith vs. the Parker Challenge where the collectors of both Smiths and Parkers have a qualifying shoot, and the top 10 qualifiers from both Smith and Parker make it into the Challenge shoot, with the highest score winning the challenge.

Dr. Paul Googe, who drove in from Knoxville, Tennessee, has participated for the last four years. He shoots a Holland & Holland. When asked what was so attractive about the Southern Side by Side he said, “the opportunity to shoot and see



Bob Foege, center, president of the Robert Louis Co. of Newtown, Conn. and his assistant John Bobowski, right, explain the advantages of the Shotgun Combo Gauge to author, left.

vintage shotguns. There are vendors that come to this shoot which you may only see in magazine ads—and the people are so nice. It’s the whole package.”

Many of the Virginians participating shot well. Godfrey Kauffman was High Gun in the 16- and 28-gauge hammer competition and Crile Crisler was runner-

up in the main event in the veterans class. Jim Rice won the 24-gauge competition, which was shot for the first time at the event.

Sandy Nunnally from Richmond and her friend Elizabeth Lanier are part of the growing number of women now coming to these events. “Curiosity attracted me to this event. I have grown to love the shooting so much that I want to experience every aspect of the sport. The event was on a larger scale than I had imagined,” said Nunnally. Asked if she would come back to this event again, she declared, “We have already made our hotel reservations for next year!”

Clarke C. Jones is a freelance writer who spends his spare time with his black Lab, Luke, hunting up good stories. You can visit Clarke and Luke on their web site, www.clarkecjones.com.