

The flash, the bang, the smoke and the smell that is -

Muzzleloading

by Allan Vaisham



Waiting for the next event at Captains Mountain.

There is something for every shooter in the Muzzleloading discipline, providing you like the smoke and smell of burnt powder. The discipline encompasses all the different types of firearms in one section. Indeed, rifles, muskets, shotguns and handguns are all shot in Muzzleloading clubs, but it goes further than that, as each type of firearm has several sub-sections. Any shooter who wants to compete in all the available Muzzleloading events in all categories would have to be prepared to shoot more than 30 events and would need several different firearms to do so.

Percussion-lock, flintlock, matchlock and wheel-locks are the four types of ignition that can be used to fire a muzzleloading firearm. Historically, this takes us from the earliest practical hand-held firearms up to the sad day when smokeless powders replaced black powder. This covers the period from the mid-12th century to 1886 when the French introduced the Lebel rifle using an 8mm bottle-neck cartridge loaded with smokeless powder. That is more than 500 years of fast and furious history.

Muzzleloading events are divided into

three classes:

- **Class 1:** Military firearms (rifles or revolvers) being a good replica of a firearm that was issued to troops somewhere in the world. The .577" Enfields and .58"-calibre Zouave rifled muskets shooting minie balls and the Colt and Remington cap and ball revolvers without adjustable sights are all Class 1. All Class 1 firearms must be 'as issued', meaning unaltered from the original firearm.
- **Class 2:** Traditional or civilian-style percussion rifles or pistols loaded with ball and patch. Kentucky long rifles and Hawken rifles, as well as muzzleloading percussion pistols with rifled barrels are all Class 2. Flintlocks may be used in Class 2 events, but percussion firearms cannot be used in flintlock events.
- **Class 3 - Open:** The only requirement is that the rifle or pistol uses black powder and lead bullets and it must be fitted with iron sights without click adjustment. Scopes sights are not permitted. Cap and ball revolvers with adjustable rear sights fall into this class.

Each class of rifle is shot from three

positions: offhand, cross-sticks/prone and benchrest, but there are also events shot kneeling or sitting. All shooting is done at the 50m ISU pistol targets with the exception of the smoothbore flintlock musket and the matchlock events, which are shot at the French 200m targets placed at 50m. All the offhand events are shot at 50m and the prone and benchrest events are shot at 100m. Some clubs also program long-range shoots if they have the facilities for it.

To avoid having a sighting-in period, all Muzzleloading events are 13 shots fired within 30 minutes. The best 10 scoring shots count.

Handgun events are 13 shots at the 50m ISU targets, but most pistol and revolver events are shot at 25m. The competition for revolvers (Class 1) and pistols (Class 2) is divided into a precession event and a snap or timed fire event.

That covers the main rifle and pistol/revolver events, but is by no means all. There are events for flintlock rifle and pistol, military smoothbore flintlock muskets, matchlocks and smoothbore flintlock pistols and more.

Muzzleloading percussion shotgun and

black powder cartridge shotgun is shot from five stations 8m from the thrower, and flintlock from three stations 5m from the thrower. Each detail is 25 clays. The shooter loads the gun in an area behind the firing stations and then waits until the range officer calls them forward to the next station.

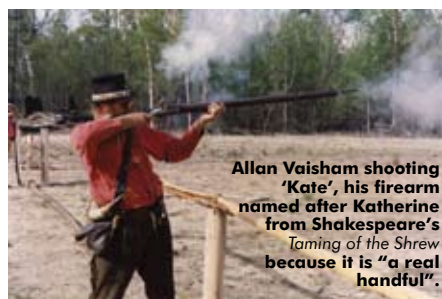
An interesting insight into shooting these old-fashioned muzzleloading firearms is that in each event the shooter is permitted a certain number of 'misfires' before being penalised.

Any club member is eligible to enter all events. However, it is too much to expect any competitor to shoot in such a marathon, so shooters have their favourite events in which they compete, the number of which is decided by their stamina and areas of interest. The level of competition is also up to the individual and can range from friendly club shoots to state and national competitions to international and world-class events.

Muzzleloading clubs do not shoot muzzleloading firearms exclusively; most clubs program black powder cartridge events as well. The modern Italian-made Sharps and Remington actions are prominent among the cartridge rifles. Old black powder proof Damascus twist-barrelled cartridge shotguns are popular for shooting clays. The

single-action cartridge revolvers, particularly the Colt variations, are also very popular on the pistol range.

The shooting range is where most of the Muzzleloading and Black Powder events are held and where the 'smoke pole' shooters gather on weekends, but it is not the only place that powder is burnt. There is a very enthusiastic following of Rondivoo events and military re-enactments. The aim of re-enactment is to try to replicate the dress and equipment, as closely as possible, of the period of interest. Thus, a person interested in the days of the Australian gold rush will study pictures and information on dress, tools and camp equipment of the period and try to replicate them. Firearms were most definitely a tool, as well as a means of protection and everyone on the goldfields had them. The aim would be to dress and have a



Allan Vaisham shooting 'Kate', his firearm named after Katherine from Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* because it is "a real handful".

campsite that looks as if it were taken from the gold diggings.

Another popular topic of re-enactment is that of military units. The choice is enormous and ranges from the Highland Scottish Regiments to Colonial Volunteers. The aim is the same as for the diggers: to dress, equip and camp as the soldiers might have done. An added effort is made to learn the rifle drill of the time and troops in question.

Since the common angle of approach to re-enactment is firearms it is to be expected that shooting competitions are a prominent part of Rondivoo and military encampments. The firearms will range from matchlock and flintlock muskets to civilian percussion rifles and shotguns. The targets range from standard 50m paper targets to metal gongs. The one unifying thing that modern participants love and which the oldtimers would have encountered with trepidation, is the smell of burnt powder carried on the breeze.

Despite the enthusiasm and colorful activities of the re-enactors, most Muzzleloading shooting is done at a shooting range and here the Muzzleloading shooters are as seriously competitive as in any other shooting discipline.

So, should a new Muzzleloading shooter rush out and buy a few black powder firearms? No, a new shooter on a budget, as

2008 MLAIC World Muzzleloading Championships by Allan Vaisham

In August 2000, Australia hosted the 19th MLAIC World Muzzleloading Championships at the Monarto Range about 60km south-east of Adelaide.

All those who attended as competitors or helpers will agree that the event was a resounding success. That the MLAIC Committee also thought so is demonstrated by Australia again being appointed to host the 23rd World Muzzleloading Championships, to be held in August 2008.

The Monarto Range will again become a tent city with marquees set up as catering and dining areas, officials' offices and clubrooms and changing areas for each of the international teams. In 2000, there were teams from 19 countries competing. Next year, it looks as though it will grow to 26 countries.

Plans are being made for a spectacular Opening Ceremony to welcome the international teams to Australia and to the competitions. For many of the international team members this will be the first time they have visited our country and the Australian team, organisers and helpers

will be our ambassadors for the duration of the event.

International competitors and their supporters will be staying at hotels in the Adelaide city area. They will travel to the Monarto Range by buses leaving the city in the morning and returning in the evening after the events are over.

On Monday and Tuesday, August 11 and 12, the Monarto Range will be open for practice and arms inspection. All firearms to be used in the competitions must be inspected to make sure that they comply with MLAIC rules. Each event is shot in two sections: one for original antique firearms and one for modern-made replicas of the same type of firearm. Approved firearms are given a sticker so the range officers and other competitors can tell at a glance that it has passed inspection.

From Wednesday, August 13, to Saturday, August 16, the competition proper will be in full swing. Events will start at 9am sharp on Wednesday and from then on details will start on the hour every hour through the day; that is, the first event will

be held at 9am, the next at 10am and so on until the shooting is finished on Saturday. Awards for each day's events will be presented after the shooting ends for that day, followed by an Australian barbecue with live entertainment.

The Grand Banquet and Closing Ceremony will be held on the Saturday night and will be a truly stunning performance designed to send the visitors home with an indelible memory of Australia and the 23rd MLAIC World Muzzleloading Championships.

It is vital for all shooters that these international events are a success for they bring shooting to the attention of the politicians and public in the most favourable of circumstances, bringing in tourists and tourist dollars. Team members from 26 countries will come to Australia; that could work out to be as many as 600 people, many of whom will take the opportunity to stay on after the championships to see Australia. Even the most diehard 'anti' will have to admit that sports shooting is a benefit to Australia.

most shooters are, can get started with a secondhand rifle and the powder and accoutrements to load, shoot and care for it for about \$500. The Pedersoli range of muzzle-loading and black powder cartridge rifles and pistols will provide an excellent choice for the better-heeled shooter who would like to start out with a new and better quality firearm.

The choice of the class of muzzleloader to purchase first is a little more complicated. The best way to make such a decision is to visit the nearest range that has programmed black powder shoots and talk to the shooters and perhaps have a shot with different types of muzzleloaders. Those already shooting black powder will happily share their knowledge and experiences.

Most Muzzleloading shooters start with a Class 2 rifle - a percussion rifle of about .50-calibre that is loaded with patch and ball. A good Class 2 rifle will get the shooter on to the range and involved in Muzzleloading events and on average clubs program more shoots for this style of rifle than any other. Once started, the shooter can decide which direction they would like to expand their participation with the confidence of having seen and talked to those shooting other classes of Muzzleloading.

A flintlock rifle for the first muzzleloader

can be a pitfall. A good quality lock that is well tuned will work perfectly reliably, but there are all too many flintlocks that are far from well tuned. Learning how to load, operate and care for a muzzleloading rifle is quite complicated enough without having to put up with the uncertainty of misfires and slow ignition. A malfunctioning flintlock is often enough to turn a new member away from Muzzleloading altogether.

Muzzleloading shooters are possibly the most friendly and helpful people you could hope to meet. Whether it is at your local club or at major international events, the common interest of Muzzleloading makes all the participants a family. Even at the MLAIC World Championships we found shooters from overseas teams willing to help other shooters they were about to compete against.

If you have any interest in old guns or in shooting black powder, you should have a look at the Muzzleloading discipline - you will certainly enjoy it!

For more information, visit the SSAA Competition Information webpage at www.ssaa.org.au/newssaa/disciplines/disciplines.html or contact the National Discipline Chairman Kim Atkinson on 0417 089 915 or email 27honeysuckle@msn.com.au ●



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