

In search of perfection - **Matthew Everingham**

by senior correspondent Jennifer Martens

Matthew Everingham is currently one of Australia's best and youngest Rifle Metallic Silhouette shooters. He was born in Mansfield, Queensland, in 1988, exactly 200 years after his great, great, great, great grandfather Matthew James Everingham arrived at Port Jackson on the First Fleet. He was arrested in England for taking two law books worth 10 shillings with him when he lost his job as a servant to an attorney, meaning he made his trip to Australia as a convict rather than the professional he aspired to be. With such a rich and interesting family history, it is no wonder that young Matthew has always had an interest in aircrafts, firearms and history.

When Matthew was 10 years old, his grandmother took him to Coochiemudlo in Queensland to watch a re-enactment of Matthew Flinders' discovery of the Morton Bay Islands. As he sat entranced, a number of the shooters taking part in the re-enactment introduced themselves to Matthew and invited him to come and experience the excitement of black powder shooting. Shortly after his visit, he joined the SSAA's Junior Sporting Shooters program and took up Rifle Metallic Silhouette. During the past seven years he's made the climb to the top of the shooting scene.

At 18 years of age, he has accomplished more than most shooters achieve in their lifetime. In 2006 he competed in the US Nationals in Pennsylvania and finished third out of more than 190 international competitors. "That was a big one," Matthew recalls. When he was 15, he shot a new Australian record of 36 out of 40 at a Metallic Silhouette Hunter Class competition. His most recent accomplishments have many in the sport picking their jaws up off the clubhouse floor. At an Air Rifle Silhouette shoot held at his club, he became the first Australian to shoot 40 out of 40 in competition. Proving he's the real deal, he nearly repeated that feat when he shot 39 out of 40 in a Rim-fire Metallic Silhouette shoot, equalling the Australian record.

While Matthew wouldn't say he's superstitious, he does confess to carrying one thing in particular with him at every shoot: a gold bullet his dad made for him. "I was trying to win one of my first state junior championships at Millmerrin in Queensland when I was about 14 or so. My dad, who is a jeweller and gemmologist, said he'd make me a nine carat gold bullet if I won."

Unfortunately, there was no thrill of victory for Matthew that year. The next year, however, his luck changed and his dad used some carnelian (a variety of quartz) he found and formed it into the shape of a projectile and seated it into a nine carat gold casing. The bullet has been around his neck at every major competition ever since. "My accomplishments have given me much more confidence in competitions. Shooting 40 out of 40 made me feel like I've reached perfection," he said. "I've achieved what I had set out to do. Even to shoot 39 out of 40 gives me much more confidence. It reinforces that it is possible for me to keep shooting a perfect score."

Despite this 'perfection', there is still room for improvement. Matthew says shooting is 75 per cent psychological and that is the area he has yet to conquer. "If I can fully accept that I can shoot big scores, I will be consistent," he says. >



Silhouette shooters Allan Murray (New Zealand) and Dann Suthern with Matthew at the Pacific Regional Shooting Championships in Brisbane, 2006.



Matthew at the Ridgway Rifle Club in Pennsylvania.

Matt's lucky charm. Matthew is not superstitious, but he admits to wearing this nine carat gold bullet at all of his big competitions.

Not only have these achievements put Matthew 'on the map', as word travels fast in the shooting sports, they have also opened up another level of possibilities. "I'd like to shoot a perfect 40 in Rimfire Silhouette and win a US Rimfire Nationals and World Championship," he said. Lofty goals for a youngster, but ones he has proven are well within his reach.

Matthew's limited training schedule of only two to three hours a week brings to mind another world-class Australian shooter: Michael Diamond. Michael's success has many people mystified because of his infrequent training regime. Like Michael, Matthew's raw talent has been enough to make up for the extra hours other shooters put in at the range. Most of his training is in the form of competitions. "I use my club shoots as my training, to refine my technique," he says. He makes the easy 10-minute drive to the Madden Range at Belmont on Tuesdays and Thursdays, competing on average in one Silhouette competition per week. He also occasionally shoots Field Rifle on the weekends.

While Matthew deserves the lion's share of the credit for his rise in the sport, recognition must also be given to his coach,

Anthony Finn. "He's taught me a lot about Silhouette shooting - about psychology, reloading, how to improve my shooting technique and how to make it into master grade." In addition, Matthew says club friend Alan Murray has also been instrumental throughout his shooting career. "Alan has helped me a lot. He is a very good shooter who has won a World Championship. Whenever I have ever needed anything, he has been there."

Matthew says he finds inspiration from fellow Metallic Silhouette shooter Augustine Sanchez, a Mexican competing out of California. The two met while Matthew was competing at the US Nationals. "He is probably one of the world's best Silhouette shooters. He has shot perfect scores in rimfire and centrefire and is just a brilliant shooter. When I was in the US, he let me borrow his 6.5BR and his .260 Remington, which I used to compete in the high-powered event."

Fortunately for Matthew, his current cache of firearms is made up of the tools that many of his peers can only dream about. His rimfire silhouette rifle is a .22-calibre long rifle Anshutz Model 1710 topped with a Leupold VX III 6.5-20x40mm variable scope. His air rifle is a Feinwerkbau P70 field target rifle fitted with a Simmons 4-12x40mm scope.

The ammunition he chooses to pair with these fine firearms varies. "At big competitions I would probably use Lapua Signum in .22-calibre, but for general practice I use my reloads or something a little less expensive."

Having recently completed his Year 12 exams, Matthew is planning to start a structural engineering course on commercial aircraft conducted at the Brisbane airport. After the intense 10-month course, which will keep him busy from 8.30am to 4pm five days a week, he hopes to get a job with one of the major airlines as a structural engineer.

Shooting seems to bring out the best in Matthew - literally. "I just love the challenge of trying to reach perfection," he says. Each week he tries to improve upon the previous week's result. He says, "I don't compete with anyone else. I compete against myself. That is how I have gotten this far."

Aside from the challenge, Matthew says he simply likes the noise, the recoil, the tools and the competition found in shooting. He's managed to convince his dad, a few of his friends and his girlfriend what he's known since he was 10 - that shooting is a sport worth looking into. ●



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