

Report – Police Sport UK Shooting Section – USPE, Vingsted, Denmark 13th to 17th October 2011

I was delighted to be asked by the Shooting Section Committee to be Team Manager for this trip, I think I said “Yes” before the sentence had been completed! Although I missed out being selected as a competitor in the past, I am now a ‘veteran’ of three USPE’s.

The selection procedure for the rifle squad was started three long years ago, and I raised the qualification bar each year. To their credit the team that has been selected have responded well to the challenges I put before them and are now at a level that is likely to get them noticed by their respective National Squads. However, I refuse to take the credit for that because I have been very ably assisted, and sometimes corrected, by our Coach Fred Jennings and the late Paul Hatton both of whom have won medals at USPE shooting events in the past.

For some strange reason there are no serving police officers shooting Air Pistol and, as we know, ‘cartridge’ pistol was banned in the UK many years ago. The team attending this years USPE is therefore wholly rifle event based.

MALE

Prone Rifle	Chris BROWN	Leicestershire	Melvin MUTCH	Thames Valley
Three Positional	Kevin SINCLAIR	Metropolitan	Toby NOAR	Metropolitan
Air Rifle	Kevin SINCLAIR	Metropolitan	Toby NOAR	Metropolitan

FEMALE

Prone Rifle	Louise AIKEN	PSNI	Pauline THORNTON	Leicestershire
Three Positional	Leah BROUGH	Metropolitan		
Air Rifle	Pauline THORNTON	Leicestershire	Leah BROUGH	Metropolitan

With the team having been selected, the first issue was the venue. Originally this event was to be held in Athens but early this year (2011), due to the worsening financial crisis, Greece withdrew their offer to host and no-one seemed to be forthcoming to take it on. Finally Denmark stepped into the breach (no pun intended), the venue was named as Vingsted which was the location for the 1983 event and the scene of one of our two previous medals – could this be an omen?

Our section Chairman, ACC Adrian Whiting, was committed with Olympic Games preparations within his home force and was therefore unable to attend as our delegate so it was a pleasure to see our *former* Chairman and Police Sport UK Vice President Mr David Stevens, once again accept the invitation to stand in for Mr Whiting.

With the team selected and the venue known, it was a case of waiting for the official paperwork to be submitted and a formal invitation to arrive. Team clothing was ordered and transport options were researched before we opted to fly. Flights into Billund were restricted by those airlines willing to carry firearms and ultimately Sun Air of Scandinavia (a British Airways franchise) were chosen, flying out of Manchester at 0855 on 13th October. Due to the early flight, and the anticipated duration of checking in firearms, we booked a Travelodge at the Airport, which had proved to be extremely useful for the last USPE.

Most of the team clothing arrived just one week before departure with the final consignment having to be collected en route to Manchester!

Everyone arrived at Manchester and we settled down for the night (some sleeping on the floor!) at the hotel. An early rise followed and with everyone showered and dressed in Police Sport UK blazers, we set off for the airport for what would turn out to be an extremely lengthy check-in process. Despite being aware some weeks beforehand that we would be carrying firearms, the airport security staff were caught completely off their guard. Security and Customs insisted on checking all of our firearms in full public view in the check-in area which certainly raised a few eyebrows with the general public. Eventually (almost 2 hours later) everything was sorted out and our firearms and hold baggage were sent on their way. We boarded the aircraft, a very cosy 32 seater and watched in horror as the doors were closed with our cased rifles clearly visible on a trolley on the apron. Thankfully the pilot was aware that he was still waiting for this last trolley load of luggage and refrained from firing up the engines. We watched as there was lots of head shaking and paperwork being waved around on the apron amongst a small circle of baggage handlers who were surrounding our kit.

We breathed a sigh of relief as the 'tools of our sport' were finally loaded into the hold and we eventually taxied away from the apron some 20 minutes after our scheduled departure time.

After a pleasant flight we landed at Billund Airport in Denmark. The arrival procedure was so simple in comparison to what we had endured four hours earlier and we emerged into the arrivals lounge to be greeted by our coach driver. After a 20 minute drive we arrived at the venue Vingsted Centre, which is the largest conference facility in Denmark with world class shooting facilities attached to it.

We changed quickly into our teamwear and set off with our shooting equipment to the ranges where our shooters went through equipment control – with the exception of a couple of buttons that had to be moved, everyone sailed through. It was at this point that it was discovered that one shooter had left his air rifle butt-plate at home! A bit of pleading, and some alleged bribery, resolved the situation with the shooter in question being allowed to borrow one of the women's air rifles as the men's and women's events were scheduled to be held on different days. Shooters then set about training and practise on the 50m range getting used to the slightly different target system. We have shot on a number of electronic systems before and the controls are always slightly different. With everyone satisfied, once the firearms were lodged in secure storage we returned to go through the accreditation process and went on to explore our accommodation. We were to find that twin rooms had been converted into 4 bed rooms utilising a sofa and a 'put-u-up' bed; having said that - all were very comfortable and completely adequate for our purposes.

An excellent dinner was served in the restaurant and our shooters renewed old acquaintances, or made new ones, with their opponents; the management team attended the Technical Meeting which confirmed all of the previously released information. One good innovation for this level of competition was the ability to view targets from other ranges via the internet. With good internet access possible via a series of Wi-Fi connections, I was able to add links to the Police Sport UK shooting website so that anyone 'back home' could also see what was happening with just a 30 second delay.

We settled down for the first night with another early start the following day for breakfast followed by the opening ceremony at 8.30 and straight into our first competition.

Day One - Friday

Thankfully the opening ceremony was held indoors as the mornings were to be extremely cold (allegedly minus 6 degrees!) under cloudless skies. Stephen Evans was our flag bearer in full uniform and, as always, the British Bobby attracted the usual interest from all assembled.

The opening ceremony over, it was on to the 50m rifle range for our first event, the Men's Prone Rifle competition (60 shots) with Chris and Melvin our representatives. Both started well and although shooting at different paces had both scored 195 after 20 shots, just a couple of points adrift of the leading scores at the same stage. Ten shots later and Chris was on 292 while Mel was 294. Chris then had a superb series of 100 to be at 392 with 20 shots to go and only 4 better scores at the same stage, Mel meanwhile was just 1 point behind Chris on 391. The final 20 shots saw Mel finish with a score of 585 for 16th place whilst Chris finished =7th with 2 others on 587. Only eight shooters can progress to the Final so the three shooters occupying 7th, 8th and 9th had to shoot-off for the last two positions in the final.

The shoot off is a 5 shot truncated version of the 10 shot Olympic Final, and is shot under strict timing conditions.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Nation</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Position</u>
F. Krumm	FRA	9.8	9.7	10.9	9.5	10.1	50.0	9
C. Brown	GBR	10.9	9.7	10.4	10.4	10.5	51.9	7
C. Butz	GER	9.3	10.3	10.3	10.2	10.3	50.4	8

This saw Chris in the Olympic Final in 7th place just 4 points behind the leader on 591.

The final commenced almost immediately, his 10 shots (which are scored to 1/10 of a point) netting him 102.2 and a total final score of 689.2 for a sixth place finish. (0.2 extra would have seen him in 5th place!)

With the excitement of the Men's prone now over, it was the Women's turn. With the best of the days temperature now gone and getting progressively colder as the afternoon sun disappeared behind the trees, it was difficult for the women as there was a slight breeze which affected shots, but did not register on the wind flags.

Both Pauline and Louise battled the elements to finish on 570 each with Pauline placed 9th and Louise 10th based on the score of their last 10 shots. The winning score was 584 - about 10 shots less than expected and an indication of just how difficult the conditions were.

With the first days competition over (from our point of view); it was time to return to the centre, warm up and relax. Pauline and Leah however, utilised the free time for practise on the air rifle range ready for the following days competition.

Day Two - Saturday

Another early start for breakfast and then it was straight to the ranges. We had Kevin and Toby at the 50m range for the men's 3x40 three positional competition - 40 shots at each of prone, standing and kneeling positions. At the same time Pauline and Leah were on the indoor 10m range for the women's air rifle.

The morning was again extremely cold and a heavy frost covered the 50m range. Myself and Fred braved the cold at the 50m range whilst everyone else opted for the slightly warmer 10m range.

Whilst 3 Position is still a relatively new sport in the UK, European youngsters *start* by shooting 3 position so we are always on the back foot at this discipline.

Both Kevin and Toby started quite well with the prone section but were already over 10 points adrift with our weaker disciplines to come. At the end of the match Kevin was over 60 points adrift of the leader and Toby around 80.

This is a discipline that we didn't expect to challenge strongly and neither of our shooters disgraced themselves.

Leah and Pauline meanwhile were shooting 10m Air Rifle and this was a competition we expected a good result in, both shooters have previously been well placed in British Championships.

Uncharacteristically Pauline stuttered with her first string of 10 shots dropping 9 points but recovered well to finish the match on 377 and 9th place.

Leah started well had a slight dip in the middle but like Pauline recovered well and finished in 6th place with a score of 382 to take her place in the 'Olympic Final'.

In the final, Leah was too far adrift of the shooters ahead of her and was unable to progress further but she was able to consolidate her 6th place finish.

With shooting over for the day for us, a small group took the opportunity to go into the nearby town of Veilje for some well earned relaxation and retail therapy.

Day Three - Sunday

Heavy frost, once again, greeted Leah for the women's 3x20 3 Position match on the 50m range. Her prone score was a little below par but an excellent standing stage saw her claw her way back amongst the leaders. At the conclusion of the kneeling stage, and the match, Leah had scored 556 and was in 6th place for the 'Olympic Final'.

An excellent final saw Leah move from 6th place to 4th, just out of the medals.

Whilst the women's 3P was on-going Kevin & Toby were shooting Men's Air Rifle. Kevin scored 557 and Toby 530 to finish 25th and 29th respectively - both were on a par with their previous averages although well down the leader board on the day.

After these two matches, Team GB's contribution was over so it was back to our rooms to warm up and relax in preparation for the closing ceremony later that evening, followed by the farewell meal and party during which contact details and mementoes were exchanged.

Rather than book the early flight home on the Monday which would have meant a 4am start, we opted for the afternoon flight to allow our shooters the time to unwind, say our farewells and still have a reasonable lie in before the journey home.

Day Four - Monday

With a lot of the opposition already departed we were able to rise and get a leisurely breakfast, before completing our packing and reclaiming firearms before our transport arrived for the short 20 minute journey back to the airport. Once at the airport the check-in procedure was meticulous yet logical, quick and very painless in stark contrast to our departure just five days earlier. We had an uneventful flight back to Manchester and a surprisingly quick baggage reclaim and customs passage before we parted company and went our separate ways.

To summarise we took a team of seven shooters and contested 11 individual matches; securing six top ten finishes of which three were Olympic Finals places. Given that the opposition teams could boast World, Olympic and European class shooters we did not disgrace ourselves. I believe that this was our best return since we came back with a bronze medal in 1983 – also at Vingsted.

My personal thanks go to all of the shooters who had put in a lot of hard work and sacrifice over the last three years to get to the standard they had reached to be selected; and to Fred Jennings, our coach, whose knowledge and experience has been invaluable in well over 20 years as competitor, manager and coach. Fred stated during this Championships that this would be his last USPE – the next one would see him in his mid-70's. He will be sorely missed but hopefully he will still be on hand to coach our shooters on home soil.

I must also thank Steven Evans (at his first USPE) and Ann Roberts who both ably assisted Fred and myself in supporting our shooters. Without them our task would have been virtually impossible.

At this point, on behalf of the shooters, support team and myself I would like to thank Police Sport UK for their help and assistance both at home and abroad. Without their support these events would not be possible for us or other sporting sections.

The next USPE Shooting Championships are scheduled to be hosted by Turkey in 2015. Training and the selection process for that event will start in 2012 once the Olympic Games are concluded.

Phil Smith
Team Manager - USPE Squad 2011