

Jack Foster

Contrary to some opinions and in answer to questions I've been asked about 300 meters, it is not dead. I know that 300 meters has been taken out of the Olympic Games by the International Olympic Committee, using procedures even contrary to their own rules. Attempts on the part of the International Shooting Union to have it reinstated have been completely frustrated by IOC. There is a distinct possibility, however, that 300 meters is going to come back stronger than ever before. 300 Meters, from the match administrators point of view, is a very expensive proposition. The Olympics Games is supposed to be a money-making proposition, at least not a money-losing proposition, and construction of 300 meter ranges has placed great financial burdens on the host countries. There is also a move in international shooting circles to cease to make 300 meters a compulsory event at world championships. In return for supporting this proposal, there is another proposal which says if there is no 300 meter event in the Olympics or a World Shooting Championship, the following year there will be a separate 300 meter World Championship. To make such an event worthwhile, ISU wants to increase the courses of fire. Among the proposals are to keep 300 meter free rifle and standard rifle, add an English Match and perhaps a rapid fire event such as the rapid fire in CISM (Counsel International Sport de Militaire) which is a little slower than our domestic high power rapid fire events allowing for more precision, and including kneeling and standing as well as prone.

The answer I give to people when they suggest that taking 300 meters out of the Olympics has sounded the death-knoll for the sport, is the fact that air rifle is the fastest growing rifle sport and it isn't in the Olympics. Granted 300 meters is expensive to shoot. However, with the present cost of Eley, both events may be compatible in a few years. With the knowledge we have in this country of hand-loading, the availability of components and good equipment for handloading, we are in a good position to remain strong in the sport. There are only a few other countries in the world that do any handloading. For instance, in Switzerland the government supplies all the ammo so they can shoot 300 meters cheaper than they can shoot smallbore. It is the national sport in Switzerland. I left Switzerland about three weeks ago as they were preparing for their national service rifle championship which is eighteen shots prone. In a nation of five million people, they anticipated about two hundred and fifty thousand competitors! It is held all over Switzerland on the same weekend. This gives you some idea of the interest and participation in 300 meter shooting there.

In Russia, 300 meter shooting is also popular. However not all countries are interested in it. It seems to be more a sport for a few individuals in a given country than for the masses. For instance, in the Olympics we will probably have about fifty to seventy countries entered in the 50 meter smallbore events. In 300 meters the entry would be about twenty countries.

300 meters is the father of the international shooting sports. Shooting entered the modern Olympics in 1896. It has only been since about 1948 that position smallbore entered the Games. It was not accepted worldwide even at that time, as smallbore position was just considered cheap practice for 300 meter shooting. Prone

smallbore has been around a long time. The 300 meter target has not changed in all these years and we are just now shooting near possibles on the target in prone. Imagine how difficult that target must have been in 1896 with the equipment they had then. This makes all the arguments for the target being within reach of the shooter, so that he can shoot possibles, a little pale.

300 meters is not considered a juniors or ladies event (there are no separate events for them). Margaret is the only woman who has been successful at 300 meters. It's hard to be more successful than she, having been cheated out of the gold medal in the 300 meter event at the 1970 World Shooting Championships in Phoenix, winning the gold medal for the standing. She has been imminently successful. It's a sport that many juniors and ladies are afraid of, I think unnecessarily. The rifles that we shoot, the ammunition that we use are not unbearable - it won't pound you into the ground. As long as you learn proper technique and don't fight it, you won't be bruised or battered. There is a knack to shooting 300 meters, in learning to give with the recoil and not trying to resist it. The equipment is basically identical to your smallbore free rifle for 50 meters, with a heavier barrel, a larger hole and a little more powder in the cartridge. Most of the shooters use the same accessories for both, such as palm rest, sights, etc. It is a little more difficult to shoot 300 meters. The wind has more effect. Mirage becomes a more critical factor. Also, you have to have someone to work the pits. It is a little more expensive, therefore most of our training is at 50 meters. At AMU this year we had no 300 meter training. We shot it in a few matches. Next year, with a 300 meter team to make, we will probably devote a month to training with our 300 meter guns. Once an individual learns that the 300 meter rifle is not punishing, that he can wear ear plugs and muffs to shut out the noise, learns to keep his sight forward enough so that he doesn't get bumped, you can derive probably seventy-five to eighty percent of your training benefit from smallbore. At MTU we usually shoot a month of 300 meters in the fall and a month again in the spring.

You can go to competent gunsmiths in this country who can build you a 300 meter free rifle for no more than the cost of a smallbore free rifle, if you know what you are looking for. You can handload the ammo for ten to twelve cents per round. We feel the U.S. has an advantage in 300 meter shooting because we do know how to build excellent 300 meter rifles and how to load the best possible loads for a particular gun. Much of our knowledge comes from our benchrest competitors and gunsmiths. This has helped us stay on top and dominate the game.

For 300 meters at the present time there are three cartridges I would recommend. The first being the .308. You should be able to build a rifle and load ammo that will group two inches at 300 meters. This is actually better accuracy than you get from your smallbore rifle comparatively for the target. The other calibers we've had success with are the 30-06 and 7 mm. These are the only three cartridges available today that are made with sufficient precision to have the necessary wind-bucking characteristics needed for 300 meter shooting. In the past some countries have used the 6.5 x 55, but the .308 shoots rings around it. The benchrest people have been successful with the 6 mm and 224's. Only the .30 caliber and 7 mm have the wind-bucking ability necessary for the conditions we meet as international shooters.

Keep in mind the world record groups benchrest shooters have are not what they consistently shoot 300 meters. You must look for a rifle/ammo combination

that will consistently, in all conditions, give you a better than average chance to shoot a ten. The 300 meter ten ring is 3.9 inches. You must have a rifle that is well under a minute of accuracy to be able to give the shooter an edge. If you miss a wind or mirage change at 300 meters, you can easily have a wide eight or a seven. Therefore, both your wind judging ability and the wind-bucking ability of your cartridge are more critical.

Three hundred meter shooting is a very satisfying sport for an individual who is interested in handloading, gunsmithing, and high power rifles. You have complete control over your equipment, whereas in 50 meter shooting you have no control over ammo except to try to marry a good lot with your rifle. You can tailor ammo to conditions in 300 meters, having a wind-bucking load and an accuracy load.

As I mentioned before, 300 meter shooting will probably be expanded. Therefore you will have a lot of additional equipment with a 300 meter free rifle, 300 meter standard rifle and possibly another rifle for rapid fire if this is added. At the present we don't use special prone rifles for 300 meters.

I urge any of you who are interested to take it up, because it greatly expands your chances of making an international team. It gives you two additional events right now at the World Shooting Championships. We have more knowledge in the United States about accurate rifles and accurate loads than in the whole rest of the world. I'm completely convinced of this.

IW: Do we have spin off from the benchrest game in development of loads?

JF: We try to watch the benchrest game closely. Many of their developments can be directly applicable to the 300 meter game. They come up with new techniques in bedding or stocking that we can use. We have used their techniques along these lines in the past.

EH: What about barrel life?

JF: The barrel life is naturally going to be shorter than a .22 rifle barrel. The main thing that cuts down barrel life is the erosion from burning gases and since you are burning more powder and thus generating more gases, your barrel life will be shorter. Generally, you should be able to expect four to five thousand accurate rounds.

By the way, if any of you want to try 300 meters, I think a number of us would let you shoot a few rounds, just to get the feel of it. One thing I didn't mention, you should always wear shooting glasses for 300 meter shooting as a safety precaution. You should do this with any high power rifle.

EP: What is the black elastic strip about three inches wide on 300 meter rifles?

JF: That is a mirage band. It keeps the heat from your barrel from rising up and interfering with your sighting. You have enough mirage to read between you and the target without reading through barrel mirage too.

MA: Jack, because Mern reloads, I know there are certain precautions that must be taken to insure safe, accurate loads. You can't go into all this, but if one of our juniors wants to start reloading or wants to build a 300 meter rifle, could they call you for additional specific help?

JF: Sure! I'm not good at answering letters, but if you call, I'll be glad to answer your questions. I want to say something here - we don't want to beat you because we know more, we beat you now because we've been shooting longer, however some of you are really pushing us! There's nothing I'd rather do than talk about 300 meter shooting. Accuracy International

P.O. Box 2019
Bozeman, Montana 59715