

POLICE SPORT UK – SHOOTING

REPORT ON USPE 2007 – MERIGNAC, FRANCE

28th August – 3rd September

By Paul HATTON, Team Manager

As a retired officer but still a serving Shooting Section committee member, I was invited by the remainder of the committee to act as team manager for the 2007 Union Sportive Des Polices D'Europe – U.S.P.E. I was delighted to accept the post and hopefully be able to bring to the squad some of my previous experience having attended five USPE's as a competitor since 1983.

My first task was to ensure we had the right assistants to the squad. This included rifle coach – Phil Smith assisted by Fred Jennings (also as standby ISSF judge). We do not have a dedicated Air Rifle coach and due to circumstances beyond my control we were unfortunate not to be able to take Michael Barnes the Air Pistol coach.

Unfortunately due to work commitments our present chairman Mr Adrian Whiting was unable to attend the Championships. We were honoured that the previous chairman Mr David Stevens accepted the invitation of accompanying the squad as our delegate.

Selection for the event has been contested since the last in 2003 culminating in final selection matches as late as May this year.

A maximum of two competitors per discipline are allowed and the following were successful in being selected.

Male – prone rifle – Melvin Mutch, Thames Valley

Chris Brown, Leicestershire

Positional - Kevin Sinclair, Metropolitan

David Holmes, Bedfordshire

Air Rifle - David Rattray, Strathclyde

Air Pistol - David Erskine, Cumbria

Chris Mason, Dorset

Free Pistol - David Erskine, Cumbria

Female – Prone - Louise Aiken, PSNI

Pauline Thornton, Leicestershire

Positional - Leah Brough, Metropolitan

Air Rifle - Leah Brough, Metropolitan

Unfortunately Chris Mason, hoping to attend his first USPE had to withdraw due to medical restrictions close to the event. We all wish him well for the future.

New Police Sport UK tracksuits were ordered and everyone made aware of the current uniform.

Flights were a little difficult.

I found three airlines that would fly to Bordeaux but only one would carry firearms, and they only flew out of Gatwick.

Flights booked, paperwork sent to the French organisers, sheets made out for customs and check-in desks – don't think I have forgotten anything.

Quite a few of us met up at the Travelodge next to Gatwick Airport on the Monday prior to our departure on the Tuesday. This proved ideal as I could make sure everyone had everything they needed and no hold up's getting to the airport.

Due to restrictions with firearms we had to be at check-in three hours before departure. Even after some preliminary enquires the day before, it still took 1hour and 20 minutes to get the firearms and air guns off our hands.

After a comfortable flight we landed at Bordeaux, got repatriated with the guns and through the French Customs in less than 30 seconds !!!!!!!! and into the heat of 35 degrees at 5pm.

We were transferred by coach to the shooting range which was 10 minutes from the airport, where accreditation was completed and all firearms and ammunition were deposited until it was time to collect it for your practice or competition. It was at this stage we finally managed to get a glimpse of the target system in use. I had tried on several occasions to obtain that information prior to arriving but the organisers were not that forthcoming. It was some four days before leaving Blighty that I managed to obtain that Paper targets were for the main competition and electronic for the finals. Two of our party had never even seen the system in place let alone had chance to shoot on one. Ah well, another day.

Transfer to the accommodation was a little longer, dropping delegates and officials off at the 4 star Quality Inn enroute.

Finally at the conference centre with other teams, keys for rooms obtained and into the dining hall for dinner 8.30pm. This was to be the place for all breakfast and dinners for the remainder of the week.

A temporary bar was manned at the entrance to the lecture theatre with half a dozen seats available for socialising with other teams.

Lunch was taken on the range by way of pre-packed 'airline style' meals – all of which I found very edible.

After the heat of Tuesday we were treated to thunder storms on the first official practice day where the team could get used to the Gehman boxes for the 50 metre events and the hand winding in use on the 10 metre air range.

Fred Jennings and I stayed at the conference centre for the 11 am Technical meeting where one or two questions needed to be asked.

(did you hear about the rifle shooter who went to the range for a practice only to realise he had left his bolt in his room and couldn't get back ???? fortunately I managed to get them repatriated very quickly and he got the practice session in.)

A visit to the range was then made. Depending on the time of day, this could take anywhere between 25 minutes and 1 ½ hours due to traffic.

At 5.45pm coaches were made available to transport teams from the conference centre to the site for the opening ceremony. The team looked very smart in the blazers and slacks.

David ERSKINE took over the position of being our flag bearer in FULL Police uniform – and very smart he looked. As always, the British Uniform was the most popular and photographed there.

We were ushered into a large garage initially due to the precipitation that was bestowed upon us. An hour later we were moved to another garage to get the opening ceremony underway.

A number of speeches were made followed by a few drinks and some light snacks and socialising before being transported back to our accommodation.

The first actual competition day, Thursday, saw everyone up and at breakfast by 0645 then on the coach for a 0730 start to the range. It was 0810 before the coach set off. This is when we realised that the posted time of departure was only a guesstimate.

David ERSKINE was the first of our competitors, putting up a creditable performance in the air pistol event. Early afternoon the Female 60 shot at 50metres discipline took place. The light was fairly constant, more than what could be said for the wind. This proved a very testing one – switching left to right and differing in strength. Pauline THORNTON finished in 11th place scoring 562 which was creditable as she has never shot on the target changing system in use.

Louise AIKEN scored 576 to take equal 6th with the winner scoring 582.

More practise sessions for the male competitors were used later in the day finally returning to our billeting for 1900 and dinner

Seven of our team had no events or practise allocations on the Friday so took the opportunity to do a little sight seeing in Bordeaux. They also took the time to get some more usual food than that being served back at the centre. However, for the rest of us, another early start, when the Male 3 Positional competition, commencing at 0900, took part. Kevin SINCLAIR has been to a USPE event before but David HOLMES was experiencing his first major championship. He coped very well indeed and did not let the event overcome him. We were though, a little way behind some of the more experienced European competitors – World, Olympic, European Champions, World record holders to name just a few items on some of their CV's.

Kevin came 21st with a score of 1098 and David 29th with 1044. The winning score was 1157.

We left the range at 1600 and arrived back at the accommodation at 1730 – all due to the amount of traffic. 1900 hrs for dinner which when asked what was on the menu – Poulet was the reply (standard reply – everyday was poulet). This was not poulet – it is believed that it was tripe. I wish I had had the opportunity to visit Bordeaux with the others – they managed to find a McDonald's.

The Saturday saw the men's Air Rifle and woman's 3 positional events.

David RATTRAY shot very well but just missed out for a place in the Olympic Final whilst Leah BROUGH shot well and gained a 7th place in the Olympic Final. (top eight competitors from the main competition

Even though she is young and this was her first USPE, she has valuable experience from shooting with the National Great Britain Junior Squad at this sort of level.

Unfortunately she could not gain any further position after the final.

The final day's competition, Sunday, and yet another early start and at the range for 0900 hours. Leah BROUGH was competing in the Ladies air rifle, whilst Melvin MUTCH and Chris BROWN were competing in the English Match (60 shots at 50 metres)

The English Match commenced at 0900 and a constant light was enjoyed but a switching wind was not – it even confused some of the more experienced competitors.

Chris finished with a disappointed 572. Not his best score but it was his first major championship and I am led to understand the first time shooting at these particular target changers.

Melvin was going very well and obtaining some nice strings of 10 which could have led him into the Olympic Final. He lost his way slightly with the switching wind and took more time than he would normally have done causing him to rush his last 14 shots. A couple of loose ones and firing his last shot with 3 seconds to go lost the Olympic final chance. He finished with a 586.

Well, the excitement was now over and a return to the billet to get ready for the closing ceremony at a local winery.

We eventually managed to get away shortly after midnight, a short night sleep, early breakfast, transported to the range for the weapons and onto the airport.

No problems getting the weapons through except that the check in girls insisted on weighing the ammunition (which had all been neatly packed in the suitcases).

Gatwick Airport customs insisted on checking all weapons, against Firearm certificates and European Firearm permits. This took over an hour.

Finally we all said our farewells and continued our separate journeys home.

Overall a good Championships. The team had worked very hard to achieve the standards and no doubt will have left the USPE with a wealth of experience.

My personal thanks go to Fred JENNINGS and Phil SMITH whose commitments over the last four years have not gone unnoticed and without whom, my job would have been impossible.

We also have to thank Police Sport UK without whose support both at home and abroad we could not do without.

The training has now started in readiness for 2011 USPE when we hope to come back from Greece with some medals.

Paul HATTON

Team Manager USPE Squad 2007.