

F Class in Scotland.

Although shooting with what we might term F-class rifles had been taking place in Scotland during the '80s, it was not known as F-class target shooting. Informal, mainly short range shooting was often conducted at the now closed ranges at Dechmont near Glasgow and at other ranges across the country. Typically, it would involve the use of ex military rifles such as Lee Enfields and P14s, also factory rifles by the big four US makers. These fairly informal club gatherings would normally be held once a month and would involve a wide variety of targets: everything from the Figure 11 advancing man to the conventional NRA 3/400yd bull's-eye and much else in between! At best, it could be called short-range target practice, but more often, plinking would be a more apt description. It was good fun, though hardly challenging. The challenge would come later with the introduction of formalised F-class target shooting.

The more formal, F class shooting as we know it today, was first practiced on a regular basis in Scotland at the West Atholl Rifle Club, During the mid '90s. The originators were former TR shooters, led by Major Alistair Munro and Stuart Nicoll, both founder members of the club. Alastair tended to, (and still does) favour a style somewhat like the O class in which a scoped rifle would be held in the conventional TR style with a sling and no rear support. For this he used a Remington 700 in .223, custom built by Callum Ferguson of Precision Rifle Services, (an advertiser in this brochure). Alistair was also one of the first people to experiment with the diminutive .223 at extended ranges, only calling it quits having gone back as far as 1,100yds. By setting an early example, other shooters gradually followed their lead, in using scoped rifles and rests in organised competitions according to NRA rules.

Early equipment as used by Alistair & Stuart, tended to be based on their long experience with TR, it made sense to use familiar easily available actions, calibres and stocks. The use of TR shooting jackets tended to continue even though not strictly necessary for additional support. The choice of scopes too, was perhaps influenced by the Match rifle shooters, who tended to favour Leupold and Weaver. However, there were signs of innovation even then: Stuart, using his engineering skills began to fashion simple, light and portable front rests which he would use in place of expensive imported items, these found a ready market in F-class and with some Match rifle shooters too.

As an aside, the West Atholl can boast a trophy with a direct link to the origins of F-class. A Canadian Indian Totem trophy, donated by a visiting team of which George Farquharson was a member, has now been put up for the best club F-class aggregate performance. The Totem links in nicely with the past and present of F-class in Scotland and Canada.

There were other places too, in Scotland where F-class found fertile ground. The more formal, competitive F-class in Scotland was given early recognition and active support by the two principal lowland target shooting clubs: the East of Scotland & West of Scotland respectively.

Major Charles Young, in particular, who is a past contributor to Precision Shooting, has been most active in encouraging the new discipline in his West of Scotland club. Charles has used his talents to make some very competitive F-class rifles based on his favourite target rifle action, the Musgrave. For scopes, he invariably he advocated the use of the now discontinued steel-bodied Weaver scopes. Charles introduced many Scots to Berger bullets and so raised the standard of shooting for many. Charles has never managed to compete at Connaught but has donated a Bugle trophy for the F-class in DCRA matches, cementing Scots/Canadian F-class relationships. It is competed for between the "F-troop USA" and the "Canada Old F's". The Captain of the winning team has to sound a celebratory note on the bugle before he is allowed a beer after the match. Since Charles has filled up part of the mouthpiece with epoxy, this is not an easy task and assistance has often been called for. Still a competitive F-classer to be reckoned with, he has now handed on the mantle of F-class matters to Peter Jackson as F-class captain of the West of Scotland. As somebody who is not content to rest on his laurels, we watch this space for future developments in F-class, possibly with his secret weapon a BSA-actioned 6mm-284.

Meanwhile, over in the East of Scotland, club chairman, Major Bob Aitken gave early encouragement to F-class participants in club shoots in the late '90s by putting up a good selection of prizes for the new category in the annual East of Scotland Championships. Entries grew from humble beginnings to now when almost 25% of the field is comprised of F-classers. Bob's Summertime Wednesday evening shoots at the Castlelow ranges near Edinburgh, were popular with F-classers – they frequently outnumbered the TR contingent! The Castlelow shoots were often the entry point for new F class shooters, a place where they could get acquainted with the NRA style of doing things in competitive shooting, while in a friendly club setting.

Bob has been enthusiastic in his support of F-class and in his capacity as SRA (Scottish Rifle Association) chairman, he has given due consideration to F-class matters by creating a place on the SRA Council for the election of an F-class representative.

The SRA have taken F-class increasingly seriously over the years, opening competitions to F-class and putting up trophies. The SRA has been open to suggestions for change too, For example, the SRA is now progressively showing the way forward in a number of respects. The limitation on a lower trigger weight has been dispensed with for rifles supported fore and aft, without any incident. The SRA has also given its backing to the V=6 scoring system, this is probably the most important single innovation to have been adopted, it is pleasing to see the Canadian DCRA has now caught up with the idea! V=6 enables the F-classer to be given due credit for getting the shots in the centre – the objective of all shooting. The system has been in use now for several years, it is a clear improvement.

The history of targetry in Scotland has been rather less straightforward though. From the early days of informal practice by non-target shooting clubs,

through various options in formal SRA competition, there has been a gradual evolution towards more challenging target faces.

Experiments have been conducted with conventional NRA centres, i.e. using the 300m target at 400, the 500 at 600 etc. Results were mixed, depending on how much mirage was present, differentiating scoring rings could be difficult and tended to slow shooting while confirmation from the butts was obtained. The practice of using targets in this fashion did not catch on and has been abandoned.

There was an experiment at the SRA Scottish short range championships to test a bull 5 = 4pts system, so bull 5s only scored 4, the same as an inner. It was not popular either, and was not repeated.

As of late though, the Canadian 1moa v-bull has been used with success in the SRA short and long range championships, when combined with V=6, it gives the shooter a challenging & yet rewarding shoot. This latest adaptation to F-class needs seems to have a more secure future.

F-class in Scotland, if it is defined to include the casual, informal club shooters continues to thrive at short range. There are a number of clubs throughout Scotland in which rested factory rifles in standard calibres are put to good use in internal club shoots all year round. The more formal use of F-class rifles in organised competition during the summer season has tended to grow rather more slowly, although in general, newcomers to target shooting have tended to take up F-class which is encouraging, the numbers are still rather small.

Equipment has tended to improve too, whether at Club level or in competition. Improving standards have driven up the need for improved equipment, which is to be expected. Scottish F-classers are fortunate indeed in being able to choose from world-class firms on our doorstep, such as Precision Rifle Services, Border Barrels and Jackson Rifles. Though to some extent, this tendency towards specialisation has also limited the appeal of the competition scene.

If it is to continue to survive, F-class like all other shooting sports, needs to develop strategies to attract a new generation of younger shooters into the competitive events, and most especially in the long range matches.

Figures from the Scottish target shooting community, the ex military men such as Alastair, Charles & Bob have all worked to build an F-class foundation. It is up to the present new generation of F-class specialists to meet the challenges to ensure that F class in Scotland, adapts to broaden its appeal to a wider community and continues to flourish.

Nothing breeds success like success, so there will be much interest in the outcome of tour to Canada, we look forward to seeing you there.

Yours Aye.