

Johan de Beer on the range.



Nail-biting Muzzle-Loader World Championships

The MLAIC (Muzzle Loading Association International Committee) mid- and long-range world championship takes place every second year in one of only three countries: South Africa, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom. (In the UK this event is held at the world-renowned Bisley range.) Only these three are deemed capable of hosting this event because only they have shooting ranges capable of accommodating the 300-900 metre (or 300 -1 000 yard) events.

During the sixth championship hosted at the Good Hope shooting range in Atlantis, Cape Town in 2007 and in the seventh championship shot on the Camp Butner range, North Carolina in 2009, South Africa's Protea team succeeded in winning both the Long-Range World Cup and the overall aggregate matches. During these two shoots the Proteas were the only team that could pass the magical 900 point mark in the overall aggregate matches. Furthermore, during the 2007 championship Japie Maritz became the new world record holder in the

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500m event and in 2009 Tertius Smit set a new world record in the 900 yard event. (Eugene Kuisis and Merwe van Rensburg both broke the old 900 yard record.)

Could the Proteas repeat such achievements at the eighth World Championship in Bisley, UK? Could they thus ensure that South Africa becomes the only country in history to secure the long-range and overall aggregate titles three times, and more so three *consecutive* times – a round-robin in fact? In three different countries!

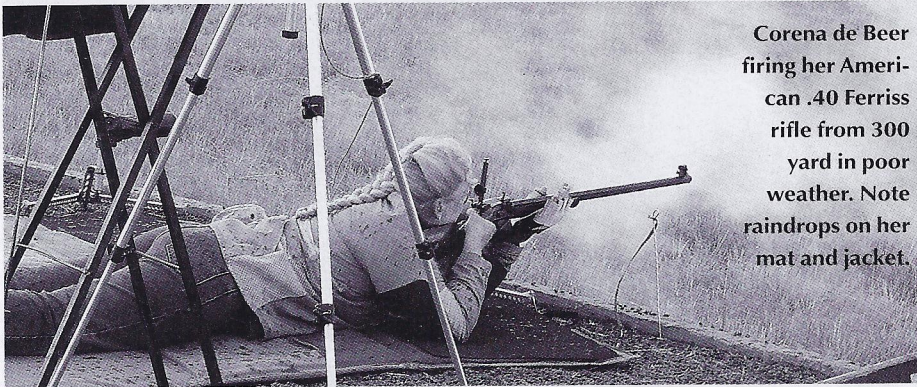
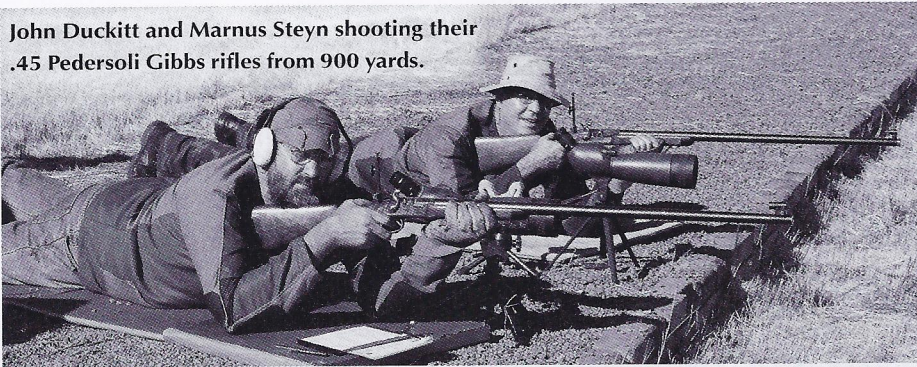
Well now it's time to tell you about how things went at last year's Eighth MLAIC Mid- and Long-Range World Championship at the historic Bisley range in Surrey, in south-east England. When they returned from competing at Camp Butner in 2009, the South African shooters decided to take a two month break and start preparations and qualification trials as early as January

2010. We had a new (previously unheard of) target – those three consecutive titles.

The Protea team that departed from OR Tambo in September 2011 consisted of: Japie Maritz (captain and coach), Jonathan Hendey (manager), Ronnie Blake, Corena De Beer, Johan de Beer, Kobus de Villiers, John Duckitt, Divan Ferreira, Eugene Kuisis, Tertius Smit and Merwe van Rensburg. Kobus de Villiers was the only Protea shooting an original Gibbs Metford rifle – an 1864 model. The two De Beers would use replicas of the American-made Ferriss rifle, Smit and Kuisis would use a replica of the Billinghamurst underhammer rifle, the others shot replicas of the 1862 British Gibbs rifle known as the Pedersoli Gibbs.

The Royal Air Force lodge and the clubhouse at the Bisley shooting facility was made available to us for accommodation. Soon after our arrival we took the opportunity to visit the Century Range, on which the 300, 500 and 600 yard matches would be shot, followed by a visit to the notorious Stickledown Range, where the 900 and 1 000 yard events would be held. A look at the weather forecast

John Duckitt and Marnus Steyn shooting their .45 Pedersoli Gibbs rifles from 900 yards.



Corena de Beer firing her American .40 Ferriss rifle from 300 yard in poor weather. Note raindrops on her mat and jacket.

made it clear that rain and lots of wind would be our 'partners' for the match. I found some form of comfort in the words of the late Joe Hepsworth, an American shooter: "The wind is your friend", knowing that we had had some difficult training sessions back home with lots of wind and mirage.

Selected shooters representing Austria, New Zealand, Netherlands, Norway, Australia, Switzerland, Great Britain, Sweden, Germany, France the USA and South Africa would be taking part in the championship.

Doing well on an individual basis during a world championship is obviously a dream for all of us, but on one thing the whole team was in agreement; this was all about South Africa and the team events. We simply

just had to take back home the long-range trophy and the overall aggregate. We had to prove to ourselves that we could do it on any range in the world. And of course, we all remembered that we had once been referred to as "the novices from South Africa" – winning at Bisley would erase that memory once and for all. (Finish and klaar?)

Our scores during the individual matches are used in combination with points accumulated at home to determine who would represent South Africa in the mid- and long-range team events. Kobus de Villiers, shooting in the Original class, did us proud by winning bronze at both 300 and 500m, silver at 600m, gold at 900m and gold with a new world record at

1 000m. Needless to say, he won the individual overall aggregate match and became the first individual to win the Original Class mid- and long-range world title three times.

In the Replica Class the Proteas again did well, Corena de Beer winning gold and John Duckitt silver in the 300 yard event. At 500 yards Merwe van Rensburg took bronze with Eugene Kuisis placing sixth. In the 600 yard event Eugene was placed fourth. At 900 yards Tertius Smit took gold with Merwe van Rensburg fifth after a count-out on V-bulls for the 3rd, 4th and 5th positions. At 1 000 yards Tertius Smit once more took gold, along with a new world record. John Duckitt took silver and Merwe van Rensburg bronze, placing the final South African stamp on the individual events. During the 2009 championship South Africans also showed their superiority at long range, Tertius Smit, Eugene Kuisis and Merwe van Rensburg taking gold, silver and bronze at 900 yards, with Tertius shooting a new world record. Corena de Beer also took the award as the highest scoring lady during the championship. Eugene Kuisis took third place in the mid-range aggregate with Tertius Smit in first place and Merwe van Rensburg second in the long-range aggregate. Besides the world records, two South African records were also broken – the 300 yards (Corena de Beer), and at 1 000 yards – Tertius Smit and Kobus broke the record with the same score.

South Africa finished the individual matches in the Replica class with three in the top ten ranking of the overall aggregate match (mid- and long-range matches combined). Merwe van Rensburg took the second place in the overall aggregate match with the same score as the winner,



Above: Protea Team 2011, front row (l-r) : Kobus de Villiers Corena de Beer, Japie Maritz, Jonathan Hendey, Merwe van Rensburg, Johan de Beer. Back row: Divan Ferreira, John Duckitt, Ronnie Blake, Eugene Kuisis, Tertius Smit.

Left: Kobus de Villiers with Corena de Beer at the 1000 yard mark.

who counted him out with three V-bulls. Tertius Smit took fourth with Corena de Beer tenth. A total of 16 medals and 4 awards were secured by the Proteas in the individual events.

The Mid-Range team announced by Japie Maritz comprised Ronnie Blake, Corena de Beer, Eugene Kuisis and Merwe van Rensburg. The 300 and 500 yard events were shot on one day and the 600 yard event was shot on the second. The Protea mid-range team took third place for a bronze medal with Germany first and Sweden second. There were eight countries competing in these Mid-Range events.

The last day of the championship arrived, again with eight countries competing; this time in the world long-range match, which would in effect also be the deciding factor in establishing which country would become the overall world champions. The long-range team match is the aggregate score generated from the 900 and 1 000 yard team events. This was where South Africa had to out-shoot the rest of the world to make a dream come true. The four man team was again selected from points generated at home and shot during the championship. Team coach Japie Maritz would carry the burden of reading the wind and mirage conditions and correctly calling sight settings to the shooters. An intimate knowledge of team equipment and individual abilities formed a large part of Japie Maritz's armament; this only being achieved by spend-

ing long hours with all Protea shooters on the range back home.

Japie announced the long-range team and Kobus De Villiers, John Duckitt, Tertius Smit and Merwe van Rensburg had the honour and responsibility of defending our title. Furthermore, they had to ensure that we gained sufficient points to ensure that the shortfall at the mid-range event could be made up to again secure the overall world title.

After the 900 yard event the USA led the Proteas by 18 points while Great Britain was ahead of us by 16 points. At the 1 000 yard range, for the final event, the tension experienced by the Proteas was tremendous. There was a lonely look on the face of Japie Maritz. My team mates and I knew what was expected of us; we knew that we simply had to follow each instruction from Japie to the dot and ensure a good let-off with each shot. We ended the 1 000 yard match with a final seven point lead over the USA.

The overall team aggregate of the competing countries comprises the mid-range score added to the long-range score. Again the Proteas ensured victory by taking the first place with 903 points, the USA was second with 886 points and Germany third with 856. Again, the Proteas were the only country to break the magical 900 point mark. A dream come true? I certainly think so, and I know the rest of the world took note that in South Africa there is a group of shooters that understands the art of long-range shooting with a muzzle loading rifle. **mm**

World Class Technical Tips

A twist of one turn in sixteen inches (1:16) is the tightest/quickest twist allowed in terms of the spirit of the original, and the maximum weight allowed for a bullet is 600gr. Within those limits however shooters can experiment to find the sweetest combinations. For a quick twist such as 1:16 you would want to use a long bullet – and that would naturally increase the weight of the bullet.

For a rifle with a 1:18 twist you would not need a bullet as heavy as the 600gr maximum. Most international shooters use a bullet weighing between 540gr and 580gr, but we South Africans have different ideas about what works best. Given the fact that heavier bullets are less influenced by wind than lighter ones, those Proteas who shoot rifles with 1:18 twist barrels, like the Pedersoli Gibbs, all use heavier bullets – between 590 and 600gr. Felt recoil increases but we gladly tolerate that in the knowledge that some other problems are reduced.

Also depending on the twist rate of the barrel, the tin/lead alloy mixture would differ from between 2% and 4% tin added to pure lead. Cable lead or wheelweights are NOT PURE LEAD and should not be used in any muzzle-loading firearm. Note also that the correct bullet ogive is of great importance at long range.

We Proteas use swaged paper-patched bullets. A solid shaft results in drag only on the 'tail' of the bullet. The lubed bullets used by some shooters are subjected to additional 'drag' on the lube grooves. At extreme distances, like the 900 and 1 000-yard events, a warm barrel is required to increase accuracy. This means that it is important to get your shots off as quickly as practical. The warmer the barrel however, the easier the lube used will melt off the bullet and increase the possibility of leading in the barrel. Because of time constraints in an event of this nature, leading simply means the end of your participation in the specific event. In sunny South Africa, our weather conditions make paper-patched bullets the overwhelming preference. No shading is allowed on the range which makes keeping the lube in good form on the bullet something of a logistical problem.



Most of us use a 46gsm artist paper with no glue compound in the paper. (For one reason or another, onion-skin is the paper preferred by shooters from some other countries.) We use the very thin lube formulated by one of our shooters on our paper. This is simply to place a thin layer on the barrel that would assist with cleaning after the shot is fired. Paper-patching bullets for accurate long-range shooting is more an art than a science but it is an art that should be learnt early and followed consistently thereafter.

For the same reason we use neat's-foot oil or cold-pressed olive oil on the 'rim' of our 100% pure woollen wads. Great care must however, be taken not to put too much oil as that can cause the bullet not to set-up in the barrel properly.

We all use Swiss No 4 (1½ Fg) black powder. Charges between 90 and 95gr again depending on the barrel used. Substitute powders in the Pirodex format (modern) are not allowed.

The combination of a 600 grain bullet (with correct alloy mixture) driven by 95gr of Swiss No 4 and the correct wad and oil used would give one between 1220 and 1226fps at the barrel. The bullet would arrive at the 1 000-yard target at about 870fps, penetrating and exiting a wooden frame 100mm thick with great ease, imagine what it could do to the shoulder bone of a buffalo.