

TARGET SHOOTER



The Primos Trigger Stick is one of the most popular sticks out there, but its inventors probably never imagined it being used for HFT

MOBILITY AIDS

STICK WITH IT!

Some shooters find HFT too much of a physical challenge, but **Jim Old's** club has come up with a clever way of getting everyone involved

“I used to do a lot of HFT with a mate of mine,” says 75-year-old Geoff Wright. “I was spending more time helping him up off the ground than actually shooting. So we gave it up. That was about four years ago.”

But Geoff is back in the game, thanks to a decision by the Surrey-based Bisley Field Target Organisation (BFTO) to trial a new Hunter Field Target (HFT) category for its members. It allows competitors to shoot with their guns supported by sticks and removes the need for them to lie down, sit or kneel at any point on the course. Entry is not limited to those with mobility issues, but it's proving popular with the club's older members and those, like Geoff, who gave up HFT when it became too taxing.

Today sees the second round of the year for BFTO's popular HFT club event, and only the second time the new sticks category has been tried. I met some of the older shooters just after the first one, and they were so excited about it that I asked if I could accompany them next time. Geoff has already paired up with his friend Ian Causton by the time I get there, but they're happy for me to tag along. Crucially, Geoff is relaxed about allowing me to use his sticks, because I don't have any of my own.

THE COURSE

We listen to the safety brief and then head into the large expanse of woodland behind BFTO's clubhouse where the course has been set out. We'll be shooting exactly the same targets as the regular HFT competitors – 30 positions, each with a metal target placed at anything from eight to 45 yards. BFTO committee member Peter Trimmer suggested the concept, and as we walk over I chat to the man who has the task of making it a success, HFT event leader Paul Hargreaves.



BFTO's new form of HFT opens a discipline that would otherwise be closed to many shooters

"When the idea first came up I was a bit sceptical," he says. "I thought safety would be an issue, and then target placement. So we decided to set a course in our usual format, base it on UKAHT rules and see what happened. What we found was that all, or nearly all, of the targets could be shot using sticks."

A horn blast signals that we can start shooting, so Geoff, Ian and I remove our rifles from their slips. I immediately feel a little out-gunned. I've brought my trusty Air Arms S400. I love this rifle, but it looks a little plain besides Geoff's FX Dreamline, with its beautiful GRS stock, and Ian's AA HFT500, complete with a futuristic-looking Alutec stock made by Warren Edwards.

Unlike Geoff, Ian is a newcomer to HFT. He had major spinal surgery 20 years ago which made shooting in the prone position an impossibility. I know from other BFTO competitions that Ian's an excellent shot, but now, at the age of 76, the club's new HFT category is opening up a whole new airgunning discipline for him.

I am also a complete newbie to HFT, and so I'm glad that Geoff is prepared to share his knowledge of the sport, as well as his sticks. He tells me that it's as much about range estimation as it is steady shooting. I know that I'm not allowed to adjust my scope once the competition has started, and thus manage to make my first mistake of the morning. I've forgotten to set the eyepiece of my Hawke Airmax scope to allow for my contact lenses, and so I'm forced to shoot all of the targets with a



Taking a standing shot using sticks is a fair bit easier than shooting unsupported, but still requires a good degree of skill

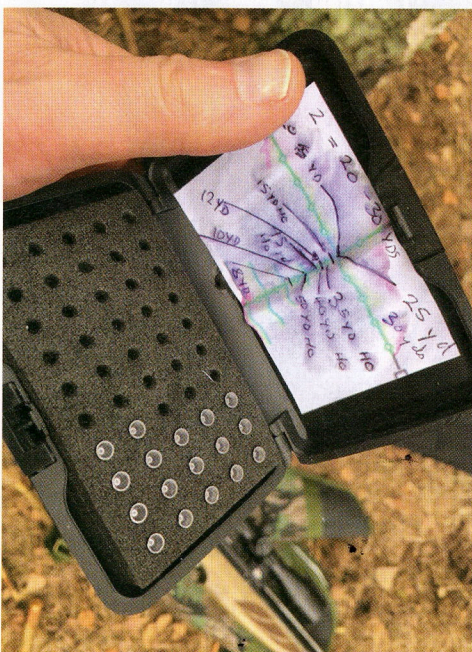
slightly blurry reticle, which really does nothing to help matters.

SCORING SYSTEM

The scoring system is straightforward and, like the course, identical to that used for the regular HFT shooters; two points for a hit on the target's kill zone, one for striking the surrounding metal plate and zero (or a 'doughnut') for a miss. With 30 shots to be taken, there are a maximum of 60 points available. Our little group of three is starting at position 12, where a yellow squirrel target has been placed halfway up a tree trunk quite some distance out.

"What d'you reckon then? I'm thinking 30 yards, give or take," says Geoff. Ian agrees and so do I (although I'm really not sure). I'm surprised, but also relieved that they're happy to discuss their range estimations. I expect this is the last thing that would happen among serious HFT competitors, but the stick boys seem chilled and relaxed. No one's in it to win it. HFT rules require shooters to be touching the marker peg driven into the ground at each position when they take their shot. Ian and Geoff are rather laid back about that, too.

I'm last to shoot on this first target, so I get into position behind Geoff's new sticks.



As with regular HFT, knowing your aim points is crucial, but any chart you make needs protecting



For many shooters, the physical demands of getting down on a peg to take a prone shot, then getting up again, are simply too much

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Apparently, he wasn't very impressed when they first arrived, and had trouble getting them to stand up. He rang Ian, who suggested he might like to remove the strap that holds the legs together when the sticks are being carried. This would allow the legs to spread out and solve his stability problems. Geoff hasn't had any issues with them since, although he has endured some mickey-taking since the story got out.

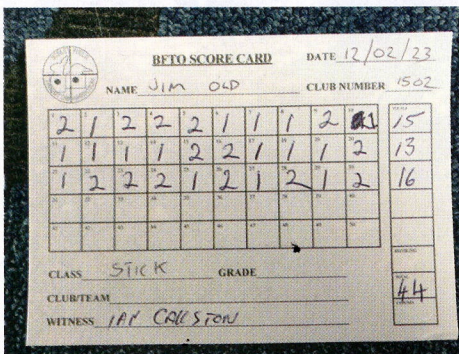
My first impression is that the sticks offer less stability than I was expecting. There's still a fair degree of gun movement as I line up on the target. It's certainly not like shooting off a bench. This is going to be more of a challenge than I expected. Geoff suggests I bring my left hand back from the rifle's forend and take hold of the grip at the top of the sticks. This definitely seems to help as I take my shot. I miss the kill zone, but hit the plate, so I get a '1' on my scorecard and I'm happy with that. We're off.

I have another problem to add to my blurry reticle. A few days ago, I stuck a holdover diagram for my Airmax/S400 combo into the lid of my pellet container. Now, however, it appears that I've used too much glue. Opening the box, I discover that it's bled through the paper and all but destroyed my little sketch. Some of the markings are visible, but others are not. I'm down to using guesswork.

BEGINNER'S LUCK

After 10 or so targets, I find a run of form and hit the kill zone four times in five shots. "Beginner's luck," I say to Geoff and Ian. I mean it. I'm finding it easier now to steady the rifle on the sticks, but unless the target happens to be at or near to my 25-yard zero, then it's largely a case of 'shoot and hope'. Geoff seems to be rediscovering his competitive side, and threatens to take me behind a tree and beat me up if I carry on doing well. I think he's joking, but either way it's all academic, as my lucky streak soon runs out.

The weather is perfect. Dry, windless and unseasonably mild. The woods are beautiful,



You get two points for hitting the kill zone, one for striking the surrounding metal plate



Jim soon found that knowing the range to the target was as vital as taking a steady shot

and more than once we stop to admire our surroundings. "It's a great way to spend a Sunday morning," says Geoff. "We're

“IT'S IMPORTANT THAT THE BFTO ADAPTS TO STAY RELEVANT TO ALL ITS MEMBERS”

getting some exercise, more than we would if we were just shooting off a bench." All around us, the regular HFT competitors are sprawled on the ground taking shots,

or clambering to their feet and dusting themselves off. It's hard not to feel a little smug that we don't have to do that. We joke about turning up to shoot next time dressed in dinner jackets and bow ties.

Paul Hargreaves comes over to check on our progress as we near the end of the course. He's visibly relieved that the round has gone well, and in particular that all the stick shooters have been able to see the targets, some of which are slightly obscured by foliage. I ask him if he worries that the addition of a sticks category waters down the HFT competition. "I don't think so, as long as the courses are built as normal. And if it takes off," he adds, "perhaps courses could be built purely for stick shooters."

I mention that those taking part appear to be enjoying themselves and seem enthused about being able to get involved in HFT again. Paul says it's important that the BFTO adapts to stay relevant to all its members. "Hopefully, when shooters find getting up and down harder through age or medical conditions, they now feel they can continue in the sport," he says.

Back at the clubhouse, with mugs of tea in hand, the stick shooters compare their scores and discuss their tricky targets. "We need a name for our little group," says someone. Everyone stares at me. I stare back. "Come on, Jim," says Geoff, "you're

supposed to be good with words." But my mind, as it often is these days, is blank. It's only on the drive home that inspiration strikes: 'The Sticklers' ●



Jim was a novice when it came to HFT, but picked up plenty of tips and tricks after shooting the course with Geoff and Ian