

## Ohio banker has lots of “pull”

He’s nearing the half-million mark in shots at clay pigeons

Competitive shooter Courtney Haning says trap used to be considered a gentleman’s sport, and it wasn’t unusual for marksmen to turn out in three-piece suits.

Bankers who golf avoid traps, but competitive marksman G. Courtney Haning revels in traps—trap shooting.

Unlike many bankers interested in shooting sports, Haning, 63, didn’t grow up with guns in the family, with a father or brother to initiate him. Instead, he relied on “Uncle Sam.” During the Vietnam War-era, the Army trained him in many weapons. “That was my introduction to firearms,” says Haning, president, chairman, and CEO at \$107.6 million-assets Peoples National Bank of New Lexington, Ohio.

When he left the service, Haning took up pheasant and quail hunting, but over the years, local bird populations waned. In the early 1990s, he discovered trap. Trap shooting is one of several gun sports using clay pigeons, which are disks launched to simulate birds or other game.

Some customers who shot trap took along Haning. “I failed miserably,” the banker admits. Of 25 targets, he hit eight. “I didn’t have the proper gun, nor the proper training,” he says. Trap shooters typically use 12-gauge shotguns, firing cartridges holding multiple pellets. But these weapons can be quite specialized. The best are custom-made, with much longer barrels than your typical shotgun, and often in “combo” models, allowing the same gun to be used in single-barrel or double-barrel mode depending on the type of trap the shooter is targeting.

In spite of that poor first showing, something about trap stuck. “A couple of local guys took me under their wings and taught me how to do it right,” says Haning. “I fell in love with shooting clay targets instead of real animals.” The classic command “Pull!” is still used for a pigeon be launched.

The training, plus time, experience, and development of good hand-eye coordination, improved Haning’s skills. He began competing, first in state-level trap events. The Haning family started building vacations around them.

Later, Haning began to compete at the “Grand American Championship,” the top national event in trap shooting. Until recently, it was held in Vandalia, Ohio, drawing nearly 6,000 shooters annually.

Trap shooters in competition may shoot as many as 100 targets in a competitive class, so practice is intensive. Indeed, Haning explains, that's another thing that makes trap shotguns special. As opposed to ordinary hunting shotguns, made to endure a lifetime of hundreds of shots, producers engineer trap guns to withstand thousands of shots. In the approximately 22 years Haning has shot trap, he's fired at more than 300,000 targets competitively. He's made close to a half-million shots all together, counting practice. He's treasurer of the Ohio Trap Shooting Foundation, and has won his share of awards.

With age and the relocation of the Grand American to Sparta, Ill., Haning's national-level competition has decreased. It's not unusual to shoot 100 rounds in a session. "And if you don't hit all 100," he explains, "you won't be in the shoot-off." His best score in the Grand has been 98 hits out of 100. Out of the thousands competing, it's certain someone else will shoot a perfect score.

—Steve Cocheo, executive editor

Details about Courtney Haning's trap shooting for gun sport fans

Typically gun aficionados like more detail about shooting sports than the usual reader, so we asked the trap-shooting banker some questions for their benefit.

Q. What kinds of guns do you shoot?

A. These days Haning has two trap shotguns. His primary weapon is a Krieghoff K-80. His secondary gun is a Perazzi MX. "They are among the better trap shooting guns," says Haning. Either one will set you back many thousands of dollars, but they are what you need to compete at a level of marksmanship where a single miss--certainly two or three--can knock you out of the running.

Q. What ammunition do you prefer?

A. Haning shoots

Federal brand shells. He explains that recoil, a factor always present with powerful shotguns, becomes a notable factor when a marksman is firing hundreds of shots over the course of a multi-day competitive event.

“Paper-hulled shotgun shells historically have less recoil,” explains Haning, “and Federal is the only ammunition company that still issues paper-hulled shotgun shells.”

Q. What kind of trigger do you use?

A. Haning uses a trigger type that may be unfamiliar to enthusiasts who shoot in other gun sports: the “release trigger.”

This

trigger type requires two motions to fire. First, the trigger is pulled. Ordinarily, that would fire the gun’s shell. However, with the release trigger, the shell is fired when the depressed trigger is released. Haning explains that this can help eliminate “flinch”—the motion that results out of anticipating the gun’s discharge, which can spoil the shooter’s pointing. (Shotguns, typically, are pointed, not aimed, in the sense that rifles are aimed.)

Q. How do you become a competitive trap shooter?

A. Haning says several factors go into being a high-scoring shooter, in addition to obtaining training from good marksmen.

One key ingredient is developing a good stance from which to shoot, one that you can resume after breaking open your weapon to reload--most trap guns are break shotguns, with no magazine. A good stance will permit the shooter to swing his or her weapon into the proper position and to follow the target clay with the eye and then to fire. Breathing control also plays a part. Overall, Haning says that mastering the repetitive motions for firing from the shooter's developed stance is critical.

However, "gun fit" is the most important part of becoming a good trap shooter, says Haning. Two points are critical, the fit of the gun's stock to the shooter's face and the fit of it to the shoulder. "This is a big part of being consistent," says Haning.

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