

SATURDAY 29th March – Triple Dewar (by This Correspondent)

It's perfectly possible to waltz into breakfast with less than 15 minutes to go before departure and still make it out with minutes to spare before the vans leave. We know this now.

We also know it's possible to sit outside a hotel in the minibus uploading photos to the web for 20 minutes and still get the one man in your bus who is squadded on the first detail to the range just in time for his shoot, if not prayers. While waiting for our delayed departure, the Free State Champion was asked if he knew which target he was squadded on, so we could drive straight there. He didn't, so it was suggested "Why don't you go and find out?" before a delay, then "I should take the seat belt off first if I were you."

The delay also allowed the Adjutant to scan his work e-mails on the Blackberry. The only one he deemed worthy of mention contained a new company record discount for a product regularly marketed by such means.

It seems to have inspired the great Queen, who went on to score 100 out of 100 in the Scottish Sword competition at 300 and 900m in the morning. Unfortunately Jumbo only had 7 Veas over the two ranges, so there was every chance of his being beaten. Jane might have given him competition, had she not cut a bull five sighter, only to drop her last to count at 300m. Conditions in the morning were not too tricky for those on the first detail, but saw fishtails at both ranges for the second detail. In the latter, This Correspondent was paired with Jon Underwood at 900m and was disbelieving when he thought he heard enough clicks for Jon to have wound on 4 minutes as the wind shifted from left to right. He put on 2.5 minutes himself – both wound up with bulls and neither could be sure whose wind zero was correct after the shoot...

After a brief stop at lunchtime, the GB team transmogrified into the British Commonwealth Rifle Club to enter the Dewar match for six-man teams at 300 and 600m. The teams were not the usual target teams but instead fairly evenly matched combinations that would, along with the similar matches on Monday and Tuesday, offer the opportunity for all the firers to familiarise themselves with each of the coaches, in case of the need to move people outside of their normal target teams for the Protea Match itself.

As it turned out, all the combinations seemed to work rather well. The match record, set a few years earlier, was 595 out of 600. The BCRC teams started well at 300m, with Blue holding a six 'V' lead from Red on 299 ex 300 and White on 297. After a similar pattern at 600m, the BCRC teams managed scores of 598.76 (Blue, coach Matt Ensor), 598.69 (Red, This Correspondent) and 595.71 (White, Martin Townsend). It took until Monday to discover the result but it was a pleasing 1st, 2nd, 3rd finish for BCRC. The wind conditions were not nightmarish but equally not negligible – 300m was a little tricky at times and there was a big change from one direction to the other at 600m before a steady period that was there to be taken advantage of if

you shot and changed over quickly. Not long after we finished, the wind strengthened a great deal, coming from either side of 12 o'clock, and blew up a dust storm to hamper the chances of some of the South African clubs that were still shooting.

Had there been a div of the day prize, it might have gone either to Jane Messer for telling Chris Watson "all out" after nine shots or to the Captain for going up onto the firing point without his bolt. Or to Parag for following 9 V-bulls with an inner to finish...

James Lewis managed to finish the day without dropping a point, and scores in the team match were an interesting mix, with David Dyson's 50.1 beating Parag's nearly perfect shoot – a reminder of the importance of avoiding bad shots! Clearly there were ways that we could have improved, but the afternoon served to prove that the match ammunition was very good indeed and that coaches and firers were all able to perform well – a confidence builder for the following week.

After a further briefing and reshuffling of buses (and for one team member a full 200 lengths of the guest house's pool without taking a single stroke!), the team returned to the guest house to clean the vans and prepare for the team dinner at the Cattle Baron (yes, another steak restaurant).

This Correspondent was delighted when it turned out that Supersport was broadcasting the Boat Race and the restaurant staff were happy to put it on the big screen. He and Adam were both also delighted with the result and were surprised how many others seemed to be keen on watching the race.

Following the dinner, the majority of the team (with the Adjutant to the fore) went in to Bloemfontein to sample some of the local entertainment. The following day would be the only one without any shooting before the very end of the tour, so this was the sole opportunity to go out and bond in age-old traditional fashion. After a very constructive first week, the team was in a positive frame of mind and the evening cemented further some of the camaraderie that had been building thus far.