

Days of Truth

By: Silver Dollar Sue



THE SASS EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Days of Truth...hmmmm, sounds like we should be in a church confessional, or an interrogation room with Gestapo-types breathing down our necks, or at top of the Hangman's gallows waiting for the trapdoor to fall. But alas, we're not. We're in Europe, in the Czech Republic, in a little, inconspicuous Bohemian town called Oparany, on a beautiful range—shootin' cowboy...Czech-style. How cool is that?

So, how did we find ourselves all the way across The Big Pond, dressed in our cowboy duds, surrounded by lots of Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, Swedes, and Norwegians (one of whom I'd swear by his accent was from the great state of Texas), one Spaniard, a few very gracious Austrians, and four wacky Hungarians? Well, it kinda started like this...my husband Huszar and I first met Hogo Fogo and Tornado Lou at the International Shooters' Reception, aka EOT 2004. While talking to them, we mentioned our planned trip to Hungary in the fall. "Oh really?" says Hogo Fogo. "We are planning the First European Championship in September. Why don't you come?" Huszar and I looked at each other, smiled great big grins, and said, "A European cowboy match? The First European Championships? A hop, skip, and a jump from Hungary? All right! What are the dates?" So, the next thing I know, I have two new appendages: a phone in my ear and a computer/keyboard attached to my fingers, phoning and keying for passports, calling embassies, getting gun permits, and ordering airline tickets. When it was all said and done, it didn't turn out to be that big of a deal, really.

We flew into Budapest, Hungary, then rented a car and drove through Slovakia into the Czech Republic. Beautiful fall countryside, pine forests, cut and bundled hay fields, a combination of New England

and the Midwest. Total travel time: 6+ hours. Total km: approximately 500. Total white knuckles from European drivers: 10—complete with fingernail imprints on the dash and side door! Have you ever driven in Europe? It's akin to Mr. Toad's Wild Ride at Disneyland—only worse! They drive fast and Lord help you if you don't get out of the way fast enough.

We dropped our luggage off at the hotel, and couldn't unload the car fast enough, got our shooting irons and rigs together to speed out to the range in nearby Oparany. We almost missed the turn-off, just a small sign on the side of the road claiming "Days of Truth→". When we arrived on Thursday afternoon, we got out of the car and stood in the field, not really believing we'd made it. The butterflies were dancing in my stomach and the anticipation grew.

Day 1—Opening ceremonies, main match, six stages: In the words of Jim Carey, a "B-E-A-Utiful" day! Cool, clear, slight breeze—perfect shooting weather! Six stages, smaller pistol targets (not like our BIG, up-close plates at home), smaller rifle targets too, and approximately six shotgun targets per stage. One stage finished off with the rifle blazing, double taps on each of five paper targets. Huszar and son Shadow Hawk shot well, but I didn't have such a good day. On another stage, a cracked casing snuck by me which allowed a bullet to collapse into it, causing a double feed, and effectively jamming my rifle—costing me six misses! Then, on a different stage ending with 10 rifle on paper, I was really cranking them out and BAM!—another jam on the last two shots. My faithful Marling double fed the last two and bound up just as tight as a drum. What's a girl to do? Go sit and check each and



walking around like a little kid, dropping firecrackers at the feet of those unaware.

Day 3—Side matches, long-range rifle, awards, and closing ceremonies: The side matches included speed shotgun, rifle, and pistol, as well as three-man relay. In watching the locals compete, I've got to tell you, those Scandinavian dudes are pretty darned quick! Our son, Shadow Hawk, shot long-range rifle for the first time ever with his dad's 24" Marlin. He didn't win, but shot a solid round in the middle of the pack.

When all was said and done, Huszar took ninth in his category; I took second in Ladies' Traditional, and Shadow Hawk brought home the gold with a first place finish! Sadness sank in as the day ended, but we were elated that we got to take part in such an event.

To our understanding, the match really took root and came to fruition at EOT 2004. Thunderman, President of the AWS (a Czech shooting organization) and Hogo Fogo of the CzCowboy Action Shooting Club, were at EOT, along with a number of other Czech shooters. They had been toying with the idea of a European Championship and had been in contact with Tex at SASS headquarters for some guidance. When the Czech contingency returned to their homeland, they got to work and put the Days of Truth together in only five months.

Anyone who has ever put on a major match knows the logistics, planning, paperwork, and execution involved. There was also the added

every article of our nearly 1,000 rounds. I know, I know, I should have done that before we left...sigh.

Day 2—Main match, six stages: The posse is getting comfortable with each other. Laughing, joking, cheering each other on to the point that other posses are coming to see what the fuss is all about. We consisted of a couple of Germans, two Slovokians, three Americans, and the rest were Czechs, including two other junior shooters. We were fortunate to have our posse leaders, Hogo Fogo, Tornado Lou, and our new German friend Shotgun George, speak good English. Our last stage of the day was a head-to-head competition with a posse-mate. It started with a handshake, a slap of the timer, then you shot two banks of pistol knockdowns, moving to take out four shotgun targets, moving again to get the nine rifle targets down range, run back to the shotgun position for a knockdown that triggered a can popper, then run like heck back to the beginning to stop your timer. I can't tell you how many folks would stop after the last shotgun target, look around (quite impressed with themselves), and then realize they had to go hit the stopper. I've never heard "Timer!" yelled in so many different languages at the same time.

You'll never guess who we ran across on Saturday? The one and only Tequila with a crew from the Outdoor Channel there to film the match for their show *Cowboys!* Huszar and Tequila were friendly, and the next thing you know, the crew is asking Huszar to get in front of the camera. Tequila was filmed shooting a demo stage and wowed the onlookers. They don't see many shooters like that in the Czech Republic...yet!

The Saturday night social was a sight to see. Go figure...a Czech band playing country western music! A costume contest was held with some costumes rivaling anything you would see at EOT, we danced under the stars, not to mention the great food, drinks (lots of the famous Czech beer makin' the rounds), the whole bit—even one senior gent,



circumstance of a "borrowed" range in the South Bohemian region of the Czech Republic which required a lot of earth moving to fine tune the shooting bays. That, coupled with the restrictive gun laws in Europe, and crossing borders into what was once part of the Iron Curtain, it's amazing they were able to pull it off at all, let alone so well! And it was run under SASS rules, that in and of itself was a major achievement. The match drew 132 shooters from nine countries, a great achievement.

A tip of the hat to them!

We found the Europeans to be very friendly and were excited to talk to the Americans. We were peppered with questions (which we gladly answered), on how the game is played here at home. It appears the typical caliber in use in Europe is the .45 and ammunition is very expensive to buy. However, they're catching on to the .38s and the idea of reloading their own ammunition (especially the Scandinavians—as mentioned above, they're quite fast!), and we were asked extensively about the loads we shoot here. I'm afraid the cat's out of the bag now folks! What the heck...blame it on Saturday evenings terrific Czech beer!

After Days of Truth, our travel plans took us back to Budapest, Hungary, to continue our vacation. Included in those plans was a CAS demonstration shoot for the Hungarian shooting club. In



attendance were approximately 20-25 spectators, and although they were very interested and excited about the sport, and loved shooting our '97, the sport has a limited future there due to oppressive gun laws and economics.

The idea is that the European Championship will have a different host country each year. Rumor has it that Oslo, Norway may be the site for 2005, with Vienna, Austria serving as host in 2006.

You say traveling out of the country with firearms makes you a bit queasy? You needn't be. We found it to be quite a bit easier than expected. If you do your homework and have your paperwork in order, odds are you should have a relatively painless experience. Paperwork that you need includes a letter of invitation from the hosting club, a U.S. Customs form to bring firearms back into the U.S., permits for the country(ies) in which you'll be traveling, and airline guidelines. Give it a try! Hope to see you in Oslo!

Winners

Overall and Traditional champion:	Picadoll Jim (Sweden)
Top Lady:	Thundermaid (Czech Republic)
49er:	Ace Heart
Classic Cowboy:	Samuel B. Carpenter (Sweden)
Duelist:	Wild Bill
FC Duelist:	Buffalo
Frontiersman:	James Hawkins
Gunfighter:	Thunderman
Junior:	Shadow Hawk (USA)
Senior:	Pavel Augusta (Czech Republic)

