



Photo by Yury Lisichko

# MAN WITH A PLAN

At present, there is no existing programme for crossbow training, but thanks to Chris Aston's latest project, things could be about to change...

**D**espite the fact that crossbow shooting has been a part of the club scene for over 40 years in this country, none of the national bodies has put together a training programme for this branch of the sport.

Crossbow shooting sits in two camps: on the one hand it uses a bow and a string to propel an arrow so it's classed as a form of archery. But on the other, crossbow handling definitely

requires the skills of a rifle shooter, so when it comes to teaching technique a rifle coach is better equipped to train crossbow newcomers. The National Small-bore Rifle Association (NSRA) lists crossbow shooting as one of its activities; the association also runs a successful air-rifle Youth Proficiency Scheme.

Earlier this year I met with the NSRA's coaching and development manager Dave Froggett at the West Midlands Regional Shooting Centre in Wolverhampton. As a former member of the GB Match-crossbow squad Dave was keen on my ideas for adapting the NSRA's youth proficiency scheme to 'convert' some of its existing instructors so they can also teach crossbow shooting.

## En Francé

My proposal is partly inspired by the success of a similar programme which has been running in France since 2002. With over 140,000 members, the French Shooting Federation (FFTir) is one of Europe's largest and most successful target shooting organisations.



Since 2002, over 600 young shooters have passed through the French Shooting Federations' crossbow archery training courses. Chris Aston plans to develop a similar scheme in the UK with the NSRA

Over the past six years the FFTir's *Minimes* training program has introduced hundreds of young people to crossbow shooting. One of the people responsible for this success is Charles Méchin. He's a member of the FFTir's national crossbow committee and the secretary general of the International Crossbow-shooting Union (IAU). Charles has kindly assisted me with the preparation of the Youth Proficiency Scheme for the NSRA.



## The NSRA

The National Small-bore Rifle Association is based in Bisley, Surrey. It is the governing body for small-bore, airgun and match-crossbow shooting. Also under the wing of the NSRA is the National Crossbow Federation of Great Britain, which is the body responsible for field-crossbow shooting in the UK.

The NSRA administers a number of qualifications for target shooting – including an Air-rifle Youth Proficiency Scheme. Over the past few years this scheme has equipped many hundreds of tutors to run courses in Air-rifle shooting for young people. This has led to the NSRA YPS becoming the standard qualification used by members of the British Holiday Association (BAHA) and also the Boy Scouts Association.

**How can the crossbow improve your shooting technique?**

All good target shooters know about the importance of follow-through – the ability to maintain the aim during and beyond releasing the shot. This is especially crucial in crossbow shooting because, the projectile travels a lot slower compared to that from an air-rifle. When the crossbow trigger releases the bowstring, the tips of the prod (bow) spring forward, accelerating the bolt from zero to around 200fps in less than 12". This means that the bolt is still in contact with the crossbow for about 8/10 of a second after the trigger is released. In the world of precision shooting, that's a very long time indeed. Only when the bolt finally leaves the crossbow is it free from the influence of the shooter, so it's this slow-motion shot formation that makes the crossbow such an invaluable tool for improving a target shooters' technique. This is further substantiated by the large number of Olympic-class rifle competitors who currently use the crossbow as part of their training programmes.



**The programme**

The Crossbow YPS programme will aim to recruit young people between 14 and 18 and course sessions will be conducted in such a way that safely caters for the full range of physical abilities. Students will learn about topics such as the law relating to crossbows, safety, equipment selection and maintenance, basic shooting skills, range commands, how to score and how to set up the shooting range. As students progress they will earn skill-level diplomas.

The type of equipment used will be specially selected; the physical weight of the crossbow will be limited to less than 7lbs (3kg), with a draw weight of 40-50lbs (18-23kg). A safety catch and trigger-guard must be fitted. I would recommend the Excalibur Apex recurve crossbow for beginners, because it is well engineered and reasonably priced.

Training sessions will take place indoors shooting from 10m on either 40cm or 25cm multi-coloured target faces. These faces will be set-up on archery butresses with a safety netting backstop.

**The plan**

Since my first meeting with Dave Froggett I've been busy putting the project in writing. I aim to complete the first draft of the Crossbow YPS Manual (Tutor Notes and Session Plans) by the end of December 2008. From there I

hope to organise an initial trial with a group of NSRA air-rifle instructors at the West Midlands Shooting Centre in Wolverhampton during spring 2009.

Once the scheme gets the green light from the NSRA the next step will be to train the first group of instructors, who will then begin to deliver the Crossbow Youth Proficiency Scheme to students. The NSRA already has a large number of qualified air-rifle YPS instructors and I hope some of them will be keen to add crossbow shooting to their sporting CVs. As crossbow shooting is also covered in Archery GB's (GNAS) rule book, I hope that the NSRA scheme will also attract archery instructors who will be very welcome to take part in the project once it is up and running next year.

If you are an archery instructor and you'd like to be involved please contact me through the editorial team at Bow International. Email: edit@blazepublishing.co.uk



Chris recommends the Excalibur Apex recurve crossbow for beginners.



Above: (L-R) Charles Méchin, Gérard Bouteville (President IAU and 1st Vice President FFTir) congratulating Florant Guillaume (France) on winning the 2008 Junior World Crossbow Championships in Switzerland

**Crossbow age limits**

Section 44 of the Violent Crime Reduction Act, 2006 amends the Crossbows Act 1987 to raise the age at which a person can lawfully buy, hire, be sold or hired a crossbow, or possess a crossbow from 17 years of age to 18 years, without the supervision of a person aged 21 or over. The penalty for breaking this law is a £400 fine.

In practice, under-18s may shoot the crossbow while under the control of a recognised target shooting organisation, provided they are always supervised by a suitably-qualified person aged 21 or over. Archery GB's (GNAS) rules places a lower age limit of 12 at which a young person is allowed to handle a crossbow and be taught how to shoot with it.

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