

ATA Article for January 2016

Greetings from Ontario, Canada

For many, January is the month that folks make (and often quickly break) their new year resolutions, plan their upcoming year and look back on the high and low points of the past year. Trap shooters do the same. Almost every trap shooter I know considers new devices, equipment or approaches that may help them hit an extra target here and there. It is trial and error and if what they try doesn't work, it is back to the basics.

Let me give you a prime example. One of the best Canadian International skeet shooters happens to suffer from red-green colour blindness. He faces immense challenges in "picking up" a solid orange target against a green background to the point where he will often pick and choose his matches where possible based on the background. When asked what colour he sees when looking at a treed background, he simply shrugs and says "same as the grass – orange". I recently saw a commercial about a revolutionary eye glass product called EnChroma which professes to help make red-green more vibrant and more discernable. When I called and told my skeet shooting friend about this and directed him to the website he appeared cautiously optimistic. This product will be on his enhancement bucket list for 2016 for sure. Hope it helps. You may know someone with the same issue and it may help them too.

January is also the month for thoughtful retrospection. I personally try to focus on the positive and minimize the negative except for learning from unsuccessful experiences. When we pause to reflect, I suggest there is seldom a year that goes by that does not have some interesting, sometimes exceptional and often humorous moments. Let me share some of mine.

As many of you know I have shot both ATA trap and also International trap and double trap. The advantage with ATA trap is that you can plan your shooting season around the competitions you wish to enter. No pre-qualification is necessary. The disadvantage to International (Olympic style) competitions is that you attend only those that you have qualified for to represent your country. There are many great shooters on both sides of our common border that spend a career at trying to "qualify" and seldom and sometimes never do. That is why I have always subscribed to the theory that competition shooting of any trap shooting discipline helps build skill, competition toughness and it should be encouraged. The alternative is for many to spend a lifetime practicing and not really competing. I have been blessed with glorious opportunities to compete in both disciplines.

At the World Championships in September 2015 in Lonato, Italy, Drew's mom and my wife, Beverley, was finally convinced to come with us. I had competed in Italy numerous times but this was Bev's first trip. She is not a "tourist", doesn't like flying and seldom attends International events. She used to love Vandalia (for ATA Grand Americans) but that was a function of the shopping and restaurants.

So Italy it was. We flew into Rome and waited – 3 hours for getting my shotgun cleared through customs (even though all the paperwork was done in advance), and a further three hours (if you can imagine waiting in line with a "number") to pick up our Alfa Romeo standard shift rental car from the Eurocar rental agency. We were tired but looking forward to getting to our room at the Sheridan Roma Hotel - a 20 minute drive from the airport. We decided we would leave the congested airport parking lot and pull into a shopping mall lot or similar place and enter the hotel's address in our rented TomTom navigation

system. We were surprised to learn that the spacious parking areas we enjoy in Canada and U.S. don't exist in Rome – at least not that we were able to find. Roads were so narrow and congested we couldn't even pull over and stop. We took roundabouts (we had no choice) and had no clue where we were going as all road signs were in Italian. For those of you familiar with TomToms or Garmins, most if not all do not permit you to input destinations unless you are stopped. By the time we found a gas station where we could finally stop, we had no clue where we were and nobody spoke English. What was worse, the TomTom would not input the hotel's address – sort of like “you can't get there from here”.

We called the hotel and talked to attendants that could speak English but the road systems were so convoluted they could not give meaningful directions. Stop after stop we pointed to the hotel location and address when trying to get directions from Italian speaking people wishing to help but all they could do was shrug and smile. They motioned to a road and gesticulated wildly. Late at night, six hours later with Beverley wanting to find an Italian divorce lawyer I finally pulled into a gas station behind a young fellow who spoke broken English. We were 5 minutes away from the hotel but even he could not give directions given the one way streets, the roundabouts, etc. He said “follow me”. I felt like Mario Andretti, trying to keep up with this good Samaritan, navigating hair pin double back turns and finally he slowed his vehicle and pointed to his right. There, well hidden from sight, in a valley surrounded by foliage and buildings and with no lit signage, we finally stumbled into our hotel room. Apparently, the norm is that guests go by taxi, or shuttle bus, to the hotel. Few nimrods try to do it on their own.

We saw most of Rome I suspect on the way to the hotel that day (and night). My strong suggestion is if you happen to find yourself in Rome, do what we did for the next few days – park the car and take shuttle, taxi and subway transportation. This enabled us to see attractions like St. Michael's Basilica, the Vatican, the Sistine Chapel (where we pondered the ceiling that Michelangelo spent many years painting atop scaffolding). This is a marvel in itself and covered over 5,000 square feet, depicting biblical scenes of his own choosing. (This was a compromise negotiated with Pope Julius 11 who essentially forced Michelangelo to paint the ceiling – he preferred sculpting). No book or reproduction can duplicate the experience of seeing this first hand. [Note - I am starting to sound like a tourist.]

The manager of our trap shooting facility at Toronto International, Orazio Zeppieri, and his wife came from Italy and return for a couple of months each fall to their family home and acreage about 80 km south of Rome. Bev and I visited them and we spent a few days enjoying the mountain view, the bountiful locally grown fruits and vegetables and visiting local attractions including a brand new trap facility a few kilometers away. From there Bev and I drove northwards on the main auto route (MI) towards Lonato but stopped for a day in Florence on the way. We already knew the main attractions we wanted to see.

Navigating Florence by vehicle was challenging but we made it. In fact over the course of 10 days driving in Italy, I only got honked at once – and I deserved it. We again found parking problematic but found a spot near the “look-out” area where one can see virtually all of Florence unfolding below. It was probably an hour walk down the mountainside with no comfort areas/washrooms. We were both busting to find a restroom. We were by then outside the Basilica of the Cross where Michelangelo, Galileo and many other famous Italians were buried. Like most historical attractions there was a sea of humanity milling around. I noticed a man, woman and teenage boy coming towards us wearing typical touristy sunglasses and casuals. I stopped them as they were passing and said “Excuse me, do you speak English”? The three stopped, the lady took off her sunglasses and said “Hello Bev. Haven't seen you since last week at

(Collingwood) WalMart". These three live four doors down our street. No idea they were in Florence (and visa versa). What are the odds?

Lonato is host to a great shooting facility with state of the art everything. We were able to stay about 20 minutes away in a little town called Sirmione, next to Desenzano del Garda on Lake Garda. This is all near Bresica in northern Italy. A little Italian cuisine, some Italian wine and I think Bev had forgotten some of the driving nightmares of a few short days ago. Then it was off to Venice (after the competition) for a couple of days in advance of our flight from Venice to Toronto.

Venice is a unique place to visit. I like the history associated with places no matter where I go (this was where the great merchant and explorer Marco Polo originated). While there are some pedestrian and vehicle streets here and there they are for local traffic only and are very disjointed. One gets around Venice on predetermined routes by water bus (just like our street cars, subways or trolleys) or by water taxi (just like our taxis that one commissions and directs). The gondola is for photo ops and are a tourist attraction and not a practical means of reliable transportation.

On the last night before returning home, Bev wanted to enjoy the cuisine and the ambience of a meal at one of the fancy restaurants that are along the Grand Canal. Patrons can see the water traffic coming and going right beside one's table. And, of course, there is a hefty premium to be paid for this luxury. Our table was right beside the rail with the channel abutting the other side. Seemed like a good idea – at first. Then Bev got sea sick. We were re-located to a table way back in the restaurant where you couldn't even see the canal. Same price.

I think I now have enough accumulated brownie points that will permit me to do as much shooting in 2016 as my work schedule will permit. Like many of my male shooting colleagues, the wife is probably delighted to get rid of us for a few days here and there anyway.

One last note. In our household, we try to watch all the Democratic and Republican presidential debates. Fox (Business News Network) hosted the Republican debate on November 10, 2015, out of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The problem was that while we subscribe to Fox News we can't get the Fox Business News Channel or any other channels where this debate was televised. Ever innovative, we came up with a last minute "brilliant" solution. I do subscribe to Sirius for my truck that does have Fox Business News Network on the radio. Bev threw a coat on over her housecoat. I threw a coat on over my sweat pants and shirt. We spent the next two hours that evening sitting in our truck with the engine running, heater on, tuned in to the debate. The neighbours probably thought we were crazy. I know our Australian Sheppard dog did as she watched us quizzingly from her back seat perch wondering why we were not going anywhere. And, just like we always experienced when our kids were young and we used to go to drive-in movies – we fell asleep and missed the whole darned thing.

Have a great 2016.

Paul Shaw

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