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THE POWDER KEG GONG CHALLENGE VAAL TRIANGLE PRECISION RIFLE SERIES

BY NIGEL HULLEMAN



The Powder Keg presented a gong challenge shoot on 1 September as part of the Vaal Triangle Precision Rifle Series, with 40 shooters partaking in the competition. The shoot was held at the Hippo Creek shooting range in the Vaal Triangle.

Hippo Creek was built originally as a shotgun range to meet international standards. Since then, the facilities have expanded to cater for both rifle and handgun shooters. Hippo Creek offers an excellent clubhouse that is ideal for award ceremonies, with catering as well as an on-site gunshop.

Paul Luff from The Powder Keg and his team had been hard at work building the courses of fire. Consequently, after a quick pre-match briefing, the shooters were split up into their respective squads. They headed out to their respective stages, as they were keen to start shooting.

Each stage presented the shooters with unique challenges, incorporating different and often awkward shooting positions, requiring six steel targets to be engaged at various distances. All targets had to be engaged within a predetermined time limit of generally

two minutes per stage, adding to the excitement.

Shooters were permitted to use aids such as shooting bags but, as per the PRS rules, had to be carried with the shooters for the entire shoot. Targets started relatively close-range, all the way out to 443 m. Most courses of fire presented shooters with targets at three different distances, namely close, medium, and long range.

Shooters were required to regularly engage steel targets of assorted sizes, ranging from large to small gongs. The targets were all at known distances for six of the seven match stages. Only the last stage did not provide shooters with the target distances. However, here shooters had the opportunity to use a pair of Kahles binoculars with a built-in range finder, which made ranging the targets a mere formality!

The clarity of the Kahles binoculars was exceptional. All targets appeared crisp, while the heads-up display ranged the target automatically. Top-quality binoculars are an essential piece of **Insert image here** of Kahles Binoculars that were used - equipment for PRS shooting, and the Kahles binoculars will

certainly meet with approval from the most demanding of shooters.

Shooters were allowed ten minutes prep time per stage to familiarise themselves with the target locations and check shooting positions. During this prep time, Kestrel weather meters whirled as data was collated. This data was relayed to ballistic applications on smartphones, converting yards to meters, and taking care of a myriad of other calculations as nature and science firmly came together.

When combined with the Data of Previous Engagements (DOPE), it informed shooters what elevation and windage adjustments were required over the various distances to hit the gongs shimmering in the morning sun, given their respective bullet weights and calibres.

These numbers were scribbled furiously onto DOPE boards strapped to shooters' forearms.

In somewhat of an over simplification, I was told that, if your DOPE is correct, then dialling these magic numbers into the scope will see you hit the plate just about every time.

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OUR HEARTS BEAT FOR PRS



Well, providing the wind between the shooting position and the target is not doing something strange, or the constant breeze that has been blowing does not drop just as you break the shot, that is. There is a science and an art to all of this!

It was clear that these riflemen had all spent many hours on the range with their rifles, establishing a solid understanding of how to engage targets accurately at various distances. Consequently, the scorers called out 'IMPACT!' on a regular basis as the shooters delivered accurate fire. The shooters present were all very competent riflemen who were one with their rifles, shooting in a smooth and efficient manner.



STAGE 1: WARRIOR TRIPOD

This stage was sponsored by Gun Warrior. It gave shooters the chance to try out Gun Warrior's new hog saddle, which allows shooters to clamp their rifles into the hog saddle, which is width-adjustable to accommodate different rifles. The hog saddle is secured to a tripod that can be raised or lowered to best suit the shooters' kneeling or sitting positions for this stage. Shooting bags were the only aids allowed to stabilise rifles on this stage. Shooters fired six rounds at six steel gongs in a limited two-minute

period. The gongs consisted of a large and smaller gong at each of the three distances for this stage.

THE CHALLENGE BECOMES CLEAR

Just how challenging this was became clear while watching a competitor shoot the Rooftop (Stage 3). This required the shooter to engage three sets of gongs, consisting of a large and small gong next to each other at three distances. The first set of gongs was at 147 m, the second at 377 m, and the final set at 398 m. All of this while lying on a board sloping upwards at a 45° angle. The rifle could be staged on the game-changer shooting bag on the top edge of the board.

At the signal, the shooter scrambled up the 45° slope, along with any bags needed to stabilise the rifle. I watched as the shooter struggled to get into position, finally wedging the shooting bag under his rifle butts. Half lying over the shooting bags, he looked anything but comfortable. The shooter chambered a round quickly, knowing he had taken too long to get into position, and had already lost precious seconds. Despite the uncomfortable shooting position, he made solid hits on the first and second set of plates, hitting both the large and small ones.

As he moved to the third set, he was unable to find the steel target due to the small field of view caused by the high magnification of the scope. He was forced to push the throw lever to the left, reducing the magnification, but increasing his field of view. Locking onto the target, he drove the throw lever back to full magnification as he chambered the fifth round.

Calling for time, he was advised that he had 30 seconds to make two shots out at 400 m! I watched as he steadied himself, and heard the shot break.



▲ Gongs scattered across the shooting field

The scorer called "IMPACT!" as the round found its mark. The shooter called for time again as he hurriedly chambered his last round. "Ten seconds!" was the reply.

The shot broke a second before time was called, but missed the last gong. Standing up, the shooter shook his head, saying: "I just did not have enough time left for that last gong." Watching him, it was evident that this was an experienced shooter who had spent a lot of time shooting his rifle.

Of the 40-odd shooters at the match, some were first-timers looking to give PRS a try, through to serious competitors looking to win. The top competitors had their eye on the

unique trophy awarded to the overall winner, as well as the substantial cash prizes on offer.

Hardy Tsao went on to win the match, shooting an impressive 33 out of a total of 42 hits. His performance saw him clinch the trophy, as well as winning the cash first prize, which he donated back to the club. Second place went to Warren Britnell, with 32 points – just one point behind Hardy. Paul Botha, a Veldskiet shooter, placed third overall with 31 points.

Paul Luff was satisfied with how The Powder Keg gong challenge went off. Chatting to him afterwards, he said that they had learnt some lessons, and would be introducing some



▲ The Powder Keg Vaal Triangle PRS floating trophy

improvements for future events. He went on to state that this had been a pilot match, with much bigger things to come. We look forward to covering more exciting events like this one in future!

PRS is certainly a challenging shooting environment that tests not only a marksman's ability, but also a number of other skills, all against the clock. So, if you are a competent rifleman, why not challenge yourself by attending a PRS shoot? We are confident you will find these competitions both challenging and fun! These matches are certainly very different from shooting groups at your local range!



▲ Left to right: Warren Britnell, Paul Luff, Hardy Tsao and Paul Botha



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