

Absolute Beginners

Having a crack at an array of targets on the .22 range



A great selection of targets from the highest firing point



Ed Jackson rings some steel and starts to learn the craft of shooting at Orion Firearms Training

Getting into firearms is not that easy, as there are many considerations and requirements - gun types and calibres, security and certification, what and where to shoot, hunting or target etc. However, a basic knowledge of gun handling and safety is paramount. So where would one go to get all this?

I did it with Orion Firearms Training, Llanidloes, Wales! Run by John O'Brien, an ex-UK Special Forces instructor with years of experience and all the necessary qualifications including RMQ levels 1 to 5. He is passionate about what he does and was keen to emphasise what his training can do, with packages aimed at everyone.

Importantly this is a facility that welcomes amateurs and professionals alike.

But what about the novice who may not had the opportunity to fire a rifle? This is covered too and you can use a wide range of kit under supervision on some challenging ranges. All you do is sign Section 21 to declare that you are not a prohibited person and that you have been given a safety briefing; that's it! You are then exposed to a variety of firearms, shooting positions and distances interlaced with quality training with lots of tips and techniques. All out in the real time world of wind, rain and temperature. You soon start to realise why you miss and also how to stop that happening.

THE FACILITIES AND TRAINING:

Orion is situated in a picturesque and remote valley, and is packed with various ranges and firing points from 25-950m. Some are covered, others are definitely not! There is also the capability to stretch the legs on the big rifles out to 3km!

John starts everyone on a .22 rifle. We started by using the Smith and Wesson M&P 15-22 on the shorter ranges from about 25m to 100m. This gave us a chance to practice basic marksmanship principles and to go through the safety rules at a practical level. This also allowed him to assess us and our shortfalls. It was a lot of fun, as we had a wide variety of targets to try and hit while still getting some



Everybody should practice from a high seat as it's not as easy as you would think

good tips regarding grip, positioning, trigger control and handling. A 22 LR is also a good platform for starting to understanding the wind even at these shorter distances.

The targets are steel, reactive-types and come in various shapes and sizes depending on the range and what you are trying to achieve. They are positioned in pits in the hillside throughout the valley and can be shot at from all distances elevations and even angles. John explained: "they are so useful as they react to the shot and give near instant feedback of a hit or miss." I found this particularly effective when trying to understand the wind, by being rewarded with a satisfying 'gong' as you hit the plate.

REPRESENTING!

The sporting targets are shaped to replicate full sized roe deer and foxes and positioned throughout some rough ground from 100 to 300m+. It was explained that on average deer stalkers only really shoot out to 150m with minimal adjustment needed in regards to wind and bullet drop. The benefit of this sort of practice gives the shooter more confidence in themselves and their equipment thus making any shot better (given you do your bit!). There was a choice of a couple of firing points in order to give us the opportunity of going sitting, prone and even from a high seat (which was particularly good fun).

Next up a new addition - the running boar, which is shot from 25 to 50m and is really challenging! I have been lucky as I have had the opportunity to shoot at movers before; surprising how much lead is required when they are up to full speed. Victory came in the form of a Firebird attached to the steel pig which indicated a hit when it exploded.

Moving to higher ground allowed access to nearly all the targets on the range, including some high up in the hills. We were able to take shots down onto water allowing us to see the fall of our shot with ease and then slowly increase the range and push our capabilities and that of our equipment. It was at this point that we were introduced to the next layer of training. We were using a Howa 1500 in .223 and a Remington 700 in .308 and as we began to stretch the range to 200m+. We were shown holdover (adjusting the point of aim in order to compensate for wind and bullet drop). By 400m we started to find this technique less and less effective. We then moved on to dialling in our scopes to get the required correction. This was a fascinating exercise which really opens your eyes when it comes to your rifles and optic's capabilities.

The tuition came to a conclusion as we stretched right out to 800m with the wind and rain in play. It was impressive how after dialling in and figuring out the wind just how quickly we were able to get rounds accurately on target with the .308. We then got the opportunity to have a go with the Desert Tactical Arms in .338 Lapua. It's not every day you get to shoot a rifle north of £5,000!

COACHING AND EQUIPMENT

I was keen to explore the trend that people would rather spend more money on equipment to solve a shooting problem than invest in training. John explained that most sporting rifles are potentially accurate pieces of kit. That said, understanding the best equipment for your needs can be a bit of a minefield too. Most people will do their research through magazines and online, gathering enough information to make an informed choice. Alternatively they will put their trust in a salesperson in the hope that they will guide them to the correct choice.

John was quick to recommend the Howa stealth combos as they are available in a good variety of calibres and stocks; so something for everyone. Alternatively a Tikka T3 if you would like something more refined. He also thought that the Blaser straight pull rifles suited the running boar targets best. Finally if money is no object then a Desert Tactical Arms was his choice for the challenging stuff. Regarding optics, it is simply a case of buying the best you can afford as quality glass pays dividends when ▶

The view from one of the undercover firing points



Hot to Trot - The running boar target proved very challenging!

shooting at any distance! A good set of binoculars are also useful as it is much easier to scan terrain with these than a scope, I found the Vortex binos particularly good!

TRAINING PACKAGES

There are various packages available. The Elite Rifle Days offer 1:1 or 2:1 tuition, but they are not cheap. This one can be designed around the customer to focus on any part of their shooting they wish to improve. Training becomes more affordable as the standard range days and sniper experience are run in groups. The former is essentially a guided affair with John or his colleague Neil moving you from between the ranges throughout the day, pitching in with a bit of spotting and guidance. The latter is aimed towards anyone without their own equipment, giving the opportunity to have a go on the various ranges and with all the rifles. Everyone has different needs and circumstances so give them a bell and they can help!

If you have your own equipment then this is the time to bring it, the range is suitable for anything up to .50 cal. Bring plenty of ammunition as it is not uncommon to get through over 200-rounds of centrefire in a day. You will also need some food, drink and some decent clothes; I got mine from www.military1st.co.uk at a very reasonable price. Make sure you get your sizes right as



Taking shots down onto the lake allowed us to view the POI very easily

you need room to manoeuvre due to the various positions that you will need to get into.

John is in the process of applying for an RFD as currently there are no storage facilities. Once sorted customers can store guns overnight in confidence! Regarding accommodation there are a few hotels to choose from in Llanidloes, I stayed at the Unicorn which was very good costing £120 for a family room (3 people) including breakfast. Fuel was the biggest expense as the round trip was over 400 miles for us. This is easily solved by going in a group and sharing costs.

CONCLUSIONS:

Orion Firearms Training is a versatile, extensive and challenging range offering a wide range of training options open to the individuals or groups. John is a highly skilled instructor who is adamant that high end training can be achieved while having fun in a safe environment. Regardless of your experience and dependent on the package chosen you will come away with an increased skill set and a comprehensive understanding of shooting requirements. I learnt so much in my day there but have barely scraped the surface. I spent the majority grinning ear to ear like a baboon and I have already filled out my FAC forms. I'll be back!

ELITE RIFLE DAYS/SNIPER CHALLENGE

£500 per person for 1 to 1 tuition
 £700 for 2 people for 2 to 1 tuition
 Duration: 1 day - 9am to 5pm
 Standard Range Days
 £360 (weekdays), £450 (weekends)
 1 to 3 people shooting
 Additional shooters £120/£150 per person.
 All prices exclude ammunition
 Duration: 1 day - 9am to 5pm

Sniper Challenge

£200.00 per person Gift certificates can be purchased, please call the office
 Duration: 1 day - 9am to 5pm
 Contact: Orion Firearms Training, 01686 412113, 07449 327006
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