

May 2018

Neil Vann shoots 400,000 registered target.

**Question;** How do you eat an elephant? **Answer;** One bite at a time! On May 19, 2018 at the California State Championship, Neil Vann shot at and broke his 400,000<sup>th</sup> registered skeet target. It's difficult to grasp that number. The first bite of the elephant was taken In October 1977 at Miramar Gun Club in San Diego, California.

Okay, 40 years of shooting 10,000 targets per year. It doesn't seem like that daunting of a task. But it's not that simple. For the first ten years or so Neil like most of us shot 3000-6000 targets per year. In 1991 he began to ramp it up, shooting 16,650 that year. And he kept up the pace. Neil was usually near the top of the list on targets shot annually. In 1996 he shot an astounding 25,100. At that point he was keeping track. Upon completion of that year he had accumulated 177,550 putting him #36 in lifetime targets. The following year he was #20.

Born in San Francisco, a stay in Everett Washington, a brief stop in North Dakota, Neil escaped the cold by making it to San Diego. Miramar Gun Club was home to Neil, later becoming San Diego Shotgun Sports. He was the Association President three times and ran the skeet program from 1998 to 2005. He and his volunteers put on monthly shoots that were always well attended. The formula? Accommodating and friendly staff, good targets, lunch, and plenty of cheer. An interesting twist, Neil conducted the shootoffs beginning with the D or E class shooters. That was his method for keeping the crowd around, insuring that the up-and-coming shooters got some attention as well. So Neil wasn't just shooting. He was contributing and giving back. Of course Neil will say that the sport has given him much more than he has given it.

For many years his squad consisted of Grey Silva, Neil Vann, Vern Gideon, Billy Nightingale, and Craig Potter. Keith Phelps was also known to join the group. Incidentally, Miramar was also home to the great Brian Holt. Neil speaks fondly of his friends along the way. Most notable perhaps is his son Doug, whom he calls his inspiration. A fierce wheelchair competitor, Doug set a number of world records that include 100 straights in the 12 and 28, and 99/100 in the 410. Neil's wife Barbara is a saint, they make a beautiful couple and family.

It was also at Miramar that Neil broke his first 100 straight. It was in the 12 gauge in 1979. His first straight in the 28 was shot at the World Championship in 1983. To date he has accumulated 111 straights including 3 in the 410 bore and 2 in the Doubles event. He has visited 26 gun clubs, and participated in 16 World Skeet Championships his first being 1983. Neil was inducted into the California Skeet Shooting Hall of Fame in 2002. All of his lifetime averages exceed .91, the HOA being .9423 at the end of 2017. Impressive numbers.

Today Neil is a Super Veteran. But to sit and talk to him you would hardly know it. You can pry a story from times past if you press him. Mostly he focuses on the present and the future. He recently said, "This is the greatest game ever. It's something you can do your whole life. I still enjoy every day at the

range shooting skeet. It has been such a great journey. There is so much more yet to do.” And pay attention when he’s around. Chances are there is a colorful story or expression mixed into the conversation. Most of his humor is self-deprecating. Neil has a tremendous ability to laugh at himself.

Most embarrassing moment over the years? It involved his son Doug who had his first shoot off, at the Miramar Gun Club. Wanting to insure his son’s success, Neil thoroughly cleaned Doug’s shotgun prior to the tie breaker. Doug took the first station, called, moved for the target,..... nothing. Neil had clicked the safety on while cleaning the shotgun. Lost! Doug never said a word.

If the San Diego Shotgun Sports Association were still in existence the chances are this would have been 500K targets, a number which has always been in the crosshairs. Since 2008 he has averaged only 3500 per year without a nearby venue. That’s not for lack of willingness. And recently he has stepped up the annual count. Today Neil is #6 in lifetime targets. He has been as high as #5. He shows no sign of slowing down. In fact, recent developments may support a much higher annual count. There are still 100,000 bites of elephant left to go. Neil certainly has the appetite. Congratulations Neil Vann on your momentous achievement. Keep going amigo.

Contributed by Chris Baker