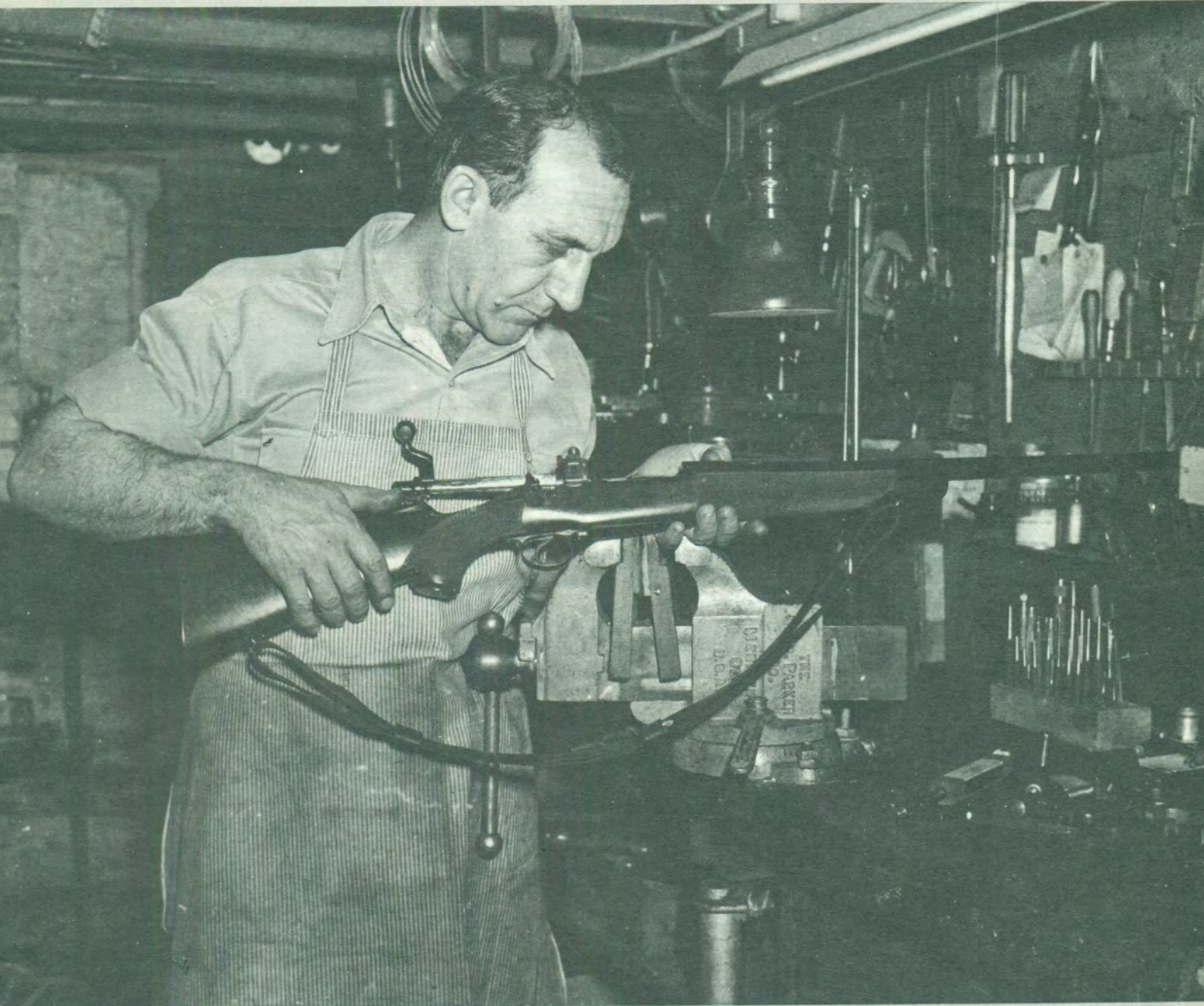


AUGUST, 1982  
Vol. 28 — No. 4  
\$1.50

*Precision*

# SHOOTING

*a magazine for shooters by shooters*



# Supershoot Eve Interview

Don Geraci - Alan Hall - Jeff Fowler

by  
Dave Brennan

'Twas the eve before the start of Supershoot X, and 122 shooters were wandering about in the gathering darkness, swapping tall stories, old memories, and cans of cold Budweiser, in no particular order of preference. Your scribe, while looking for the lost chord or something found himself with three individuals who were comfortably seated, had adequate liquid refreshment, and were determined to talk about benchresting . . . Don Geraci, Allan Hall and Jeff Fowler . . . and that's pretty heavy company in the benchrest world, my friend. At the stage that it became obvious that we had one heck of a great discussion going, Yours Truly came up with a pad and pencil, and said, "do you mind if I ask a few questions?" The author's hat is off to the three, they didn't duck or sidestep the questions that I threw out.

REPORTER: Okay, let me toss the first question at Jeff Fowler. Jeff, at the IBS Winter Meeting, in the cocktail lounge discussion that went on into the small hours, when we were talking about the hottest benchrest shooter today, there was a good sized number of votes for Jeff Fowler. But there were also a couple who said, "he's a fine shot, but he's got a real hot barrel. Let's see how he does when he shoots it out."

FOWLER: Hmmm . . . well, I've spent a lot of time and money to make certain that I have the best equipment I can put my hands on. As far as "one hot barrel" goes, I won The Super Shoot with one gun, I won the NBRSA Varmint Nationals with another gun, and I was second at the NBRSA Big Gun Nationals with yet another gun.

REPORTER: Describe the gun that you're doing so well with in the varmint ranks, please.

FOWLER: An Allan Hall standard action, with a McMillan barrel, a McMillan stock, gunsmithed by Broughton, and stocked by Fred Sinclair. It's a ten and a half pounder, and I shot it all the way in the varmint nationals. I made my own bullets, 63 grains, in Sherman carbide dies.

REPORTER: You certainly had a good 1981. I presume that you're shooting the

same outfit in 1982?

FOWLER: No, curiosity has got to me, and I've decided to shoot .22 caliber in 1982. I'm playing with two cartridges, one a standard .22 PPC, and the other is a one-tenth inch shorter. I'm shooting my own bullets, 51 grains, made in Rorschach dies. I'm using 4198 powder in the short one and 4895 in the full length one. I'd use 4198 in both, if I could, but I can't get enough of it in the full length case. I'm going to shoot it all year and see what happens. I know from my testing with a chronograph that my usual 6MM match load turns up around 3450 feet per second, and I'm getting 3600 f.p.s. out of the short .22PPC case right now.

REPORTER: We in the east really haven't had much luck using 4198 in the PPC case, and I know that you western shooters do very well with it. Do you have any theories why this is so?

GERACI: I could duck that question, and give you a lot of verbal razzle-dazzle, but I won't. 4198 powder has more variation from lot to lot than other powders that benchrest shooters use. You've got to test different lot numbers, and when you find one that shoots, buy a heck of a lot of it. You can't dismiss the powder as not being any good based on one lot, you've got to try other lots before you give it up. Some shoot great, some shoot poorly.

FOWLER: You find the right lot of 4198, and in my opinion, you won't use anything else.

REPORTER: Jeff, as the guy that runs Fowler Shooters Supply, are you seeing .22 caliber picking up?

FOWLER: We sure as heck are. I judge caliber popularity by the sales of three items: barrels, bullets, and Wilson straight-line seaters. Two years ago, the 6MM outsold the .22 by a four to one ratio. Today they are dead even in sales.

GERACI: I think that .22 caliber originally lost its popularity at the time that we went to short, heavy barrels in the varmint classes. Velocity, and to a degree accuracy, fell off when we went to real short barrels in the .22, but today the caliber is coming back. Jeff is shooting one, I'm shooting one, and I honestly feel that the .22 is just a better caliber, period.

REPORTER: Let's talk about equipment in general. We're going to have 122 shooters on line tomorrow. What do you think about their equipment in general?

GERACI: Let's touch on the shooters, first. I suspect that 50% of the shooters who will be on line tomorrow could win it. The other 50% will be spinning their wheels. Now, of the 50% who have a chance at winning, several have rifles that probably would outshoot Jeff, if fired in a testing tunnel. But few have done any mental preparation for the match, and that's where they lose out. Benchrest shooting is an advanced sport, and you should expect to see more mental preparation than the shooters give to a large match.

FOWLER: I had my equipment tuned as best I could do it by noon today. I put them away at noon, and the rest of the afternoon has been visiting, and mental preparation.

GERACI: The real top shooters today are — surprisingly — not small group shooters. I won The Crawfish two weeks ago, and didn't win a single match. Jeff is not a small group shooter either, but he'll kill you in the aggregate.

REPORTER: How would you characterize yourselves as far as shooting style goes?

HALL: All three of us shoot fast — find a condition, and shoot in it. Shoot fast, but, be prepared to stop, just as fast.

FOWLER: I'll agree with that. If I have my condition going, I'll shoot when that gun is still moving, if I think the condition is about to leave. The gun may be still moving, but the crosshairs are where I want them when it goes off. I've never had an equipment failure in a match, but if you travel a thousand miles to get to the match, you sure as heck ought to take steps to minimize your exposure to equipment failure.

REPORTER: Explain that one, please.

FOWLER: Okay, I constantly see fellows go to the firing line with a loading block in hand, and seven cartridges in it. The fellow fires two sighters, and then starts to fire his five record shots with the five cartridges that he has left. He's left himself no sighters for condition changes, and just as bad, if that trigger discharges the rifle as he closes the bolt, he has just disqualified unless he can get back to the loading area and load a round, real fast. That's absurd, never fire your final cartridge unless you've got your five record shots on the paper. I traveled over a thousand miles to get here, and maybe another shooter will beat me, but I assure you that no dumb equipment problem will beat me. We'll be shooting here four days. Each day, when I go to the line, I'll have

a rifle here in my trailer, with a clean dry bore, all sighted in, and a bunch of loaded ammo right next to it. If I have an equipment problem that I can't solve on the line, I can run back here, get the other rifle and ammo, and be back to the line in time to shoot the required number of shots. That sir is simply being prepared, as I see it.

GERACI: Another advantage to shooting fast. If you wait until the last minute, you've left yourself no time to deal with emergencies.

REPORTER: How many sighters do you fellows use on average?

GERACI: About three sighters is average.

HALL: Two, maybe three.

FOWLER: In a varmint match, four sighters would be average.

REPORTER: Let's talk about "holding off". Do you do it as a practice?

GERACI: I don't hold for vertical, only if my first shot goes up or down on the record target. If that happens, it's back to the sighter to find out why. For horizontal, I'll hold off up to a quarter inch, but at 200 yards I'll hold off up to two inches if the conditions require it, and my nerve is up to it. Most verticals are either gun trouble or bag trouble.

HALL: I don't like to hold vertical, usually I try not to do so. Horizontals make winners or losers, matches are won or lost on horizontal spread, not vertical.

FOWLER: I'll go even further, and probably surprise you with this one, but not one of the three of us here believes that light changes has any effect on verticals. We have never been able to establish that it does, and that includes a lot of testing with mechanical rests.

REPORTER: Have any of you had the case of a gun that shoots to a slightly different point of impact on the record target than it does on the sighter right below it?

GERACI: If my first record shot doesn't go where my sighters are printing, I will go back down on the sighter. I do this when I think everything was the same as when I was shooting sighters. If I think the condition has changed for the first shot and it goes away from the sighters, but where I think the condition moved the shot then I will keep shooting on record.

REPORTER: What sort of condition (other than a beautiful calm) would you prefer to shoot in?

GERACI: I think of myself as a wind shooter. I know that mirage is more consistent, but I've had more experience with wind.

HALL: I'll shoot wind or mirage with equal acceptance, but I prefer mirage.

FOWLER: I agree with Allan, and I also prefer mirage. You mentioned "other than a beautiful calm", and to that I'll add the opinion that both Allan and I will move up in the standings in rotten conditions, so maybe the beautiful calm isn't that great an idea.

GERACI: When conditions get rough, a lot of shooters get pessimistic, and that's a poor way to mentally prepare yourself. At Austin last year, many shooters were beaten before they started.

REPORTER: Let's talk about practice. How many practice shots did you folks fire last year?

GERACI: I fired about 1000 shots not in matches. But, I don't shoot practice to shoot small groups, I fire practice to tune my guns. When they are properly tuned, doing what I want them to, I stop practicing.

HALL: I'm now at the point (15 years plus) that gun handling, position, technique comes automatically. I guess I fired 500 rounds outside of matches last year.

FOWLER: When I get a new gun or a new barrel, I'll chronograph it, and work up the load that seems to shoot best in it. Last year I didn't fire a single round outside of a match, for the sake of practice. I fired 500 to 600 rounds tuning rifles.

HALL: Many new shooters mistake tuning for practice. You have to have a rifle that you have confidence in.

GERACI: If I've put the rifle away for a period of a few months or longer, and now I'm going to an important match, if there have been no equipment changes, I'll check it out with a few groups. If it's okay, I'll put it away.

REPORTER: What do you see as the probable life-span of a good benchrest barrel today?

GERACI: Well, certainly 3000 rounds is entirely reasonable for gilt-edge shooting. I had one barrel, a Hart, that the late Dr. Sam Nadler started out with, chambered first for a Wasp. Sam changed it to a .222 later, and then after Red Cornelison won the Big Gun Nationals with a 23-40, Sam had it re-chambered to that new cartridge. The barrel came to me in 1969, I shot it to 1973. The barrel was about 10 years old when I retired it, but the last match I shot it in, I won. I would est. about 12,000

rounds had been shot at that time. Damn good barrel!

FOWLER: I won at Midland recently with a McMillan barrel that has 12,000 rounds through it, and my winning aggregate was in the teens. The gun that I won the last two varmint nationals with has between 4000 and 5000 rounds through it.

HALL: The 6PPC that I'll be shooting here at Supershoot is now in its fourth year, and has 3000 rounds through it.

REPORTER: What can I expect for gilt-edge barrel life from a 6PPC barrel?

HALL: 2000-2500 on average.

GERACI: 3000 on average.

FOWLER: More than 3000. But I'll put an addition on this subject. Barrels do not wear out from shooting to the extent that shooters think they do. A heck of a lot more shooters wear out their barrels by improper cleaning. Watch a bunch of shooters cleaning their rifles tomorrow. They have the cleaning rod bent like a rainbow . . . when the rod is bent that way outside the barrel, it's also bent that way inside the barrel, and that scrubbing the lands and grooves, and that's murder on a barrel! Keep that rod straight!

REPORTER: How many passes do you make through a barrel after shooting?

HALL: Three complete passes (in and out) with the brush, and two patches.

FOWLER: Three with the brush, two or three patches.

GERACI: Ten passes with the brush, two patches.

REPORTER: So much for now, fellows, it's kind of late. Who's going to win this thing, anyway?

HALL: I am.

FOWLER: I am.

GERACI: I am.

Footnote: Geraci won the big one, the two gun, after having won the 200 yard heavy bench, the grand agg heavy bench, was fifth at 200 yards heavy varmint, and third in the grand agg heavy varmint. I saw almost all his targets, and if any one of his 200 yard targets had more than .300 vertical dispersion, I'll eat my hat.

- FINIS -

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