



NEIL CHADWICK

A PROFILE OF AN
INDUSTRY INSIDER,
BY DANA FARRELL

A contributor to fifteen NSCA National Championships and three World FITASC Championships over the last couple of decades, you probably know Neil Chadwick as a sought after target setter. If you're a shooting range owner or manager you may think of him as the owner of Long Range LLC., a state of the art electronic clay target release and counting system. If you've been in the sporting clays game for more than

a few years, you may remember him as an accomplished shooter – a force to be reckoned with in his day on any FITASC layout or sporting course.

A Shooter First

Born 60 years ago near Cambridge, England, Chadwick grew up on a farm, shooting wood pigeons, crows, pheasants and rabbits – a typical experience for a rural English youth raised in the

mid-20th century. He was first introduced to clay target shooting by way of NSSA Skeet on an American Air Force base in the UK in 1975, an experience he says, that left him hooked on shooting for life. Getting into competing seriously soon thereafter, he developed into a very accomplished shot, making the England International Skeet Team in 1987. Before long he was traveling the world shooting FITASC.

After majoring in communications at college, the young Chadwick found work with the British government for a couple of years, then took a job with computer giant IBM, where he stayed for nearly 20 years. He took early retirement in the late 1980s, when the popularity of the PC was causing a profound shift in the computer industry. With IBM layoffs numbering 70,000 worldwide, Chadwick accepted the company's 'Golden Handshake' and left to carve out a living of his own design.

In the late 1980s he met Andy Duffy and Jon Kruger while shooting the World FITASC Championship in France and they urged him to come to the States to shoot. He recalls that his first experience shooting on this side of the pond was at Hopkins' Game Farm in Maryland in 1990.

Eventually immigrating to the US in the early 1990s, he first settled near the New Jersey/New York State line, eventually moving to a rural 14 acre country spread in New Hampshire where he and wife Debbie sometimes discover moose and bears wandering through their garden! Once in the US he continued to compete, highlighted by winning HOA at the 1995 SCA Nationals at Addieville East Farm.

As a member of a steering committee formed by Hal DuPont

to promote FITASC in the United States, Chadwick helped ease American shooters into the international sport in the mid-1990s. Many influential people in the shooting industry at the time were opposed to bringing FITASC to the States, but DuPont's group paved the way for what is now an integral part of the American shooting fabric. "Neil was very good at spreading English influences and experience to the game, without being obnoxiously English. He didn't lord it over anyone – he knew that he was in the US and that US shooters were his audience," says Will Fennell. It's safe to say that without the input of Chadwick and a few like-minded others, the US might never have produced World FITASC champions, as they have over the past decade.

Target Setter

Chadwick got increasingly involved in target setting as his focus gradually shifted from competitor to that of professional target setter – having gained valuable experience setting targets at Wilobe Farm, a small shooting ground he owned in England in the mid-80s. "Good shots would ask – hey, can you set me up a downhill target sliding away, because I was just at a shoot and they had one that I couldn't hit. We set up hundreds of different targets for such people at Wilobe Farm, and that really gave me an insight into what the good shooters were having difficulty with," he said. He'd been shooting competitions for 10 years at that point and been all over the world shooting and seen just about every target presentation possible. "They get stored away in the memory bank. With my computer background I'm a very analytical

and a logical thinking sort of guy, so I don't find it difficult to set a target that doesn't need to be 60 yards away. I can put a target 25 yards out and make it do something that the shooter may find difficult to understand. Having said that, the level of shooting in the US has reached such a high standard, that it can get a little difficult sometimes to try and beat some of the top shots – but I must be doing something right because they keep asking me to come back to the Nationals." He says it's his deep love of the sport, and certainly not the money, that keeps him in the target setting business.

Early on after moving to the States, he was asked by a New York State club owner to help improve his repeat business. His clientele liked the club, but he just wasn't getting the return business he needed. All his traps – manuals at the time – were concreted into the ground on wooden posts. Chadwick bluntly told him to "go get your chainsaw and cut those wooden posts down, then move the traps around the grounds – that

will make your clientele happy!" Increasingly sought out for course design and target setting for several years, beginning around 1995, his target setting business kept him on the road six months each year. "I was away more than I was home," he said. Will Fennell recalls Chadwick's entrance into the American target setting arena. "Neil sets great targets. He really raised the bar at the time and got people exposed to another level of target setting. He was the first hired target setter that I remember. When someone complained that a target was too difficult, he was not afraid to take their gun and break it for them!"

An effort to diversify his business plan led him to set up a company to import European shotshells to the States – Victory Ammunition. The enterprise didn't last too long; he decided it was just too hard to compete with the bigger ammo companies on the market. He published a popular East Coast monthly shooting news sheet for a while, called the Clay Pigeon, which eventually was

bought out by ClayShootingUSA magazine, taking with it some of the writers that still write for this magazine today.

Around that same time he also sold Promatic traps, which continued until he purchased Long Range LLC. in 2001. In addition to remote releases, the original Long Range company made restaurant pagers, a very profitable product line. Not wanting the responsibility of providing ongoing service to their remote release customers, they sold that portion of the business off to Chadwick, who as a shooter and computer expert, was perfectly suited to run with it.

Long Range

His new company, Long Range LLC, evolved rapidly. "Within a couple of years I started to redesign the complete system and looked to make things compatible with what we were actually selling at the time. It was impossible at that time to do what I wanted it to do. They were using a frequency that was FCC licensed – just one frequency. If you're going to operate multiple radio systems, you really want them on different frequencies. If they're all on the same frequency you're going to get trouble with things not firing because one signal is cancelling out another." Within a couple of years Chadwick redesigned the system using the public (unlicensed) radio spectrum, where he could divide up the frequencies. His redesign allows him to operate 15 machines per frequency – with a total of 250 frequencies. To illustrate the success capable with Chadwick's technological approach, every single trap in use at the 2013 Nationals (408 in total) was operated by his remote control technology.



NEIL CHADWICK WITH NSCA DIRECTOR BRETT MOYES AT THE 2013 NATIONALS.



Long Range has six employees, including Chadwick's wife Debbie and stepson Jeremy. All the software engineering is contracted out. Circuit boards are all made in the US and populated with components, then shipped to Long Range, with Chadwick's staff performing the final assembly and testing of the different systems. Customer service is paramount – and free upgrades are provided for the life of the product. “We overnight things when we don't really need to and we loan stuff out to shoots. We'll often get a call – hey, we're putting on a State Shoot and want to set-up a 5-Stand – can you help us? We send them what they need – customer support is very important to me.” The product line design has evolved over time, often using suggestions from customers that have then been built into the system.

When designing a new product offering or revising an existing one, Chadwick typically writes a spec sheet detailing what he needs the equipment to do and contracted software engineers write the code to fit the need.

Sometimes it's a challenge to communicate his ideas to non-shooting engineers. For clarity, he once took a group to Pat Lieske's Island Lake Shooting Range to show them a 5-Stand layout. “As we walked up, they went Oh, okay. Without even throwing a target, they could see how it was laid out, where the machines were and it just clicked.” Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words.

Often the biggest challenge he encounters on a job is integrating machines of various brands and power sources into one cohesive system. “I wanted to make sure that I designed a system that would work with any brand of trap. A lot of grounds have a mixture of machines. A range manager will be creative and put together a 5-Stand or sporting course using whatever traps he's got on hand. We'll ascertain what they've got and build them a system that suits them. I haven't come across a machine yet that we cannot operate. We can do it either hard wired or with wireless remote control. The simplest way, and the way most people are going today, is wireless remote control.”

Long Range will send the receiver hardware out with the correct plugs for the machines so it's simply a matter of plugging the receivers in, patching the counter control unit in at the station and providing power to it. Chadwick provides live, remote support sessions over the internet when a club buys his product. He can log onto their computer remotely and actually teach them the system on line, during an interactive session. With this capability, he can take control of their PC, allowing the customer to see what he's doing, while also allowing the customer to point to something and say – okay, what does this do?

What's Next?

Long Range voice controlled remote releases are currently under development for ATA Trap, Skeet and 5-Stand. Chadwick is looking at the trap and skeet markets very closely, because in his words “You've got to get it right first time to avoid a bad reputation that's hard to bounce back from.” He's excited for the coming year and has some new ideas he's fleshing out. One cutting edge idea is using voice recognition to allow things such as throwing the option bird on a Skeet field. “We want to build some intelligence into the system,” he says enthusiastically.

Counter systems are an important product in the Long Range line, the latest version of which uses a contact-less card. The technology is called NFC (Near Field Communications), a very short range wireless communications technology that is currently in use for other devices such as Google Wallet. NFC is that cool technology that allows you to do things such as pay for your coffee by touching your phone to the appropriate reader.

DIEGO DUARTE (LEFT), ANDY DUFFY AND NEIL CHADWICK (RIGHT).



Old Times...

A recent conversation with Andy Duffy offered a light-hearted glimpse into Chadwick's past. When his name came up, Duffy said with a chuckle “He's a lot of fun. He's fearless and he's got a great sense of humor. When you combine the two it can make for some interesting times.” He related a story of a World FITASC Championship held in Andorra, a small nation in the Pyrenees Mountains between France and Spain. It was sometime in the early 1990s. Duffy was waiting for the US Team bus to pick him up for a ride to the top of the mountain to shoot. The bus zoomed past him, leaving him pondering how he'd get the top of the mountain – a 40 minute drive, when up pulls Neil. “You gotta get me to the top of the mountain. I'm shooting in 30 minutes,” said Duffy. The sequence that followed must have been like something out of a Keystone Cops silent film. They missed a turn, ending up on the wrong side of a raging river. Not one to give up easily, Neil startled an old woman walking along when he drove the rental car across a footbridge, pulling up to the Parcours just as Duffy's name was being called for the third time! ■