

Mr. and Mrs. Benchrest . . . Tony and Faye Boyer

BY JAMES MOCK

The 2009 Super Shoot is now history and during this event, history was made. Tony Boyer won the two-gun for an unprecedented fifth time. He and Don Geraci had been tied with four victories each before this year's event.

The interview was done prior to the beginning of the competition, but I had a feeling that Tony was hungry for the fifth victory.

Faye Boyer is the only female member in the Benchrest Hall of Fame. This attests to her tremen-

dous skill as a Benchrest shooter. She along with Allen Arnette and Wayne Campbell, earned Hall of Fame honors with Tony as a mentor.

Tony told me that he has no secrets, but he sure has methods that seem to improve the ability of those who he teaches.

The following questions were answered by Tony and Faye in their motor home on Monday prior to the 37th Super Shoot.

THE INTERVIEW

James: When did you start shooting Benchrest?

Tony: Although I shot one match in 1978, my shooting career really began in 1979. I attended a "Benchrest School" and began to shoot seriously after that.

Faye: I began shooting in April, 1980.

James: Do you remember what equipment you used in the early days?

Tony: In 1978, I used a 6mm Remington (ground hog rifle). In 1979, I used a sleeved XP-100 with a Hart barrel. When Faye began, she shot this same XP and I used a Hall. She shot that rifle for seven years.

Faye: Yes, that was a great rifle. We still own that rifle.

James: Would you mind naming the gunsmiths that you have used over the years?

Tony: This may be dangerous. I am surely going to forget some, but those that come to mind are Myles Hollister, Clarence Hammonds, Clay Spencer, Speedy Gonzalez, Dwight Scott and Wayne Campbell. Dwight has chambered more than any one else and I consider him to be in a class by himself.

James: Did you experience success early in your shooting career? Many shooters that became Hall of Fame members had early success.



Tony: Yes, I won a 200 yard agg in my first match that I shot after the Benchrest School. Also, I made the Hall of Fame in six seasons of shooting, and was inducted in 1986.

Faye: Of course it depends on one's definition of success, but I think that I did well early on. We had very limited resources in those early days. We often shot a barrel for the whole year. Also, we often doubled with the same rifle (*i.e.* we shot back-to-back matches without removing the rifle from the bench.) This is hard on barrels.

Back to the question, I won two small group awards in my first match. Also, I got my first Hall of Fame points in 1987. I consider both of these as early success.

James: **Many of us do not practice in a productive way. Would you share some of your practice "secrets"?**

Tony: First, let me say that I don't practice until the wind is blowing. I may go to the range and fire only a couple of groups....because I can't get conditions that help me learn about my load in the wind. There is no use wearing out good barrels shooting small groups in calm conditions.

I believe in practice. Early on, I worked four days a week, and practiced two and half days. Also, I attended about twenty matches per year. Many people like to shoot early in the morning and late in the afternoon to get the "good conditions". I have always had trouble with these conditions because they tell you very little about your load.

Many do not have the drive to shoot in the adverse conditions, but that will show up on match days.

Faye: I once practiced quite a lot. I guess that I got over that phase. **(Tony laughed softly at this comment and went on to say that Faye could shoot very well in conditions that he would not consider trying.)** Since Tony and I attended from 20 to 23 matches a year, we both had plenty of practice under match conditions.

James: **How do you evaluate barrels?**

Tony: I have developed a system of evaluation that takes no more than 30 rounds to determine if it is going to shoot. With Hart, Shilen or other button rifled barrels, I load the bullet to about .003 off of "jam" and try four different charges of "T" powder. If these four won't shoot, then that barrel will not be used for big matches.

With the cut rifled barrels, I seat the bullets to just touch the lands. I don't "jump" bullets and will say that many think they are jumping when in fact they are not. If one coats his bullet with blue Dykem, he can see that very light mark when the bullet is just touching.

Since "T" powder is now extinct, I have switched to

N133. Although I don't have as good a handle on it as I did the "T", I am learning what to look for with it. **(James: I will say that he did pretty well with N133 at this SS)**

James: **About how many rounds do you put on a barrel before it has lost its "edge"?**

Tony: Contrary to what many say, I rarely shoot a barrel more than 600 rounds in competition. I can remember only one barrel that exceeded 1200 rounds. It was a Hart that Faye shot early in her career.

Many people find all types of excuses for a barrel not shooting. They say it was gun handling or conditions or bad bullets or out of tune....when in fact it is the barrel. Just because a barrel is capable of shooting a small group on occasion, does not mean that it is capable of winning a match.

Most barrels will start slinging a shot, but on occasion one will gradually "go away". Faye had one of those and it is maddening. The groups just get a little larger each time one shoots it. These are the toughest to diagnose.

James: **This is a little off topic, but I asked Tony if he could make me a top shooter. He chuckled a little and said he didn't know. I said that he had taught many that are top shooters.... including Wayne Campbell, Bart Sauter, Andy Shifflett, and John Brown. I let Tony off the hook by saying that I would never be a good student of his because I can't keep my head still. Because of a neck problem I cannot hold my head in one position very long. Tony said that he had changed his style because of neck problems. Once Tony sat high and was over his gun much like Andy does today, but now he sits much lower in order to get comfortable.**

Tony: John Brown and I learned this game together and I can't take credit for teaching him. Although John and I shot the same bullets, he never liked my choice of powder or my style of shooting. He was always a "picker" and he picked his way into the Hall of Fame.

James: **I am a bag squeezer. I have tried other methods, but I always return to this method. I understand that you were once a bag squeezer, but now use the Farley rest.**

Tony: I consider bag squeezing the best method for returning to point of aim quickly. I would still shoot this way if I could. The Farley with joy stick is almost as fast and works well for me since I can no longer squeeze the bag.

Faye: I am a bag squeezer who uses a Farley rest. I know that this sounds peculiar, but Tony and I use the same equipment. I simply use the joy stick to "get

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close”, and then release the joy stick and grasp the bag with my left hand. The Farley must be set tight enough to prevent the front bag from settling as the rifle is fired.

James: This is a game that puts a great deal of emphasis on small details. I notice that you have been working on brass during the interview. Do you turn your own brass and if so, what tool do you use, and how many passes are used?

Tony: Although I don't enjoy this part of the game, I do turn my own brass with a Nielson turner. When I shot a .263 neck, I turned the brass in two passes. I have since changed to a .268 neck and use one pass to complete the job. I don't shoot my brass a certain number of times, but shoot it until the bolt starts “clicking”.

James: How many times do you fire form your brass before it is ready for a match?

Tony: I like to use a little oil on my brass when I am fire forming it.

After two firings, I will use it in competition. On the second firing, I am working up loads, but I don't blame the barrel if I have an occasional flier.

James: Do the two of you shoot identical rifles?

Faye: No, I have a Farley sporter, and Tony shoots a BAT. During this match, we will probably double on his Hart HV. That old gun has really been a great one. It has earned many HOF points.

James: What are you using for other equipment these days?

Tony: We use Leupold Competition scopes, and Scoville stocks. Of course, the old Hart still has its original McMillan stock. The barrels that we are currently using are from Bartlein. I have had good luck with their gain twist barrels. As I have stated earlier, I am now using VihtaVuori powder. I have shot the same lot of N133 for the past three years (Lot #14906).

James: One of the skills that you are reported to have mastered is “reading” your target. How does one read a target and glean information that is helpful in tuning?

Tony: The first thing that I do is

look at the hole made by a single bullet. If the 6mm hole looks like a .30 caliber, then the barrel is not tuned. In other words, if you have 3 or four bullets in a small group, and one is thrown; I'll bet that the thrown shot cuts a bigger hole in the target.

Most shooters think that vertical groups are caused by too light a powder charge. This may be true, but more often than not, the rifle has more to do with this than the load. If the rifle is muzzle heavy, this can cause vertical. Also, the way the action is set in the stock can cause vertical as can handling problems...such as shouldering the rifle.

The most often used excuse that I hear today is, “My scope is bad.”

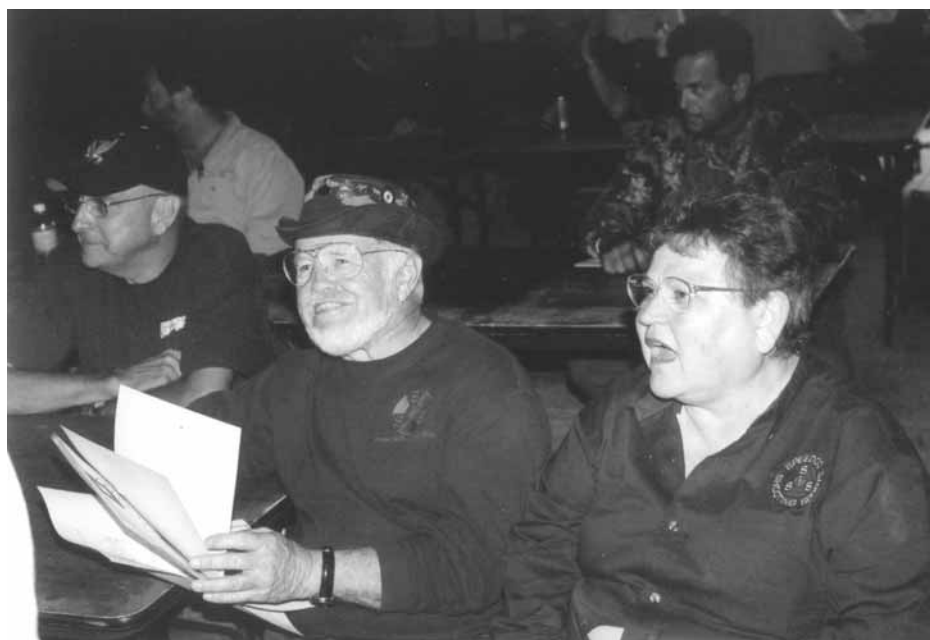
I think that many times the scope gets blamed for some other problem. I shoot Leupold Competition scopes that are unmodified.

Back to the tuning question, I have noticed that a tiny “bughole” group is often followed by a large one. If a person shoots a very tiny group with a hot load, he would be wise to reduce that load before his next trip to the line.

If a person is shooting four-and-one type groups, it probably is not the scope. A scope does not cause the fifth shot of each group to go astray. Neither the rifle nor the scope knows which shot is being fired. By that I mean if you are losing the 4th shot in each group, then look at yourself and your gun handling. If a load is too hot or too mild, the pattern seems to have a shot or two that is “spit” out of the group.

James: When tuning during a match, what do you normally change?

Tony: I will change powder charge, of course, but I will also change neck tension if the brass seems to lose some of its original tension. I don't change the seating depth during a match. Let me add



that seating depth is very critical in cut rifled barrels. I outlined above my method of finding seating depth. Once found, I will use this depth for at least 200 rounds.

The difference of .002" of seating depth can make a great difference in how a rifle shoots, but I have found that these cut rifled barrels will continue to shoot at a given depth. We both know that there is erosion taking place, but they continue to shoot well for at least 200 rounds.

James: The rifles that both of you shoot are right bolt/right port with ejectors, correct?

Faye: Yes, and I still squeeze the bag. We both use the Farley rest. I will use the joy stick to get close, then I squeeze for the final adjustment. That is my method and I make it work for me.

We use the cartridge holder that places the rounds next to the port. Let me add that I am never really comfortable at the bench. At most ranges I cannot put my feet on the ground. **(James: What would she do to the competition if she got comfortable at the bench?)**

James: Do either of you return to the sighter after starting your record shots?

Faye: Although I don't normally shoot many sighters, I will return to the bottom target if I am not sure about my previous shot.

Tony: If I go back to the sighter, you know that I am in trouble? On rare occasions I will go to the sighter if a shot did not go anywhere near its expected impact.

When I chase a shot, I normally hold 1/2 the amount that the bullet impacts away from its expected location. I do this without returning to the sighter. Most people won't do that. **(Faye: I won't.)**

James: What do you do the day before the match to get ready?

Tony: I get my brass ready, but I will not load it until the morning of the match. I normally take loads with four different powder charges to the line for the warm-up match (or the first match if there is no warm-up).

James: Tell me about your record keeping. (Faye started laughing as I asked this question, and commented that he was the King of record keeping.)

Tony: For each barrel I keep records for the number of rounds, and the data about the load, including what shim I use on the dies, etc.

Faye: He has "papers on every barrel that he has owned.

I do not record Density Altitude, temperature, barometric pressure, or relative humidity. I do all of my tuning by what I see on the target.

James: Do you shoot a different load for 200 yards?

Tony: No, I use the same load for both distances. When it comes to choosing a load, I will shoot the upper window. By that I mean if my rifle will shoot 29

grains of N133 equally well as it does 30 grains, I will shoot the 30 grain load.

Normally, I shoot my group faster at 200 yards than I do at 100. I rarely stop shooting at 200, while I will pause at 100 and wait for the conditions.

James: How do you set your flags?

Tony: I now use a straight row with the flags stepped down so that each one can be seen above the previous one. I space them at 20, 40, 60 and 80 yards for the 100 yard competition and add a 100 yard flag along with a 160 yard flag for 200 yard competition. Four flags are used at 100 and six at 200.

James: Faye, do you think that there will be other ladies who earn Hall of Fame credentials?

Faye: I have no way of knowing, of course. There are not as many women shooters today as there was a few years ago. We have several that are good shooters.

We lost Eunice Berger a few years ago, and she was an excellent shooter. Today, we have several that have the capability to excel in this game. Those that come to mind are Vera Carter, Dianne Pretti, Oleta Thomas, and Carolyn Libby.

James: Tony, there is a vicious rumor floating around that you are going to start shooting rimfire competition. I need you to confirm or deny this.

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Tony: Yeah, I am going to give it a try. They say that it is going to be “trying” on me. We’ll see how it goes. (**James:** I am sure that he will do well.)

James: Many of the readers are wondering if I am going to ask about your book. When will we see your upcoming book about Benchrest shooting?

Tony: If it is not out by January 1, 2010, there will be no book. I am told that a cover photo is all that is needed to complete the book, but if there are delays past the first of the year, we are going to scrap the whole idea.

James: If you had to choose one “secret” to help a shooter compete at the highest level, what would you tell him or her?

Tony: If you have the means, buy as many barrels as possible. A great barrel is the real secret of this game. There are barrels out there that shoot better than they should. They have been given the name “hummer”. I can assure you that they exist.

I ended the interview at this point. For their assistance and candid remarks, I wish to thank Tony and Faye for their valuable time. I can only hope that his book is on the market soon for our readers.

For all of their accomplishments, they remain humble.

To those who have not shot Benchrest and don’t realize just how good Tony is; let me compare him to Richard Petty of NASCAR. Richard won 200 races in the top series (Winston Cup or now Sprint cup). If you are not a race fan, maybe one could compare him to Tiger Woods in golf.

Tony is the best Benchrest

shooter of all times and his record of 122 HOF points (and counting) may never be equaled. Not only did he win the Super Shoot for the fifth time, he received the Precision Shooting, “Shooter Of The Year” award for an unprecedented eleventh time.

He still has the Tony School, but you will have to travel to Keezletown, VA to take advantage of this. He is building a house and cannot travel to different ranges as he did in the past.

I have learned much from watching these two great shooters and from this interview. I hope that I have enough skill in writing his thoughts that each reader will benefit from it.

James Mock

