

# CZECH-MATES

Keith Warburton and his club take on the might of the Czech Republic on the eve of the Worlds



Never mind the Hunter Field Target (HFT) World Championships that took place at Kelmarsh, an almost equally prestigious event took place the day before: the International HFT competition between the Czech Republic (CZ) and Cambridge HFT club (postcode CB).

Matt Rawlings, Cambridge HFT's chairman, met Jakub Vicher, head of the Czech HFT team, at the 2013 World Championships and the two had maintained contact. Matt offered them a warm-up event prior to 'The Worlds', to help shake out the kinks, both physical and technical, that the 30-hour journey to the UK might have caused, and thus the CZ v CB International was born.

## Czech Point

When the Czechs arrived in their swish-looking coach, we were rather surprised to find they'd just travelled the fifty-plus miles south from their hotel in Rugby, but there's a good deal of logic behind that: on the following

**Above:** Alex Honeywell secured his third place with a standing shot

**Left:** Dusan gets his award from Matt Rawlings

**Below:** The CZ team's matching smocks were sponsored by JSB, but we weren't jealous ... much

day they'd only have a ten or fifteen minute trip to the 'Worlds' competition venue.

After a bit of 'getting to know you', the visitors settled down to checking their kit out on the zeroing and plinking range. It was encouraging to see that their selection of rifles was pretty similar to what we see in UK competitions, including BSA and Ripley. Walther (4) and Steyr (6) had the best representation, but there were also a couple of Czech-manufactured CZ200S which, when imported by Air Arms, becomes the Air Arms S200.

In all there were 16 shooters from the Czech Republic, and 39

representing Cambridge HFT. We felt the balance was about right. With some thought of putting a bit of pressure on the visitors for the following day I had a word with one of our junior shooters, Emily Jones, and told her it was important that she get a higher score than at least one of the adult Czechs.

The format of the competition was spelled out by Matt during the safety brief (there's a mandatory 'safety' at all HFT competitions). The scores for the top ten shooters from each side would be totalled to find the top team, while the top individuals would be decided in the usual manner of best score (potentially 60 points from 30 targets)



54 AIR GUNNER [www.airgunshooting.co.uk](http://www.airgunshooting.co.uk)

with the winning three places to be decided by a shoot-off if necessary.

Some of the Czechs shot in mixed groups with CB shooters, and others preferred to stay with their countrymen. The language gap might have had something to do with it because, surprise, surprise, none of our lot spoke a word of Czech!

## Not a Contender

I shot with fellow Air Gunner contributor Anne Higgins and her dad, Phil Russell. Their scores (54 and 53) put my 40 to shame, but they were both shooting .177 whilst I was shooting .22 - that's my official excuse for the day. We were all competing in the 'Open' category with no separate .22 prizes to be awarded, so I was never going to be a contender anyway.

Much like the shooters, the day was bright and breezy, and that breeziness goes a long way to explaining Cambridge's team win. In conversation with Lukasz Radaj of the Czech

team, he explained that most of their HFT shooting takes place either in sheltered forests or in mountainous areas, and they seldom have to contend with strong winds, but they are really good at elevated targets. Shooting in neighbouring Poland, he said, often takes place in windy conditions

Lukasz is in fact a Pole and HFT shooting is very popular in his home country, and often takes place in windy conditions. When he'd moved to the Czech Republic in 2008, he'd looked for HFT shooting and found there wasn't any, the Czechs were shooting their own version, a blend of Field Target (FT) and HFT, and he was largely responsible for getting the Czechs to take up the UK / International version of the pastime. Today, there are approximately 60 people who regularly participate in their key national competitions.

## Overcoming Wind

With the Czechs not being used to the

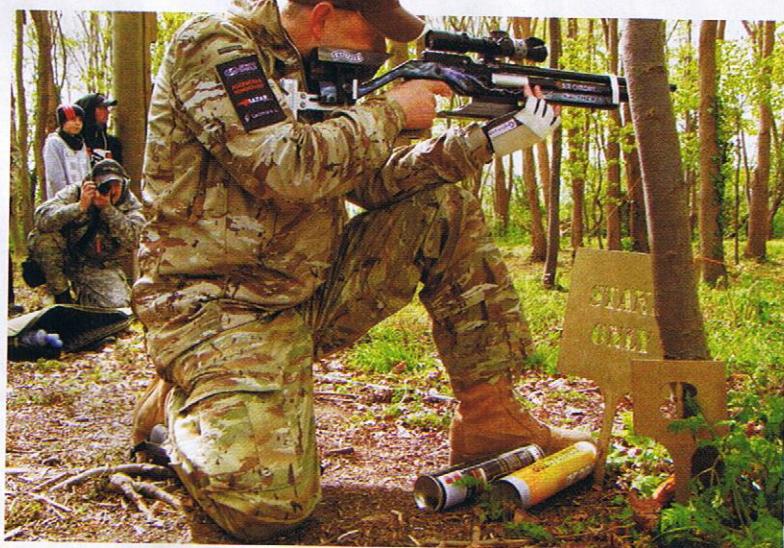
playful winds we 'enjoy' at Cambridge, we managed a win in the team event by 337 over 313 points. The individual competition was much harder fought with shoot-offs for the top three places. First and second places went to Dusan Mandat (CZ) and Simon Vant (CB) respectively (58 points), whilst Alex Honeywell beat Ladislav Pusztat into fourth place after they'd both come in with 56 points. Oh, and 12-year-old Emily Jones, with a score of 42, managed to beat two of the Czech shooters and equalled the score

**"It was encouraging to see that their selection of rifles was pretty similar to what we see in UK competitions"**

of another of them.

So how should we account for these great results from such a young team? Now, I wouldn't say that they in any way had an unfair advantage, but is it entirely coincidental that JSB, a major manufacturer of air rifle pellets, is based in the Czech Republic? And is it completely coincidental that the team is sponsored by them, and that the non-shooting member of the group who was lurking around just happens to be Jiri Prazan, the Technical Director of JSB? I think not.

Rumours of 'specially selected batches of pellets' were heard ... and admitted, but I have to say those pellets were also made available to the Cambridge shooters, which was incredibly generous of our new friends from the Czech Republic. We look forward to finding out if using them improves our shooting in time for next year. ■



**Left:** Simon's miss allowed Dusan to take the title with his Walther

**Below left:** The Czech shooters often make use of stools - what a good idea

**Below:** Ladislav couldn't handle the Cambridge wind

