

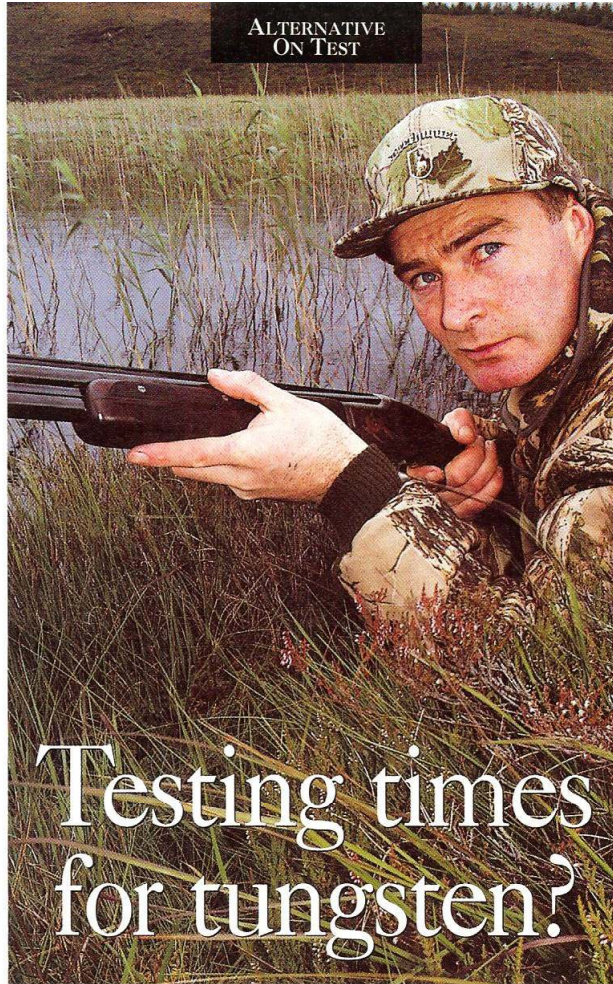
Prior to setting off on a recent wildfowling expedition I automatically referred to my printed tide tables to confirm the height and time of high water and then absent-mindedly flicked on the Teletext to see what the weather held in store. Two simple actions that nowadays we take completely for granted, so vast and accessible is the sea of information that surrounds us. A far cry from the days of our great grandfathers when weather prediction was more black art than science and the use of a tide table pre-supposed that the poor professional wildfowler could actually read!

How fortunate you might think then, are today's sportsmen for whom the veil of ignorance has been torn aside from practically every facet of shooting. Take ballistics for example. Our Victorian predecessors were great ones for conducting field trials on new innovations, everything from choke boring to shot size, from wadding to powder was tested in the field and the results published. Simply read Greener and Payne-Gallwey to see what I mean.

Yet for some inexplicable reason the modern shooting community seems to have abandoned the robust Victorian philosophy of 'never mind the manufacturer's claims, let's test it for ourselves', which is why, on the very eve of changeover to non-toxic shot for wetland shooting, unless you've actually tried the various alternatives for yourself, you really don't know anything about their performance at all.

True, you may have picked up on popular rumour and opinion as to the efficiency of any given lead substitute, but that is all it is - rumour and opinion. Hardly the springboard from which to launch shooting into the 21st century.

The simple fact is that quantifiable, independent, live quarry field trials of non-toxic shot have simply not, with one



PHOTOGRAPH: WILLIAM BARTLETT

Pattern plates and rumours among mates are not enough to offer a warm welcome to a new alternative shot, argues **Nick Horten**. Whilst reports of Tungsten Matrix have varied from incredible to good, the results of a detailed field trial conducted by the Langstone wildfowling suggest that the new kid on the block is not quite what it seems.

notable exception, been carried out. That exception being Eley Hawk's bismuth which was shot for an entire season by members of the Langstone Wildfowling who meticulously recorded the results of every cartridge fired. And very encouraging results they were too. Stripped of any manufacturer's hype the naked performance of bismuth was revealed as a worthy, if expensive, alternative to lead.

Independent field trials of

shotgun ammunition are not difficult to organise, so for this reason, and having got into the habit of recording data for every cartridge fired, the Langstone Wildfowling decided at the start of this season to carry out an unbiased test of the new Kent-Gamebore IMPACT Tungsten Matrix cartridge. Remember if you will that this trial involves shooting not at brittle clay pigeons but at teal, wigeon and mallard on the marsh through a

variety of different guns.

We are told by the manufacturers of Tungsten Matrix that shot pellets are 'consistently uniform' in density perhaps, but much of the shot is anything but spherical. Cut a cartridge open and see for yourself. We are told that comparison testing carried out for Penn State University confirmed IMPACT's superiority over 'three leading brands' of cartridge. I do not doubt this superiority of 'total energy and pattern density' but what exactly were the other 'three leading brands'? The comparison is meaningless without knowing.

Any field test conducted on live quarry has to have in-built safeguards for humanitarian reasons which is why a previous Langstone Wildfowling's trial of some early steel loads was abandoned. The number of cripples was simply unacceptable.

I deeply regret that, on the evidence available to date, the continuation of the IMPACT trial is by no means a foregone conclusion. The cartridge being tested is the 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ oz load in No 5 shot, specifically selected since it enabled a direct comparison with results obtained from the previous bismuth trial. The figures obtained to date are presented in the form of an abbreviated table which details the most pertinent findings.

As a keen wildfowler I had desperately hoped that Tungsten Matrix would prove to be another successful lead replacement. Sadly in my opinion, and that of my fellow testers the particular cartridge we have tried to date is anything but that. Surely though, with the demise of lead from the wildfowling scene now only months away, the time is ripe to remove the responsibility of field testing the various non-toxic cartridges, from which every fowler must ultimately choose, from the shoulders of a few gunners in a tiny south coast club.

Field trials, producing

quantifiable results conducted by hundreds of wildfowlers across the breadth of the country, liaising through a national shooting organisation directly with the cartridge manufacturers and publishing its findings, must surely be an improvement on the present situation whereby fowlers have only rumour, opinion and the manufacturer's claims upon which to base their choice of non-toxic ammunition.

I strongly suspect that, faced with the same fundamental changes to the very fabric of the

sport of field shooting, our Victorian forebears would fearlessly and forcibly have done no less. □

● A copy of *Langstone Wildfowlers report on the field testing of bismuth, containing details of the methodology used in that, and the present Tungsten Matrix trial, is available from ~~the author on 01253 502484~~ Price £5. Readers will be notified of the publication date of the results of the independent trial of the IMPACT Tungsten Matrix 1 1/4oz No 5 shot cartridge in due course.*

From the foreshore...

Interim results of Langstone Wildfowlers field trial of the Kent-Gamebore IMPACT Tungsten Matrix 1 1/4oz No 5 shot, 12 bore cartridge, with comparative results of a previous field trial of Eley Hawk's Bismuth loaded Alphamax 1 1/4oz No 5 shot, 12 bore cartridge.

	TUNGSTEN MATRIX	BISMUTH
Cartridges fired	116	109
Shots connected with quarry	53	59
Birds killed outright	3	38
Birds wounded	50	21
Birds retrieved	11	51
Birds lost	42	8

THE ABOVE EXPRESSED AS A % OF SHOTS CONNECTED WITH QUARRY

Connected	45.68%	54.12%
Killed	5.66%	64.4%
Wounded	94.3%	35.6%
Retrieved	20.7%	86.4%
Lost	79.2%	13.5%

No geese were shot/shot at during the Tungsten Matrix trial. For a complete definition and explanation of the above terms see the published report.

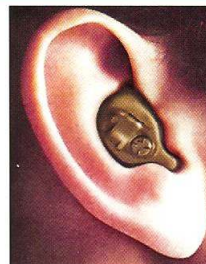
TUNGSTEN MATRIX - A REVELATION ON GESE

Despite the findings of the Langstone Wildfowlers regarding the effectiveness of Tungsten Matrix, several others have found that this alternative to lead performs excellently, both inland and on the foreshore.

One such body is Wells & District Wildfowling Club which has distributed Tungsten Matrix cartridges to its members for use on the geese on the north Norfolk coast - and with promising results. Kevin Thatcher, chairman of the club, said: "Around 20 of our members have reported back with a unanimous thumbs up for Tungsten Matrix. These are wildfowlers with years of goose shooting experience on the foreshore around here. I think the lads were a little disappointed that 3" cartridges are not yet available but they felt that the 2 3/4" loads performed at least as well as any of the other alternatives. The general response seemed to be: 'This is good but can we have 3" loads and 10 bore loads?'"



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