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Clockwise from above: Clive Hurn, Nick Holt, Richard Barron, Jean de Mouy; Xavier Bureau, Eric de La Bigne, Edward King, Christopher Burnham; Piper Jonty Barron at the Signet Library, Edinburgh; Stewart Henderson, 'Top Gun' Antoine Housset, committee chairman Edward King; Champagne in the library; Graziel d'Estalencx on the trigger; Alison Nicol checks her score.





Long live the Auld Alliance

When the Coupe des Nations clay pigeon shooting competition came to Scotland for the first time in 20 years it made for a marvellous spectacle, says **Stephanie Abbot**

An Englishman and a Frenchman sit down to tea in the plush surroundings of the Ritz in London. It sounds vaguely like the set up for a joke as old as time, but this was actually the precursor for an international clay pigeon shooting competition which has just celebrated its 29th birthday.

Back in 1990 over scones and cucumber sandwiches, a debate broke out between the two chaps over which nation possessed

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the best marksmen and naturally, each said it was undeniably his own country. Unable to come to an agreement the Englishman challenged his French companion to a contest to finally lay the argument to rest.

In that same year, a competition was thrown together between members of some of the gentlemen's clubs in Paris and London who battled it out in the French capital and rumour has it that the French were victorious. Leaving the English competitors keen for a rematch, this time on home soil. It was here the Coupe des Nations was born and every year since has seen clubs come together for a few days, alternating between France and the UK to compete for the ultimate glory of the 'best shot' title. This year saw the competition return to Scotland for the first time in 20 years, at both Cluny shooting grounds in Fife and Braidwood, just south of Edinburgh.

While competitors take part by invitation only, the number of clubs involved has expanded to include The New Club in

Edinburgh, The Metropolitan Club based in Washington and even one as far away as Hong Kong, with each of these additions shooting for the British team.

Organising this kind of competition is no easy feat and is made possible by a committee of at least four people, currently headed up by chairman Edward King. Having been involved with the Coupe des Nations since 1999, King knows a thing or two about what it takes





to put such an event together. 'The competition is generally in May and we will start to look around for possible venues and hotels normally in the October/November of the year before, just to get everything in place because there is a lot going on. It's a very full on three-day programme.'

Sponsored by the likes of Bentley and The Balvenie distillery, this year's competition ran from the 3-5 May and as is customary included a fabulous gala dinner, this time set in the beautiful Signet Library on Edinburgh's Royal Mile.

With a list of previous impressive locations such as Highclere Castle, Blenheim Palace and various private chateaux in France,

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expectations of glorious settings are always high.

More than that, the location has to offer adequate entertainment to fulfil the ladies programme which runs alongside the competition itself.

'One of the key parts of the event is to try and shoot somewhere different but also to see somewhere different and we have a number of wives and girlfriends who come and it's nice for them to have something to do when the men are shooting. Obviously, Edinburgh was absolutely full of things for them to go and look at.'

However, the competition is very much open to women who are keen shooters, with the committee aiming to set up a female team – known as the 'Swallows' – every year and named so in response to the French ladies' team, the 'Amazones'.

As many of the participants are regular attendees, the general atmosphere of the event is that of old friends coming together and shooting for fun but Edward admits that the desire to win is felt by both sides. 'The competitive instinct is there, it's rather difficult to take that out of it given that you're shooting clays and someone is keeping score.'

Above: The group enjoying a break with the Bentleys. **Below:** Graziel d'Estalens takes aim.

Thankfully the home side bested their French competitors this year and apart from the obvious bragging rights, there's a very sizeable trophy for the taking which was awarded at the gala dinner during a prize giving ceremony. However, such a behemoth is this prize that last years' victors, the French, were unable to fly it over with them.

But, when asked what he enjoys most about the whole event, chairman Edward King is quick to respond.

'The people. Maybe I don't see them from year to year and yet I get to spend three days in their company, catch up on all the stories, on children getting married and all the news. It's enormous fun.'

