

Mastermind: Barry Downs



Is there a pistol shooter in Queensland who has not heard of Barry Downs?

Barry's success in this sport is unmatched by any other Queensland and by very few Australian shooters. It is for this reason that I have selected him to be the first of our 'Master' Profiles.

He has represented Queensland 15 times and Australia on 4 occasions.

Barry is recognised as a precision shooter, as his early successes in Australian Titles will show.

In the National Championships in 1966 he gained a gold medal with 537 in Free Pistol. 1967 gave him a silver medal with a score of 533 - again in Free Pistol. 1968 and 1969 gave him golds, again in Free Pistol, with respective scores of 545 and 547. In 1970 a bronze came his way with 530 in Free Pistol. This was the year that the Queensland Team won their first Team gold medal. Other members of this victorious Free Pistol Team were Don Powell, Ron Petersen and the late Dick Fitzhardinge. 1970 was a good year, for as well as his bronze in Free Pistol, Barry won a gold medal in Air Pistol with 380. This was the first year that Air Pistol was included in the National Championships' programme.

1971 saw a third placing in Air Pistol with 376, followed by another bronze in 1972 with 374 in Air Pistol. Barry was back in the gold again in 1973 with a 377 in Air Pistol.

Barry has therefore represented Queensland from 1966 to 1980, but now feels that he has perhaps taken part in his last National Championship. To Barry, these Championships have lost their appeal: too many events and a long, long line of shooters. Barry feels that the competition is not the part of the

Championship that remains in your memory. He believes it is the people and the place you remember most about a particular venue... not so much the Range and the actual contest. The Range will become just 'another Range'. It is for this reason that Barry lists his Mexico visit (in the Australian Olympic Team) as the most memorable of his career. Not only did he shoot 541 in Free Pistol, but he spent some time with a family there: ventured out amongst the Mexican people, went sight-seeing, and tasted the foods of their restaurants.

Barry states that sometimes he wonders whether that, once you have reached the top in a particular sport, it would be better to give that sport away, and take up something entirely different.

His overseas ventures, and Australian representation, commenced in 1966 with the World Championships in Weisbaden. Barry was part of the Free Pistol Team and finished with a score of 530.

In 1967 he visited Tokyo, again in the Free Pistol Team; and this time he recorded a score of 519.

1968 brought Mexico City and his Free Pistol score of 541.

At the World Championships in Phoenix Arizona, in 1970, Barry was a member of the Free Pistol and Air Pistol Teams; finishing with 547 in Free Pistol and 364 in Air Pistol. Barry rates this 547 in Free Pistol as his most successful overseas performance, and this still stands today as the best Free Pistol score shot by an Australian shooter in a World Championship.

Barry was in Singapore for the Pesta Sukan Games in 1971; shooting 531 in Free Pistol and 376 in Air Pistol.

Although Barry is regarded as a top precision shooter, and Master of the Mayleigh Match, he is also very accomplished in the other matches.

His best Standard Gun score in Open Competition was registered at the Ipswich Open in 1980: a score of 566. At an Invitation Shoot in Bundaberg in 1979 Barry recorded two successive scores of 570 in this match.

His best Open Free Pistol score was a 555 in the State Titles in Brisbane in 1971. A 384 in Air Pistol in the S.E. Zone Titles in 1973 is the highest Air Pistol score Barry has recorded on the Open scene.

At the Metropolitan Open in 1979 Barry finished with 582 in Centre Fire - his top score in this event.

At the 1974 Nationals Barry recorded his highest Rapid Fire score with a total of 572.

His Mayleigh Match scores are always ones to watch, and his score of 293 in the 1977 Gold Coast Open was no exception. His highest Mayleigh score at a National Championship was shot in Darwin in 1980, where he recorded 290 in the Team's event.

Barry believes that to be a top shooter the prime requirement is to be willing to work at shooting every day - not only live firing but dry firing. The shooter must not be satisfied that because he is doing a 'quantity' of hard work he is improving his performance - he must also 'think' about what he is doing. The 'quality' of training is very important.

Barry claims that, for most of us, to become a top shooter would mean too much hard work and more sacrifice than we are prepared to make. Many shooters, Barry has observed, do work hard, think hard about their shooting - and then spoil all the good work by smoking.

To Barry, to be able to participate in top competition regularly is another important factor the aspiring champion must consider. The 'isolated' shooter has a real battle to reach the top.

Barry attributes much of his success and keenness to having people around him who were interested in what he was doing - men like Keith Archos, John Vandenberg, Harry Hawkins and Len Zaver all gave Barry the interest and support he needed.

A good Club helps too...having fellow members who are not jealous of the success of their top shooter can play an important part in the development of a champion. Barry claims that his Club (Brisbane) also had good facilities and this, coupled with the understanding of Les Bardwell (former Inspector of Police, Patron of Q.A.P.S.A. and President of Brisbane Pistol Club), enabled him to practise and perform to the best of his ability.

Barry places great importance in the fact that, if a Club has a top shooter, that Club should do all they can to ensure that that shooter should be helped to reach his maximum potential - not just for the individual's benefit, but for the benefit and prestige of the whole Club.

Barry is a firm believer that all shooters of the same ability should be squadded to shoot at the same time...particularly at Open and National events.

To be a top shooter then, the individual will not only have to put in top quality work, but will have his Club and friends behind him. In addition to these requirements the shooter must be very fit - Barry gave as an example here being able to shoot Free Pistol all day, non stop!

Barry claims that for Australia to gain success overseas we have either to import shooters (!) or to find individuals who have the time and money to compete in a circuit of the European Championships.

He feels that for a country of our population, and considering the number of Pistol Shooters we have, and the amount of Government support we receive, Australia is doing as well as it can.

Barry suggests that coaching a top shooter is very hard - a top shooter should, and usually does, have the ability to sort out his (or her) own problems. Those who can adjust to the mood and conditions of the day will be those who succeed. He does believe, however, that a top shooter does need someone to 'watch' him. This 'someone' must know what shooting is all about, but at the same time will not offer that shooter advice unless asked!

Barry states that there is more to be gained from overseas representation than medals. The Competition, whether the shooter succeeds or not, is an important part of that shooter's experience and development. The 'Medal Psychology', often employed by some organisers, is therefore a detrimental one.

Barry Downs, now in his seventeenth year of shooting, undoubtedly has many years of successful pistol shooting ahead of him; and has much to offer the Queensland Pistol Shooting Movement.

Sharyn Petersen