Heating Things Up

Shooting in extreme heat is a challenge. There will come a time in your shooting careers when you will shoot in the heat. For example, at this year’s ISSF Shotgun World Cup in Lonato, Italy, the temperature (in June) was 89 degrees with 59% humidity. During the same month in Tucson, Ariz., the temperature will easily register over 100 degrees with 20% humidity. While the temperature in Tucson is at least ten degrees higher than Lonato, the heat index tells a different story. The heat index is a combination of temperature and humidity, which dictates the human perceived temperature (check out http://www.hpc.ncep.noaa.gov/html/heatindex.shtml to calculate the heat index). The heat index of both locations was 97 degrees. Regardless of where you are shooting, make sure to check both the temperature and the humidity. Humidity can cause a lot of problems. For example, when it is humid, you can overheat quicker than if you were shooting in hot, dry weather conditions. Humidity can also cause issues with your shotgun, shells and targets, but this article will only address how heat affects your body.

The first item to remember is to stay hydrated; this starts days before the competition. Prior to a competition in hot weather, you need to drink enough fluids—mostly water—so that your urine will be a very light color. Just like taking care to eat right before a match, you need to remember to drink plenty of the right kinds of fluids. There is a lot of information on what you should eat and at what time before competitions, but the best advice I can offer is to pay attention to how your mind and body respond to different foods and drink and use what works best for you. The day of the competition, stay away from caffeinated drinks because they act as a diuretic and will make you lose more fluids. Eat light but eat often, and try to drink water between rounds and even between stations. It is also wise to get in the shade whenever you can. Be aware that you can drink too much water, which will cause an imbalance of sodium and electrolytes leading to a condition known as hyponatremia that can be worse than being slightly dehydrated. For more information on Hyponatremia, please read http://www.trainingbible.com/joesblog/2008/09/hydration-and-exercise-part-1.html. A damp towel around your neck or under your hat will help you feel a little cooler, but remember you still need to drink water and replenish your electrolytes.

Provided that you have successfully supplied your fluid and nutritional needs, another aspect to consider is protective eyewear. Be sure you have the right lenses in your shooting glasses (everyone’s preference is different here). Even when you are not on the firing line or even the range, it is critical to wear some type of eye protection. It will also be helpful to bring a towel to wipe your hands and gun to make sure to maintain a strong, non-slip hold. Some people like wearing gloves because the barrel and action can get hot. If gloves are your preferred method of a non-slip grip, then practice with them on because it can change your grip which will affect your gun and handling.

In regard to clothing, it is best to wear light-colored clothing that fits a little loose. This will allow the air to circulate over your skin. A hat is a must. I do not recommend sun visors because it leaves the top of your head exposed and you can get sunburned through your hair. Sunscreen is also very important. Try to purchase a brand that has 45 SPF or clear zinc oxide for those, such as myself, that are allergic to the glycerin in most sunscreen brands.

Just like the buddy system, if you are shooting on a team or with a friend/parent, be sure to watch each other for signs of sunburn or sunstroke. It’s helpful to shoot with people you know or trust as you can spot slight changes in your body language that can point to dehydration or worse. Look out for each other, carry extra water if you can and don’t be afraid to offer it to someone who you might think is suffering from dehydration.

Though shooting in the heat offers several challenges, it also has a few benefits. I’ve noticed that my muscles and joints are a little looser when it is nice and warm, allowing more ease of movement. You will still need to stretch and warm up before shooting, but probably not as much as if it were 50 degrees out. A word to the wise: when you clean your shotgun don’t use a lot of oil or grease because it tends to migrate more when it gets hot and will collect more dust.

The heat, just like the wind, can work against you if you let it. Learn how to compete in different temperatures and you will be ready to compete anywhere in the world. I would like to welcome everyone to visit Tucson. There are plenty of attractions, great shooting at a nice club and on the average we have 300 days of sunshine a year. The one last thing you have to do when shooting in the heat, whether it’s in Tucson or anywhere around the world: SHOOT THE TARGET. Do this, remember to have fun and you will have a great match.

■ Rob Larson