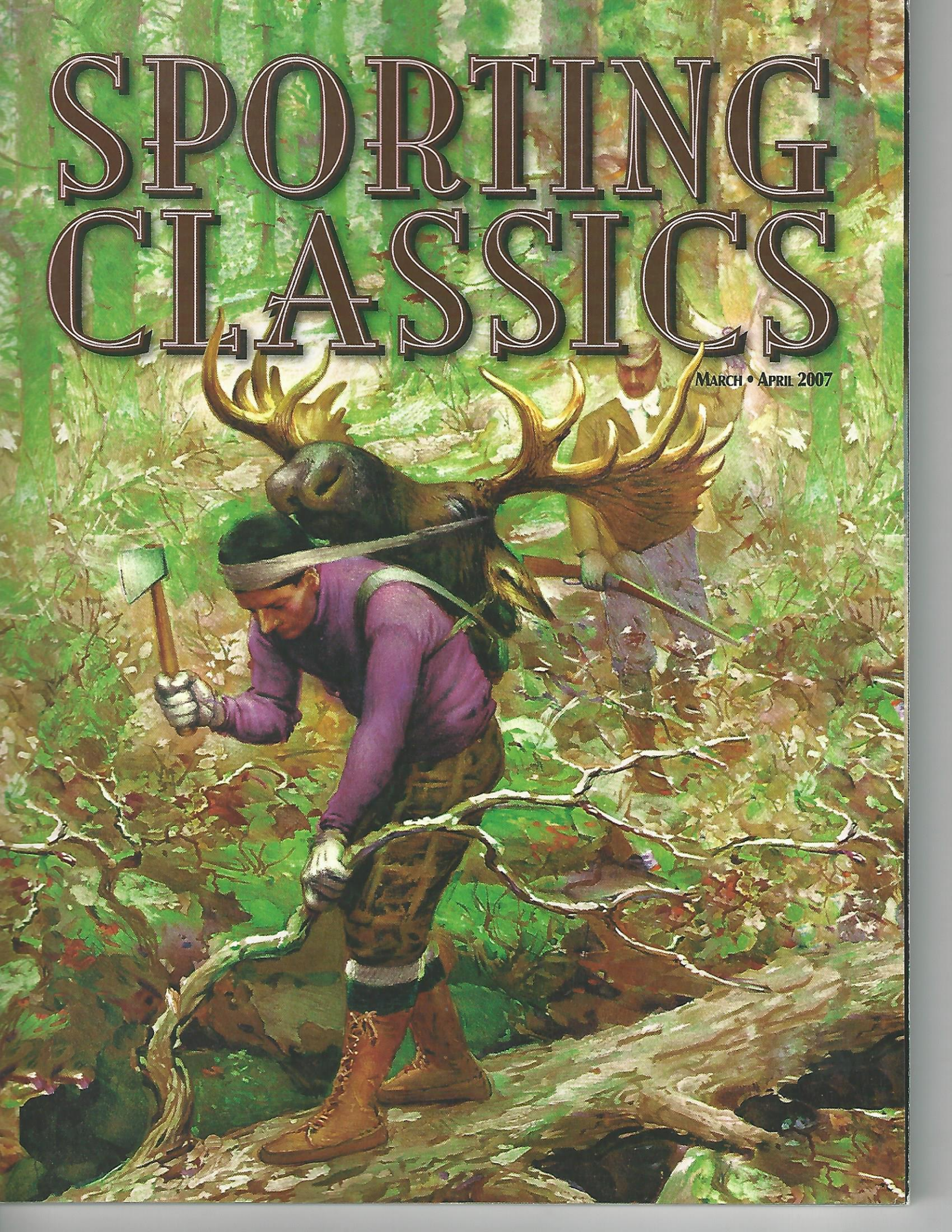


# SPORTING CLASSICS

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# Travel

By John Ross

**Z**ipping as they do, the bright orange clay sailed out of the low house on one of four skeet fields that stair-step across the nose of the low ridge on which rides the Shooting Club at The Homestead. Tucked in a seam of Virginia's Appalachians where hot and healing waters bubble forth, The Homestead has been attracting guests since before the American Revolution gleamed in the patriots' eyes.

Heralded for its classic golf courses where farmer Sned's son Sam slammed his first drive, The Homestead has been drawing

shooters since the first trap and skeet fields was installed in 1933. The Homestead Cup Championship over Memorial Day and the Golf and Sporting Clays Championship in mid-September make use of the club's deceptively difficult course that winds through the woodland valley behind and below the skeet and trap fields.

If you're in luck, you may encounter the likes of Stormin'

*For the past sixty years this beautiful resort in Virginia's Appalachians has served as a nursery for both young and new shooters.*

Norman Schwartzkopf, Jodi Foster, Richard Gere, Cindy Crawford or Will Grossman working out on the shooting ranges. Will is only 12, but he's already developing an eye for gunning the clay disks.

As I watched, young Will followed the target, swung through it and pressed the trigger on the pert Beretta .410 over-under.

*Blam!* The bird smoked.

On report, the second of the pair rocketed toward him from the high house. Will was hurrying now. *Blam!* A miss.



Bending over the boy, David Judah, chief instructor and director of the Homestead's Shooting Club, asked in his lilting Jamaican accent, "Do you know where you shot?"

To my surprise, Will answered with more assurance that I can muster in such situations. "Ahead?"

David beamed, "Indeed you were." Then he asked: "Do you know why?"

"I rushed, didn't I."

"That you did, and now you know that there's plenty of time, don't you."

"Yes sir."

"Are you ready to try it again?"

"Yes sir."

"Let's have your sister give us another pair. First the low house, please, then the high house."

Will's youngest sister, Lexi, who is all of 7, held the switch in her left hand and pressed the buttons that triggered the birds in the sequence that David had suggested.

"See how slow they are? Now is

there any reason to hurry?"

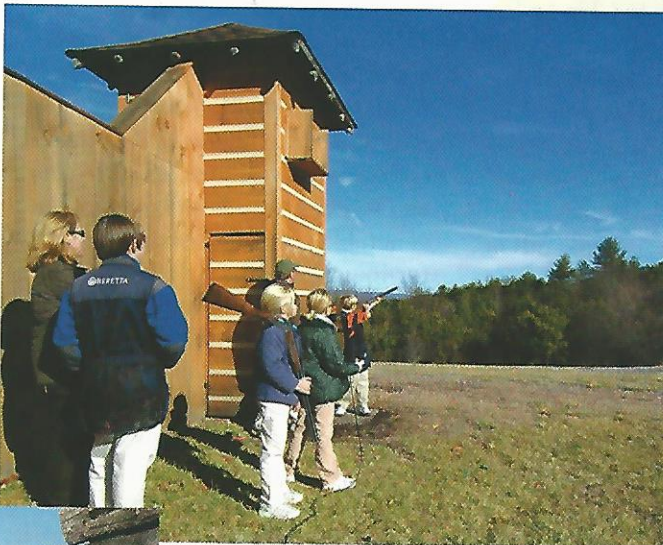
"No sir."

Will slipped a couple bright red shells into the gun and closed it firmly. He mounted the gun like he was an old hand, though he'd

been shooting for less than a year. His mom, Suzanne, and his father, Earl, each adjusted their earplugs. His other sister, 9-year-old Kate, stood with her mother's skeet gun broken and resting on her shoulder. His brother, Chip, who at the ripe old

age of 13 has been shooting for a brace of years, stood ready to take his place in the rotation when his time came.

"Pull!" Will commanded. Lexi pressed the button and the bird streaked from the low house. *Blam!* A chunk flew from the front of the disk. With the sound of the shot, the incoming bird angled across in front of Will. He followed it, and followed it, and



*Left: David Judah, director of The Homestead's Shooting Club, offers valuable instruction to a new shooter. Above: Will Grossman, age 12, tracks a clay bird while his mother and sisters, all avid shooters, await their turn.*



slapped the trigger at the very last possible moment. *Blam!* Fragments scattered like shards of busted glass.

"Whoa!" Suzanne exclaimed as Will broke the double and his dad clasped him on the shoulder. "Good job! Will. Good job!"

Will handed the gun to Chip and exchanged a high five with his mom. I couldn't tell who was happier, Will, his folks, his siblings or David, his coach. I was grinning like a fool as well. Doubles, especially when made by a kid, make you feel that way.

I am convinced that the future of the shooting sports lies not so much in the chambers of state legislatures or the courts as it does with families like the Grossmans from Charlottesville, Virginia, who travel to The Homestead often during the year so their kids can learn how to shoot.

"My parents both shot," Suzanne explains, "and in particular it was my mother who took me out when I

was young. She took me to the Black Rock Gun Club (near Princeton, New Jersey). The array of women who shot there was extraordinary. They were all ages. In fact, my mom shot the year before she passed away at 81."

Suzanne and Earl belong to the Owner's club at The Homestead. They bought in so Earl could play golf while Suzanne worked out on the resort's four skeet fields, wobble and traditional trap ranges, sporting clays course, and five-stand field. For them, and scores of families like them, this venerable hotel has become a nursery for young and new shooters.

Shooting is a family affair for Earl and Suzanne and their brood. "We started with Chip," she says, but everyone takes part. "We think it's very important that they all learn about gun etiquette, before they ever get on the range. Chip began to shoot when he was 11. Before that, he pulled like Lexi and Kate did today.

"For me, when I was young I saw

these women . . . they were of all ages, and some, in their seventies, were crack shots," she adds, with emphasis on the last two words. "They would shoot every Thursday. When you see women out there doing that, especially in that day and age (the late '60s), it was very inspirational.

"My dad was also a shooter. He used to practice his lead on valuable bird prints (by famous ornithologist John Gould) that hung on the wall in their house. Shooting is something a family can do together."

Suzanne wanted to preserve the family's gunning traditions. Earl, an excellent golfer, was not a shooter when they met. Yet according to David, Earl's hand-eye coordination is superb. I watched him bust doubles, one pair after the other, on the sporting clays course.

It would be tempting to think of the Grossmans as an anomaly conjured up by The Homestead's

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PR guru, Eileen, who happens, by the way, to be David's wife. But on the mild Thursday between last Christmas and New Year when I came to do this story, Margaret Carr and her four daughters had taken a mini-rifle lesson from David and were happily firing at targets down on the .22 range.

Meanwhile, a father was engaged in a friendly competition with his son who seemed to be no more than 10. The boy was winning, but he had an assist from one of David's seven instructors. On each of the skeet fields a knot of people, new to shooting you could tell because of their winter scarves and ski parkas, were blasting away at clay birds.

The Homestead is the kind of place that introduces hundreds to the shooting sports. Take the wedding that's being planned for May. The groom's party of fifty or so will spend a couple hours on the range. David will set 'em up on station seven.

They'll each shoot seven incoming and seven away singles and then finish with five report pairs.

"Those who are used to shooting will break most of the birds," David smiles. "But those who are new to it, will shoot in the high teens." After the gunning, they'll watch the sunset with cocktails from the Shooting Club's pavilion.


And therein lies the magic of the Homestead's Shooting Club. David is an extraordinary coach. From no more than an innocent question or two, he can tell who's shot and who hasn't, who's comfortable with guns and who isn't, and who's apt to be intimidated and those whose confidence is mostly bravado.

He likes to start shooters out on .410s because of the low recoil and lighter weight of the gun.

I ask: "Doesn't that handicap them? Smaller pattern and all."

"Oh the pattern's the same size," he reminds me, "there are just fewer

soldiers in it. The number of pellets is not nearly as important as the recoil and noise. Frighten a first-time shooter and they'll never be comfortable with a gun again."

Just watching Chip and Will bust birds with that Beretta .410 stack-barrel convinced me of the wisdom of David's strategy. And in a year or two when Kate picks up the shotgun, she'll be as comfortable with it as she would be a pair of Nikes. Lexi will follow her. And in a generation, you can bet that Suzanne and Earl's house at the Homestead will be filled with grandchildren who'll be clamoring to go shoot. And that's just one of the reasons that makes The Homestead a very, very special place. 

For more information on shooting instruction and the sporting clays championship, contact David Judah, Homestead Shooting Club, 1766 Homestead Drive, Hot Springs, VA 24445; 540/839-1776; thehomestead.com.

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