

You might not realise, but the Ballinger Belt national shooting championships are on in Wellington this week. **Sam Worthington** talks to 40-year-old crack British shot Jon Underwood about his life with a rifle.



Ready, aim, fire: British champ Jon Underwood has another target in his sights at Trentham shooting range, where he's competing in this year's Ballinger Belt. Photos: ROBERT KITCHIN

A shooting star

Q) When did you first pick up a gun?

A) I was 11. A school I attended had a facility for young kids to try it out, near Guildford in Surrey in the UK. That's where I got interested in it.

Q) The passion just flowed on from there?

A) I liked doing it and then when I went on to secondary school in Guildford it was something that I was keen to pursue there as well.

Q) What was the first gun you owned and do you still have it?

A) It was a .22 Anschütz. I might have lent it to someone actually, I haven't actually got it in my possession. That was my first .22; my first fullbore rifle I had was a Musgrave, from South Africa. My favourite rifle now is my RPA. I've had that since 2004 and that has done me well.

Q) What makes shooting an attractive sport?

A) I suppose it's the thrill of getting the shot in the centre every time, time after time. And being able to cope with all the different conditions that are thrown at you out on the open ranges. Particularly the winds, obviously. You're trying to judge how far your bullet is going to be



deflected over every distance that we shoot at.

Q) How much do you practice?

A) During the summer months I'll be out on the ranges back in the UK most weekends – sometimes one day of the weekend, sometimes both days of the weekend. I don't tend to do so much during the winter because it's obviously quite cold.

Q) Do you do any other training outside of actual shooting?

A) Most of it is around shooting. I don't do too much else to maintain it but obviously if you're fit it helps, so you've got to be a bit careful that you don't lead an unhealthy lifestyle.

Q) What is your day job?

A) I have to earn a living, it's not a professional sport. I got into the



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JON UNDERWOOD

family business and we have two companies that I run. One rents out tools and is a plant hire company, and the other one is a property letting company.

Q) In 2006 you became the first person to win the Queen's Prize bronze, silver and gold medal in the same year. A career highlight?

A) Very much so. The year before I'd won the Grand Aggregate and we always consider that to be a tough challenge over a number of days, whereas the Queen's Prize is the real pinnacle because you have to get through the first stage, the second stage, to the final which is

the last event. So there's a lot of pressure on that one. To go into it leading, knowing that it was in the bag as long as I held my nerve, which I just about did. It was close in the end, but that was certainly a highlight.

Q) What are people's reactions when you tell them you shoot?

A) Here [in New Zealand], it's interesting because they're quite interested here. There seems to be good support. Back home, we're a little bit more cautious about telling people because there's still a bit of concern that shooting is not a good thing to be doing. But most people are quite interested and there's a lot of friends and family following what we're doing on our website.

Q) What makes shooting at Trentham such a challenge?

A) It's the conditions, they just change daily. We've had a different day every single day here. Winds coming in from different directions, variable strengths. We had very blustery, gusty winds on Sunday with rain; [yesterday was] a nice sunny day with light winds, so you just have to watch out for those very quick changes while you're on aim because you can't aim and watch the wind at the same time.