

Going Outdoors: What Should You Know?

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It's that time of year again: we're hoping the worst of the winter is behind us, the days are starting to get longer and we're wondering whether the field will have dried out by August. All of this means outdoor archery is just around the corner and that's a very different proposition to the indoor shooting of the past few months. So if you joined us over the winter and want to learn what's coming up, or if you've shot outside before and would like to raise your classification this year, here are my top tips on what you should do, and what you shouldn't worry about.

Distance

The first thing you notice outside is that the distances are significantly longer than the 18m or 20 yards shot indoors: unless you're a very young junior you're not going to be shooting less than 30m until we go back indoors.

This isn't something to be afraid of, though, because unlike indoors you typically get the entire boss to aim at as GNAS rounds are shot on full 122cm faces (more on this later); also, although no one wants to miss the boss, it is at least surrounded by soft grass rather than brick walls; and so few people try to stretch themselves by shooting further or competing that you'll look good no matter how you shoot.

Outdoor distances come in two flavours, metric (metres) and imperial (yards); which one we use depends of what type of round is being shot or practised for. At Burleigh, we tend to shoot the different types on alternate Sundays; at any other time you're free to shoot whatever you choose. Metric distances are 30, 50, 60, 70 and 90m; while imperial distances are 30, 40, 50, 60, 80 and 100 yards.

Outdoor rounds are usually (with the exception of the FITA70 / FITA50) shot over multiple distances, and you only get sighters at the first, longest distance. A list of the various rounds and the classifications you can claim on each can be found in the members' section of the website and pinned to the noticeboard on the shed.

Where should you start, and where should you go?

I mentioned earlier that you shouldn't be afraid of shooting longer distances just because you might miss occasionally, but that doesn't mean you should go straight to 90m either. If you haven't shot outside before then a good target is getting to 70m: start at 30m and work your way up to it. If you have shot outside before, you should definitely try to shoot at 70m and aim to get comfortable at 90m as well. This way you'll shoot with better archers and pick up useful tips from them, and maybe see that what they do isn't that scary. These distances will also allow you to go to external competitions and enjoy your archery more. You don't need to be "really competitive" to enjoy competitions, in fact most of the people you'll meet are not and the more of us go to

external competitions the better.

Equipment

You'll hear a lot about what equipment you should shoot outdoors and what you should do with it, and a lot of this information is either well-intentioned but wrong, or just not right for you. Here's what you really should know:

Arrows

There are (broadly speaking) three types of arrows: aluminium, aluminium-carbon composite (A/C), and pure carbon. Please don't go getting pure carbon arrows unless you really know what you're doing, because they're much harder to find with a metal detector and for that reason you can't use them at some grounds.

Aluminium arrows are what you typically see indoors and what many of you will own already. There's absolutely nothing wrong with them, they're cheap and consistent and they can be straightened if they get bent. On the other hand, they are thick and very heavy, so you will struggle for distance compared to using A/C arrows and they'll be affected more by the wind.

Aluminium arrows are sized according to two measurements: the outside diameter in 1/64s of an inch, and the wall thickness in 1/1000ths of an inch, giving a size like 2314 (23/64" diameter, 14/1000" wall). You'll always be better off with a larger diameter and thinner wall.

A/C arrows are expensive, but if you're trying to improve your classification they're the single best investment you can make. To put it into perspective, where XX75 Platinums are about £3 per shaft, the cheapest A/Cs, the ACC costs about £8 per shaft. Next in line is the ACG, a thinner version of the ACC which only makes a difference at the higher spines (spine meaning stiffness, more on this later), typically if you're shooting above 35lbs, which is about £11 per shaft. Beyond this lie the ACE and X10, which you really shouldn't go near unless you know what you're doing and trying to win at County level or compete nationally; this is because they can only be purchased in entire dozens, and their barrelling technology makes them very expensive: £180 per dozen for ACEs; £280 per dozen for X10s. You also won't actually see any difference from these arrows unless you're trying to shoot at least Bowman scores; in fact the ACE in particular trades off its light weight by being extremely fragile, very unforgiving of a poor release and need to be correctly matched to your bow.

One final point on arrows: in outdoor competitions you often need to shoot six arrows per end, whether in one group of six or two groups of three (some imperial rounds, though these are sometimes shot in sixes now – long story!). Add the fact that you need to shoot over 150 shots in some rounds (12 dozen and practice), and that vanes can become loose and really mess up your arrow flight, and nocks can get broken... it's really worth having more than six shootable arrows so you have some spares, and I would recommend having at least nine.

Vanes

Indoors the best you can get is natural feathers, which stabilise the arrow faster than plastic vanes while also being more forgiving. Outdoors, you don't want to use feathers because they react badly to moisture. Instead, the best choice is the "spin" vane, a curved sliver of Mylar

or similar that attaches to the arrow with a type of sticky tape. They're accurate, forgiving, and easy to repair in the field. There are several on the market, and having tried all of them I strongly recommend the "Range-O-Matic Spin Wings" as I have found them to be the most durable and best performing. If you're after something more exotic, Eli Vanes are good and pretty but very specialised. If you want to use plastic vanes, get very small ones, less than 2", and use a fletching jig to put them on.

Poundage

It's a myth that you need a lot of poundage to score well at long range. I've seen archers with about 22lbs and aluminium arrows shoot better at 60m than "serious" archers with more than double the poundage and all the latest equipment (at 70m, 28lbs and A/C arrows will serve well and even at 90m you don't need more than 34lbs). This is possible because one thing and one thing alone will get you most of your points outdoors: consistent shot execution. Build a solid front shoulder and learn to pull through with your back; these will allow you to build poundage later on without compromising your execution.

Tuning

A lot is written about tuning and you can safely ignore most of it because you simply won't see any difference unless you're shooting well into Master Bowman scores. There are a few bits of basic setup that will help you achieve consistent results though, and our coaches will happily help you get them sorted out:

- Tiller (the difference in brace height between the top and bottom limb) should be about +5, which is to say a 5mm larger gap at the top
- Nock point height (the top of your bottom nock point) should be about 5mm above square
- Centreshot (arrow alignment) should be set with the arrow point aligned just outside the line of the string

From here, the best thing to do is "walk-back tuning" which involves shooting at multiple distances and trying to get your arrows to fall in a straight line by increasing or decreasing spring tension to "push" or "pull" the line of arrows into a straight line (pushing or pulling the ones shot at further distances), so you don't need to move your sight sideways between distances. Since most outdoor competitions take place over multiple distances this is one less thing to worry about.

I hope to see you all outside, happy shooting!