



Hotshot Matthew Canning, from Newtownstewart, who struck double gold at the European Championship and World Cup competition in the Czech Republic.

SHOOTING

Double gold for Newtownstewart silhouette shooter

BY TOMMY NETHERY

A NEWTOWNSTEWART man has just struck double gold as a member of the Ireland Silhouette shooting team that won the European Championship and World Cup competitions staged in the Czech Republic at the end of last month.

Matthew Canning, a computer expert, currently working and living in Dublin, was a member of the three man Irish team, which performed beyond all expectations to see off a strong challenge from France and Austria.

Over two days of competition the Irish trio set a blistering standard in the small-bore rifle (.22) event, with Canning's personal best of 31/40 on the first day, setting Ireland on their way to a memorable victory.

In the end the men in green won by just five points, from France, who posted a final tally of 178, with Austria finishing third.

"It was fantastic achievement," said a delighted Canning. "For a small country like Ireland it was quite remarkable. Overall, four of the seven members of the Ireland squad returned home with gold medals.

"In the small-bore event, myself and team-mates Nicholas Flood (Dublin) and Fabian Connolly (Leitrim) had opened up a gap at the end of day one.

"Nicholas top scored with 35 points from a possible 40. I then achieved my personal best and Fabien completed a tremendous combined effort with 30 points.

"Although one of the Austrian competitors posted a stunning 39 points on day two, we held our nerve to fend off the challenge of the Austrians and the French."

Holding their nerve was one way of putting it. The truth of the matter is, that Canning and company repeated their blistering form of day one, with the Tyrone marksman again improving on his personal best by a further two points.

Silhouette shooting originated in Mexico in the 1960s. Ten years later it became big business in the States and by 1979 the shooting of small metal shaped game animals made its first appearance in Ireland.

The small-bore version became increasingly popular with competitors shooting targets upwards on 100 metres.

Canning's personal triumph of achieving European and World Cup glory is all the more remarkable considering he has only been competing in the sport for three years.

As well as winning double gold, the Newtown man also topped the podium in his qualification class.



European Championship and World Cup champions of 2005, the Ireland team of Nicholas Flood, Fabian Connolly and Tyrone man, Matthew Canning.