



NEAR MIRACLE

John Humphreys marvels at a little known innovation he'll be relying on to preserve his aural senses in future years shooting

THE NICE man made me sit on a kitchen chair, eyes firmly to the front. He peered into my ears with a light on a stick, inserted a foam plug, pushed it well in and stood back. His assistant advanced menacingly like the malignant dentist in *Marathon Man*, clutching the sort of hypodermic they use to inject horses, and before I could move I had squirted into my ear a glutinous brew the consistency of putty.

He went round to the nearside and repeated the performance. I sat there dead to the world, all sound gone, an appreciation of what it must be like to be profoundly deaf and a taste of what awaits a shooting man who does not take good care of his hearing.

Five minutes passed, the assistant stepped forward and removed the moulds which had now gone rubbery, took out the plug with a pair of forceps and, now that hearing was restored, he said, "That'll do nicely. You'll get your new ear plugs in a week." You see?

It was not menacing at all, but just the nice Maurice Davison and his helper, come all the way from Shrewsbury in Shropshire to fit me with the last word in ear protection for shooters. To his words, less than a week later the new plugs arrived in their special box. I had mine coloured bright blue, just in case I dropped one into the grass where flesh tints might go chameleon in the tangle.

This visit was the end of a two-year crusade in search of the perfect ear defence. Regulars will know that I was becoming slightly tense about the problems of hearing damage to shooters and the fact that so many of my friends cupped a hand round their better ear before they could catch my drift. We tried all sorts from lumps of cotton wool, the disposables - one of which vanished down the ear-hole of a fellow contributor - the ones with a small valve, and the Rolls Royce sort which contained electronic microphones and cost an arm and a leg.

All were less than perfect for one reason or another. At best were the electronics, but they were so bulky and many sounds were distorted. It was a job to know what to do with them between drives, your choice of



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headgear was limited to a cloth cap, many cost in excess of £150 and the batteries had a habit of dying on you at the most awkward moments.

I speak of what I know, for I gave them a fair try last season and a shooting life spent wearing things which par-boiled your lobes made you think that even a loss of hearing was not all bad.

Best to date

HOWEVER, I am happy to share with readers what I considered to be the best to date - the Noisebreakers from Emtec Laboratories. The device is a model of your ear which will fit nobody else, with a specially designed hole through the middle. In crude layman's terms - my sort of language - little sounds make small ripples and get straight through, but big bangs, Re the double discharge of your 8-bore, make tidal waves which are baffled by the aperture and filtered. There are no batteries or working parts. They are virtually indestructible, cost about £50 a throw and when necessary you wash

them in mild soapy water. What is more, they keep your unique mould back at HQ so in the event of your losing them or wanting a duplicate set, they simply pull them from the shelf and there you are. Maurice tells me that within five minutes he can find any set of specially coded moulds from among thousands.

As usual the shooting fraternity was slow to discover this marvel. The secret is well known to workers on oil rigs, in factories, newspaper print shops, among police motorcyclists, breweries, and anywhere where loud noises are an occupational hazard. The list of individual users runs from Lord Jim Prior to The Duke of Kent and HRH Prince Abdorezza of Saudi Arabia, while the brother of the Sultan of Brunei ordered 24 sets.

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation did a field test and found them excellent but I suspect their findings did not reach the eyes of enough of our fraternity. My own opinions concurred entirely with theirs and I have no hesitation in

recommending them to rifle, clay and field shooters.

I gave them a try-out on a day's decoying. When I had worked out which were left and right - like the Irishman's boot - I was away and had them in all day. After five minutes I was not aware of their presence but I could hear redlegged partridges calling three fields away, the song of a skylark and the whoosh of wings when a pigeon came unseen from behind and veered at the last minute. Protection is to BS 5108, whatever that might mean, but it is OK by me. The only time I knew they were there was when I ate an apple. So perfect is the seal that the appalling crunching sound inside your head is like Hannibal's army eating celery, complete with elephants.

MoD registered

IN FACT, I was driving home before I thought to take them out. I have tried them while on the telephone and in normal conversation and can hear perfectly but the bang of a gun, while audible, causes no distress, even after a good many shots. The product is registered with the MoD as complying with quality assurance requirements and has an established reputation outside the shooting world.

Fans of heavy metal who like the music but are wary of the decibels could get away with wearing a pair at a concert, whereas ear muffs might give cause for adverse comment. I shall certainly not be seen out shooting without mine from now on. It is my New Year's resolution and one which, for a change, I might keep.

The main thing to remember is to take the box with you each time you go out. Either tie it to the gun sleeve, keep it in the gun case or do as I have done and clip it to the handle of the gun cupboard door. I cannot open the door without putting my hand on it so there's every chance I'll take it.

Whatever course you take, hearing protection is a must if you are to retain that most precious sense. If the Noisebreaker appeals, just-make an appointment for the nice man to pop round with his hypo and get your 60 quid out. For your Noisebreakers contact Emtec on (01743)709480.