

First, it's the gear: They carry in the bags--big bags--of gear. The shooting coats, the ammo blocks, the gloves, the spotting scopes...it's a lot of gear. The kitchen is littered with it. This isn't stuff they just enjoy hauling around; it gets used...ALL of it.

Then they start the process of moving the gear from the kitchen to the main room, where the shooting will be done. This is a match night so extra care is taken to arrange everything, "just so".

Each man rolls out his shooting mat and starts to assemble his base of operation: the spotting scope here, the ammo box, there, etc.



They pull on the shooting coats: Heavy, cumbersome, belted--straps and buckles everywhere. Rather peculiar in appearance, these coats are clearly not a fashion statement. It was explained to me that the coats provide support for the shooter: The straps are adjusted differently, according to the need of the shooter to accommodate the shooting position; to help steady the arm, bear the weight of the rifle and support the stance. To start with, the coats are left loose and hanging; these are not things you want to be strapped into while you are still setting up.

Finally, the guns come out.

Not your "standard-issue-first-gun-I-bought-with-my-paper-route-money" kind of guns. These are the Maseratis of the .22 rifle class: sleek, here, clunky there, shiny...or not. The guys are kind of shy when I come around to take their pictures but when I ask to take a picture of their gun they start to grin and show the guns to their best advantage. I know that beauty is in the eye of the beholder but even I can recognize a certain, striking attractiveness to these crafted pieces of art.



The guns are not configured in a way I am used to seeing them--they're solid and imposing.



The stocks have parts that fit snugly under the arm and parts that hold tightly to the shoulder; parts that look like the standard parts but upon closer scrutiny, they aren't like standard. No ammo magazines, the engineering for such things would leave the weapon with minutely less stability. I dry-fire a rifle and the trigger-pull is startling - so easy that I can hardly believe that it's tripped...no tell-tale "jerk" of the amateur shooter--the action is perfectly smooth and easy; everything is designed for control and accuracy.

Nick's gun looks like something out of Popular Science: all stainless steel, lacquered wood, angles and curves--at first I wasn't sure if he bought it or made it (I'm still not!) -it has a touch of the "Erector Set" to it.



Don's is fine-furniture--it would look equally at home on the shooting range or in a formal drawing room; rich, dark wood - polished, smooth and shining.

Each gun is just a little different from the others. Each shooter has found the rifle to "fit" him

The targets go up at the far end of the room and lights play off of them like a chorus line on a Broadway stage.

Straps go through buckles, are pulled taught, and it's down to business.

Prone position: Its down to the floor, adjusting body positions, adjusting rifle positions, adjusting ammo positions, adjusting spotting scopes, re-adjusting coat straps...this is a sport of concentration and care--they don't hurry and they don't make mistakes.