

Greg Van Borssum

- a jack-of-all-trades



by senior correspondent Jennifer Martens

Even if you've never heard of Greg Van Borssum, if you are a film buff, it is highly likely that you've seen some form of his work. For the past 11 years, Greg has worked in the film industry as a writer, director, producer, actor and combat trainer. Some of his recent efforts can be seen in *Method of Entry* and *Bad Cop, Bad Cop* and most recently he has worked as second unit digital creative director in the Oscar-winning film *Happy Feet*. Greg worked alongside Australian filmmaker and *Happy Feet* director George Miller to create the 2006 blockbuster, which Greg says, "took animation quality to a whole new level".

Greg is an achiever in every sense of the word. He's a former elite bodybuilder, a martial arts instructor and an Oscar-winning film director. Looking back on his life, the title 'jack-of-all-trades' comes to mind. He comes from a family of real go-getters; in fact, in 1963, his father, Colin Van Borssum, set the world record for canoeing across Cook Strait. You could say that success is in his blood.

Aside from his desire to be the best at what he does, Greg also has an insatiable thirst for knowledge. When studying martial arts, he didn't simply take weekly classes or even scour books or the internet on the subject. He took his quest for



The Oscar-winning team - Greg, right, and good friend George Miller.

Greg Van Borssum

understanding a few steps further. "I lived at the Shaolin Temple in China, so I could train and learn at the heart of where it all came from," he said.

He is now taking a similar approach to the shooting sports, specifically in the discipline of Action Match. When Greg joined the SSAA and the St Ives Pistol Club three years ago, he began with air pistols and .22s and tried his hand at different disciplines such as ISSF and Standard Match. Even though he thoroughly enjoyed these matches, he always felt like there was something missing in his shooting. He realised that what really appealed to him was drawing the gun from the holster. "Once I learned how to draw from the rig properly, I started looking for a suitable match to fire." He found Action Match, which, for Greg, was the complete package.

Having settled into the discipline, he set about the task of finding the best coach possible. "I've always searched for the best people to learn from...people who have done all the hard yards, so they can shave years off of what you want to learn." His rapid rise in the sport is proof that he was successful in his mission.

According to Greg, Craig Ginger was a logical choice for a coach, as he is a proven consistent shooter, which was high on Greg's list of criteria. "I see a lot of people in High Master Grade who walk up to the line and shoot a 1918 one day and then an 1850 the next. The consistency isn't there. But I know Craig can walk out to the line and be consistent."

Craig is an Australian national champion and top-level international competitor. He and Greg train together twice a week. "Greg is very competitive and wants to learn, which makes him easy to coach. He



Greg at the range with his STI race gun. After some gunsmithing work, Greg says it is the perfect tool for the match.

takes the information you give him and uses that in his individual training, so when he comes back, he's improved." Craig also said that Greg is a great asset to the sport, putting an effort not only into his own shooting, but also into the club, the competitions and into growing the sport's membership. "He's always willing to give back to the sport."

In order to be in contention for a medal or title in Action Match, you have to fire well in all of the four events. Greg is no stranger to pressure and hard work, so the precision and the demanding and unforgiving nature of Action Match have proven to be exciting and challenging for him. "It is very character building," he said.

When Greg and Craig began training together, Greg was an Expert Grade shooter. When the state titles came around just four months later, he had already advanced into Master Grade. At the competition, he shot a score of 1907, which catapulted him into High Master Grade and secured the NSW State Master Grade title. In November 2008, Greg competed in the World Championships, finishing an impressive 22nd overall.

Greg has set in motion a training regime that will see him improve at a rapid rate. He does shooting training five days a week, which, in addition to time at the range, includes gun handling, dry firing and video study. He also 'pumps iron' Monday to Friday.

Greg was just 20 when he won Mr Australia. He went on to finish 6th in the heavyweight Mr Universe competition in Italy.

All of this training would amount to nothing if Greg didn't have the right tools for the match. After much research into the different firearms used in Action Match, he settled on two STIs. His race gun is one of the original Strayer Tripp International firearms and is about 12 years old. He bought it secondhand and had Sydney gunsmith Pete Williams make a few alterations. "It is a fantastic firearm; it is a double stack and the hard grip on the gun suits my hand." Finding a grip he liked wasn't all that easy because his hands have become "pretty leathery" from all of the bodybuilding and combat training he has done throughout the years.

The metallic sight firearm he uses for Action Match shooting is a similar set-up. Greg has not been able to fault the gun in the three years he has been using it. He says, "It is always more accurate than I will ever be. It produces 1.5" group at 50m. If I look up and produce a bad shot, I know it was my fault. It narrows down the mistakes to the shooter."

As his schedule demonstrates, Greg is very dedicated to the pursuit of perfection. All his training and reloading is done with a goal in mind - or, in Greg's case, goals - and when he sets a goal, it is not a case of if he will achieve it, but when.

As a bodybuilder, his aims were to win a Mr Australia event and compete at the Mr Universe competition. At just 20, he won an overall Mr Australia title and by the time he was 21, he had competed and placed in the top six at three Mr Universe events.

Greg Van Borssum

In shooting, Greg set the short-term goals of progressing through the various grades and making the state and national teams. His long-term goals are to advance his placing in the world rankings and, he says with a grin, "knock Craig [his coach] off the top pedestal". Adding weight to that confession, his coach says there is no love lost between the two. In fact, Craig



Greg with good friend Angry Anderson, who is reportedly a fan of the shooting sports.

thrives on the competition. He says having someone like Greg hot on his heels just causes him to train all the harder.

Encompassing all of Greg's ambitions is the desire to establish consistency in his shooting. He said, "I used to always like watching Lleyton Hewitt. People used to think he was losing his temper, but he wasn't; he was just furious at himself because he wasn't doing what he knew he could do. To me, that just showed desire."

Like many athletes, Greg's strengths in his sport can often turn into his weaknesses. "I am really fast because of all my years of fight training; my reaction time is probably quicker than most," he says. "My gun will be up and out and I'll be firing my first shot while they are still coming to their guns...unfortunately, that can be my downfall. I can get a bit 'snatchy' on the trigger, which can cause me to drop a few shots."

Greg has impeccable eyesight. This asset means he can read his shots at 50m without looking through a scope. "That is one of the reasons I have recently moved back to shooting Action Match with metallic sights," he said, "so I could get my eyes back to the fore-sight of the gun."

He credits his great eyesight to his years of combat training and, according to Greg, that is both a good and bad thing. "When my



Greg's physique helps to dispel the myth that shooters are not athletes.

shooting is on the money, my vision helps me to fire really well." But, when he sees that he has dropped a shot during a competition, he has a tendency to let the rest of the match go downhill.

Greg's enthusiasm for shooting has seen him introduce many people to the sport, including Australian supermodel Megan Gale and Australian rock singer, actor and TV presenter Angry Anderson. Megan and Greg met during the filming of *Justice League*; Greg was responsible for all the film's fight design work. Unfortunately, the film was

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put on hold in 2008 due to the writers' strike. According to Greg, Megan was "very intrigued by the sport". So too was Angry Anderson. "I took him to the range for a shoot recently and he loved it. Even our industry work colleague John Stevenson (director of *Kung Fu Panda*) wanted to come and try it out," recalls Greg.

As Action Match director at the St Ives Pistol Club, Greg not only organises shoots, he makes it his mission to increase the club's membership and see that all newcomers enjoy their shooting experience as much as he does.

Shooting gets some negative media attention, but Greg says his non-shooting friends don't buy into it. He has a large support base consisting of both shooters and non-shooters, all of whom are very encouraging about his involvement in the sport. In fact, his friends are always interested in how he is doing and what is happening in the sport.

Greg believes there is much misperception about shooting in the general public - similar to the misconceptions that exist with martial arts. "People often think martial arts is about kicking and punching and fighting, but it is more than that," he said. "When you've been doing it as long as I have, it is about becoming at one with yourself and having this beautiful, flowing movement. It

has nothing to do with the fighting."

He says shooting is the same and that the sport has little or nothing to do with what most people associate it with. "If you draw from a holster and you do it beautifully and you fire the shot and it all feels perfect, that is not about shooting." For Greg and most shooters, the sport is about perfecting a movement and possessing the capacity to continually repeat that movement.

When Greg watches sporting shooters in the Olympics and at other high-level shoots, what he sees has nothing to do with shooting a gun. "It is about perfecting technique, the mindset, the control and that is a mastery of everything and you can apply that to all different things - martial arts, bodybuilding, film making - it's really just a reapplication of knowledge."


The pursuit of perfection and quest for knowledge may have steered Greg to the shooting sports, but it is his fellow shooters who make the sport so interesting to him. "The shooting range is great meeting place," says Greg. "You can't pick where people come from." Indeed, shooters hail from all walks of life and on any given day, you can find sporting legends, musicians, doctors, lawyers, teachers, truck drivers, carpenters and film directors gracing the hundreds of shooting ranges and clubs across Australia.



Greg's STI race gun, which he says produces 1.5" groups at 50m.

"Even my dentist is a sporting shooter," said Greg.

Like everyone else, Greg only has 24 hours in a day, but he uses his time wisely and is able to accomplish more than the average Joe. In addition to being a husband, father, martial arts instructor, shooter and weightlifting coach, he is also working on *Happy Feet II* with George, as well as being the combat designer and one of the unit directors of the upcoming *Mad Max 4* film and writing, directing and combat designing a number of major films that are yet to be made public. Given his litany of past successes in and out of the film industry, you can bet there will be another winner. ●




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