

# SASS Inaugural European End of Trail 2008 Match

## Traveling with Firearms

### From U.S. to Italy

by **ToniTwoBits (SASS Life #20849)**

El Rod (SASS #8849L) and I decided last year to travel to the European CAS championship last August (Days of Truth 2007 in Mazzano, Italy) with our guns and most of our ammo. To tell of our adventures on that trip would fill a book with 1200 pictures and text, but what I need to impart to you in this article is what we did to travel with our competition firearms and 22+ pounds of ammunition. Remember - this is what we did in 2007 with no experience flying to Europe with our firearms, NOT exactly what we'd do for EEOT 2008....

After paying our entry fee (100 Euros each via Paypal) and getting a confirmation letter from DOT 2007, we felt it would be a good idea to visit the Italian Consulate in Los Angeles to get a notarized letter of clearance to take our guns and ammo to a "sanctioned" match. This letter included our passport numbers, gun types and serial numbers, ammunition quantity, and a "Good Guy" letter from our local police. We were told by the Match Director, Arizona Tom, that we didn't need that letter, but upon arriving at the Rome airport, it helped with the police there. Since we live in Northern Nevada and Reno is our nearest airport, we were limited to airlines (Delta) and their regulations (which we found is somewhat different from Alitalia). Reno also has a U.S. Customs office where we declared our guns and camera (Form 4457), so that upon returning to the U.S., we weren't charged any duty, and not returning with firearms that weren't declared. Delta's regulations were 2 cases per person, no more than 50 pounds each, and the firearms had to be packed in hardcases with locks according to their regulations (see your airlines website for restricted items "sporting guns"). For extra cases and weight, the costs rise. Since we took 4 pistols, 2 rifles and 3 shotguns (plus some spare parts), the two gun cases reached their maximum weight rapidly. The other cowboy accoutrements (holsters, belts, boots, etc.) were in a third soft-sided case and the fourth case was clothing for the remainder of our 3-week trip. Delta's regulations stated that we could put the 11 pounds (each) of ammunition in the regular cases (soft-sided) - ammo to be in original cardboard boxes or metal containers, not cowboy reloads in plastic cases.

Our whole trip was based on our friends picking us up in Verona, not Milan, and renting a car later. Unfortunately for us, there is no direct link from Reno to Verona so we planned on transferring to Verona on Alitalia. Upon arriving in Rome, we had to get police clearance which is where the Consulate letter helped. Getting the police clearance was a several-hour problem, which made us miss 3 connecting flights (Alitalia) to Verona. The guns were a concern there because they knew nothing about the match in Mazzano (Northern Italy about 400 miles away), but the ammunition was the real problem. Italian law and Alitalia Airlines state that ammunition has to be packed separately from "anything" in a locked, hard-sided case, which we didn't have. We unloaded all the ammo from the 2 clothing cases, and had to obtain another case. Guns and ammo are "hand-transported" from airline-to-police-to-airline by security police (and it requires an 80 Euro payment). Once cleared and arriving in Verona, we picked up our gun cases at the airport police office after presenting the Rome airport police paperwork. Oh, yes, the extra ammo case costs more Euro because we then had 5 cases total.

Point of Interest here - the Italian police are more important than Italian Customs when transporting guns and ammo (even in a vehicle). We found each Province (Mazzano is in Brescia Province) may be different. Also, the airport police that we spoke with did not speak English and we ended up with a Delta and Alitalia airport "troubleshooter" to translate what was happening.

After shooting at DOT 2007, our gun cases were stored in the hotel vault (with no ammo - we left any remaining with the match official for them to practice with) until leaving 3 weeks later. Back to the Verona airport (Air France) where we filled out the police paperwork again, paid our 80 Euro transport fee, a transfer in Paris (where I thought I could catch a glimpse of the Eiffle Tower - not), then to Atlanta where our gun cases were not on our plane (horrors and stress). Somehow the 2 cases of guns were delayed in Paris and showed up 5 days later in Los Angeles where we had to present ourselves with passports, U.S. Customs forms and money to get them out of a bonded Customs warehouse. Once we got home from Atlanta before locating the missing gun cases 5 days later in Los Angeles, it took a lot of phone calls, finally ending up with the LAX Cargo Manager personally.. If you become separated from your gun cases, they immediately become "bonded cargo" and not "personal baggage". The airlines "lost baggage" people may not know this little ideosyncrasy and may not be very helpful in locating them.

Things we learned and what we'll do if we go to DOT 2008:

--pay the EEOT 2008 fee

--have the U.S. Customs declaration forms filled out (Form 4457 - they want to see the actual guns).

--we'd still get a letter of clearance from the Italian Consulate (Match Director said it wasn't necessary but helped)

--only take ammunition for our rifles, but not necessary (everything else you can buy there - just let them know in advance)

--fly from Reno to Atlanta and then Milan (not transfer in Rome to Verona) - if you can fly directly to Verona from a U.S. airport that is best because Verona is only 40 miles from Mazzano and a small airport, whereas Milan is about 130

miles and a huge airport. It is important to not land (transfer) in any other country without the proper paperwork and lots of time between flights. Do not land in England at all for ANY reason...

--rent a car at the Milan airport (taxis are expensive and it's a 3 hour drive to Mazzano)

--stay at the same family-run hotel in Desenzano (about 10 miles from Mazzano on Lake Garda - very picturesque with lots to do at the lake after shooting each day). Somewhat more pricey than the hotels in Mazzano. For more info ask to the organization: they will help you.

--return flight out of Milan (no stops in Paris) back to Atlanta (or any other U.S. airport)

--allow at least 5 hours between flights

The above is probably a LOT more than you really wanted to know, but it was a fun trip even with the few glitches.

The people were wonderful - helpful and fun. The stages were well laid out and all descriptions were clear. Everything was translated into at least 3-4 languages. The opening and closing ceremonies were awesome. We met so many people from the 16 European nations. Go if you can.... All the best to everyone.

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