

**D**O NOT BE LULLED by the daffodils engraved above the trigger.

"The flowers might be a little girlie," Mary Huntz says, raising her 12-gauge Beretta to her shoulder. "I wanted my gun to be pretty, I admit." Then she yells "Pull!" and fires on a fast-flying disc that shatters spectacularly into shards.

"That sound is what's pretty!" cheers another of the Annie Oakley Shooters, an Atlanta-based sisterhood of markswomen—named for the famously unerring exhibition sharpshooter—who take aim at sporting clays. With about 150 members on their roster, the Annies, as they call themselves, are one of the most active, fastest-growing women's shooting clubs in the country.

"Our members come from all skill levels and walks of life—young and older, professionals and stay-at-home moms, peashooters and sharpshooters," says Huntz, one of the founders. "It's a very welcoming, supportive group, but when the scorecards come out, we shoot to win."

They meet the second Monday of every month, rain or shine, at Burge Plantation, about an hour east of Atlanta in Mansfield. Swinging Berettas and Brownings and bundled in the olive and umber tones of haute camouflage, frosted ponytails tucked under buttoned-down hunter caps, they create the mood of a Ralph Lauren ad that means business. With a rallying cry of "Annies, get your guns!" the women traverse a long loop of shooting stations, where clays mimic the arcing flights of fowl such as quail, pheasants, and doves.

These sportswomen might navigate the brambly course in golf carts decorated with NRA stickers, but some Annies took up arms expressly to stay off the links ("it was either clays or golf if I wanted to spend time with my husband" is a refrain) and happily discovered a pastime with more bang—and the occasional buck.

"I hate to overuse the word 'empowerment,'" says Lucy Millar, "but to make your body work safely and effectively with a gun to hit a moving target—there's just nothing like it in the office or the carpool.



Some of us hunt live game, and some of us only shoot clays. Either way, it's a rush." Adds newcomer Vicki Gillespie, "Men have known that secret forever, and now we're in on it."

The Annie Oakley Shooters originated as part of the Atlanta Charity Clays tournament. "To say thank you to the women who helped with the concession stand and other volunteer work, the tournament let us have one day to shoot," Millar says.

Eventually, these trigger-happy auxiliaries sought a range of their own and invited their girlfriends. In 2004, they

established the annual Annie Oakley Tournament, which has raised more than \$200,000 for the Trust for Public Land and has given club members the experience to participate in regional championships.

"This is one of the few sports in which women and men can compete together," says Dr. Beverly Gregory, an eagle-eyed anesthesiologist who placed second in the Annies' last tourney. "You don't have to be bigger, stronger, or faster, and there are no ladies' tees, no handicaps. All you need is hand-eye coordination. A gun is a great equalizer." ■