

VIESSMANN



Climate Club Trophy



CLUB TROPHY

CASE STUDY SPORT CLUB BIATHLON MANIA

A SMALL CLUB WITH BIG IDEAS

Located in Slovakia near the town of Banská Bystrica, close to the Hron River, you will find the **Sport Club Biathlon Mania**. The club, founded by former elite biathlete, Dušan Šimočko, is unique in its approach to developing young athletes, aged 6 to 15, using laser rifles to develop shooting skills. It's an approach that seems to impact well on athlete development, while saving the club some €2,000 per year, and reducing the impact of lead toxicity. A triple win for athlete, club, and environment!

WHAT IS THE GOAL?

Sport Club Biathlon Mania seeks innovative solutions to over-consumption that also have knock-on benefits, not only in terms of reducing the ecological impact but also by creating sporting, and often economic, value for the club and its athletes.



Members of the club

HOW IS THE GOAL ACHIEVED?

The club was founded by Dušan Šimočko in 2016 with three children as its first members. Thanks to initial support from partners – PowerPlay Studio, makers of the online sport game Biathlon Mania, and Apeom, a laser rifle company – the club now has 46 child members and counting! Dušan is



Laser Rifle

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also a coach at the club as well as a volunteer bus driver, helping to pick-up and drop-off children to and from training. As you would expect, the club's values reflect those of Dušan's, developed during his career in the military, where he spent the majority of his time training and competing as a very successful biathlete. Dušan explains, "Our goal as a club is to protect nature by leading by example and not over-consuming as a biathlon club."

The club implements three main initiatives that seek to achieve this goal:

- Using laser rifles instead of air rifles to train 6-15 year old athletes
- Using a 15-seater bus to transport children to and from training
- Collecting old air rifle cartridges to create hand-made medals

WHICH IBU SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES DOES IT ADDRESS?

Lack of opportunities for entry-level participation

Dušan founded the club as a hobby when he was still in the military. His goal was to establish a club for young children. His own daughter was three years old at the time and he was acutely aware of the challenges she would be facing if she wanted to be involved in biathlon two or three years later. Normally it would not be possible for a six-year old child to take up biathlon, since use of the air rifle is considered too dangerous.



Indoor training session with the children



Outdoor training session with the children

That was why Dušan decided to get laser rifles for his club. "It teaches the kids to operate the rifle as if it's a normal rifle. The basics can be well-trained, from triggering to aiming and to the weight of the trigger, it's all the same," explained Dušan. Laser rifles are one-third of the cost of air rifles and the club makes a further saving by avoiding the rule that each athlete must have their own air rifle. "It helps us to keep the children's membership costs down. Four laser rifles for 20 children at a training session is quite adequate," stated Dušan.

Emissions from travel & transport

Dušan and his father are the club's bus drivers. They transport the children from a pick up point in the town to the training sessions, either at the stadium or in the mountains. The club owns one 15-seater bus meaning, with 46 members, more than one trip has to be made. If Dušan is coaching, he will often travel with his father who will drive the bus back to collect the other children while Dušan coaches. Older children are picked up first since they train longer than the younger ones.

Dušan calculated that if they transport only 28 kids, they save almost €50 by traveling to the closest biathlon centre 10km away – based on 28 cars traveling the same distance with a consumption of six litres per 100km. Across the year, considering a total of 100 training days, that amounts to a saving of €5,000 and 2,940 litres of diesel – at €1.70 per litre.



Process of making hand-made medals from old air rifle cartridges

Waste production

The club awards hand-made medals from old air rifle cartridges that coaches collect from the shooting range. Another volunteer, a local retired metalworker, melts the cartridges to extract the brass and fill the mould that he has created to form the medals. These medals are handed out to the winners of various categories in the annual competition.

WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES FACED?

Sport Club Biathlon Mania owns one 15-seater bus and has 46 children to transport to and from training by two volunteer bus drivers. This gap in resources has come through rapid growth in the number of members. Currently, most of the funding comes from member registration fees, which is why much of the work is done by volunteers. One of the goals Dušan has is to access additional funding to purchase an electric bus.

Another challenge is that the children are getting older. According to Dušan, it's important that children aged 15 years

and above sometimes train with a normal rifle. To address this challenge, Dušan's goal is to purchase Anschütz laser barrels, which the club's coaches can use to train older athletes. "They're more expensive than the laser rifles we use for now," said Dušan, "But the Anschütz laser barrel can be installed to the stock which the athletes use for shooting with 0.22 LR ammunition anyway." This means that roughly half of the training sessions could be coached with the laser trainer and the other half with the smallbore rifle cartridges, which would help to save the club roughly €7,000 per year with no impact on the children's development

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Dušan is a former vice-president of the Slovak Biathlon Association. During his tenure, in 2021, the SBA launched a Biathlon for All programme for 6–9-year-olds to increase member numbers of this age group. During the same year, the SBA also organised a laser rifle competition. Both initiatives led to a huge increase in the number of members and, due to the success of these initiatives, Dušan hopes to partner with the Association again to extend the age range to include children up to 12 years old.

Currently, the Sport Club Biathlon Mania works with children up until they are 15 years old. When they reach this age the children must find other clubs that have the resources to train and develop them further. To enable older children to remain at the club, a group of volunteers at Sport Club Biathlon Mania are in discussions to build a team of people that can focus on raising funds for the club, possibly through crowdfunding and sponsorship initiatives.



Club members and their 15-seater bus