



HELP! I'M A BEGINNER

The struggle for information and guidance for new archers is in the past so don't suffer in silence, there's a lot of help out there

New archers are lucky – what, in the past, might have been a struggle for information and guidance is now an easy browse through the collection of assistance widely available.

It is a sad but true fact that the level of support and information given to beginners after they have completed a beginners' course is dependent on the club that they join; in some cases two

clubs just miles away from each other could just as well be in different countries. This isn't surprising, considering that everything in archery at the grassroots level is done by unpaid volunteers, many of whom originally signed up to shoot arrows and then, through the necessity of keeping the club running effectively, find themselves taking on a second job on the club or county committee, or coaching.

When you've finished your beginners course it is sometimes difficult to find the next step

For some clubs this is just the way it is, members accept it and life goes on; but it does leave to a lot of very keen people to find archery hard work six months down the line – not the enjoyable pastime they enrolled for. This often drives people away. Where support is lacking in a club it is not a deliberate policy, it is unintentional that no-one is taught about the organisation schemes of classification, handicap and ranking rounds and tournaments – it's just a little negligent.

Lack of information is a big issue and it has been for decades. ArcheryGB has been promising to put together a welcome pack for years but some clubs got fed up waiting years ago and have done their own. Fortunately, if you find yourself in a despondent position with no ready assistance, there is an army of help you can call upon.

The biggest issue, for most at least, is the transition from a beginners' course to becoming a full member and taking your position on the shooting line. Everything is new and you are conscious not to upset anyone, but soon you will find yourself wondering what's next.

The fact is, there is no formal structure from the top in place to tell

Competitions at the club are a great way to ease yourself into tournament shooting



you where to go – no good centrally governed road maps, like in many sports, to give you an idea of how to progress and develop. Everything is down to individual club initiatives, the coaches in those clubs and your desire to improve.

Support varies from none at all to the ability to hire club equipment for a few weeks, coaches being readily on hand to offer guidance and advice, booklets detailing the common aspects of archery technique and etiquette, and club level competitions. You will find that bigger clubs tend to do this better than smaller clubs, if for no better reason than there are more people to share the workload.

There are a lot of clubs that fall in the middle, clubs who do have some resources and qualified coaches, yet due to a quirk of the coaching code forget to

mention that it is not right for a coach to approach an archer – the archer has to approach the coach. Asking for help is quite daunting when you just start out.

So what can you do if you find yourself in the worst possible case? Looking to move clubs is probably the first thought, but that is not always an option. Don't assume that because of a lack of a formal structure there is no help close to hand – experienced archers on the line will be prepared to help. Many will willingly spend time pointing you in the right direction, you just have to ask.

If you get no joy at this point the next step is to contact your county coaching association. Most county organisations have a website, if not then contact ArcheryGB directly and you will be pointed in the right direction. All



Many clubs have good coaches who are willing to spend time looking at your form

counties have some very willing coaches; many are prepared to travel to clubs to offer coaching on a one-off or regular basis. There is no funding for this so there are costs that need to be covered, but nothing in this life is free.

The internet is, as for most things, an invaluable resource. With archery, perhaps more than many things, the caveat of "don't believe anything you read" is very poignant. Forums like Archery Interchange, Archers Rest and Archery Talk boast posters from the elite and most helpful corners of the archery world.

More traditional publications are also useful (there's one coming from this very magazine in the near future!), but often grasping the detailed explanations can cause more trouble than it's worth for the beginning archer.

Don't underestimate the value of your local pro-shop, archery is their day job. It is in their interest to help you as much as they can, it is also not in their interest to supply you with poorly set up equipment. In fact, your local pro-shop should be actively encouraging you to visit – you will find out very quickly that building up a good relationship works both ways and your loyalty will be handsomely repaid with free snippets of information and equipment selection advice; what might take an experienced member of staff five minutes to explain is generally backed up by many hours of practical experience.

The real message is that you do not have to suffer in silence; there are many people out there willing to help, just take a little look at the bigger picture – and ask!

Everyone starts somewhere, experienced archers are more than willing to pass on what they've learnt