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FPAG's 2004 Maltese Show



In the Fall of 2003, under the direction of club president Mitch Piatt, the Florida Pyrotechnics Arts Guild (FPAG) took on a project that was the first of its kind in America: the construction of a fireworks show using only authentic Maltese techniques. Several thousand dollars were allocated to the project, along with generous donations from PyroSupplies.com, Greg Dixon and Skylighter to help with the large amount of materials the large, chemical-hungry multi-break shells would consume.

Over the course of the year, despite setbacks caused by an onslaught of hurricanes and a relatively small group of core members to keep the project going, over 60 large shells were produced along with 300 small finale shells, a large counter rotating wheel, a handful of lampare shells and two lance pieces.

The statistics were quite impressive for a non-commercial effort by only a dozen or so pyro hobbyists. 700 pounds of chlorate star composition was consumed, along with 100 pounds of flash and 500 pounds of black powder. Using a hydraulic press and guild-built star plates to produce 5/8", 3/4" and 7/8" pumped stars, a grand total of over 20,000 stars were pumped out over a 3 day period! Over twelve hundred 1-1/4" insert shells were produced for use in 10" snail shells and other large ring effects. Three hundred 3" shells were produced in just one week for the finale, 30 of them containing a total of 360 hand rolled 1/2 inch colored "beraq" salutes.

The effort was not limited to only those members working together in Florida either. Kolin Kimbrough of Texas brought six large shells of his own, one of them a perfectly performing 6 break 5" with bottom shot. Renowned shell builder Don Rowe also brought a 7 break 8" that weighed 90 pounds and stood about five feet tall (the black shell shown above).

When the work was all done and the fruits of everyone's labor were placed on a tarp for one final look on the day of the show, the sight was awe inspiring. What was once the realm of websites and photographs taken in Malta was now spread out before us for the first time ever on American soil!



Some of the builders responsible for this show pose next to their work. Paul Schembri from Malta can be seen front and center, sitting to the right of guild president Mitch Piatt.



Paul Schembri works with other guild members on the large counter-rotating wheel.



Bundles of 3 inch "kaxxa" finale shells, pronounced "ka-sha".



Large shells fill the magazine, with 10" shell-of-shells in the forefront.

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FPAG Maltese Show...



A box of 3/4" stars pumped 70 at a time using a hydraulic press.



Trays of rough powder drying in the sun.



Multi-break cans with outer star rings loaded.



Containers filled with bottom shot shells.



Dan and Joe assembling breaks together.



Mitch stringing breaks together on his home-made Maltese roller.

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6" Single Ring w/Pistil

Av. Weight: 20 pounds**Lift:** 230 grams**Description:**

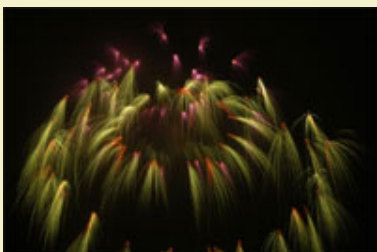
This style of shell, along with the 7" size, is the "workhorse" of Maltese displays, usually configured with three breaks and a bottom shot. Each break has six rings of nineteen 3/4" pumped stars and an inner pistil of contrasting 1/4" round stars. Typical designs for the outer ring include solid color, half and half, quadrants (see left photo) and glitter. The bottom shot is sometimes substituted with a silver spider shell.

[Video Clip](#)

7" Double Rings w/Pistil

Av. Weight: 32 pounds**Lift:** 430 grams**Description:**

The 7" size adds enough extra space to insert an additional ring of 5/8" comets inside the outer ring of 3/4" comets. This produces an attractive triple layer effect with an inner "doughnut" of stars inside the outer ring, along with the central cluster of 1/4" stars. Since the 1/4" stars burn out rather rapidly, they can be hard to spot in the videos.

[Video Clip](#)

10" Triple Insert Rings

Av. Weight: 20 pounds**Lift:** 800 grams**Description:**

This is a 10" single break shell with no bottom shot, and includes ninety 1-1/4" color insert shells. The inserts are made with 1/4" color stars and are rolled and spiked just like a tiny Italian style canister. They are fused from the side using regular Chinese time fuse, with three separate timings to produce three rings. Five rings are stacked inside the shell, with 18 shells in each ring. The first row of 18 shells represents the first timed ring. The second and third rows combine to create the third timed ring, while the fourth and fifth rows produce the second timed ring. The reason the second ring is placed at the bottom of the shell is to produce a jumping back and forth effect of the rings rather than a predictable progression.



[Video Clip](#)

10" Snail Shell (Bebbux)

Av. Weight: 20 pounds

Lift: 800 grams

Description:

This is another 10" single break insert shell with no bottom shot. Four rows of eighteen 1-1/4" insert shells are produced with 1/20th of a second timing increments, then carefully arranged in order of time so that the inserts break in a clockwise or counter clockwise progression (direction depends on break orientation of shell). The inserts are typically grouped so that groups of four will break at the same time, rather than each one having a slightly different timing. The end result is a circular progression of tiny shell breaks working their way around as they expand out, creating a spiral pattern and thus the "snail" nickname.



[Video Clip](#)

7" Report Rings w/Pistil (Beraq)

Av. Weight: 30 pounds

Lift: 430 grams

Description:

This is similar to the 6" multi-break except the rings of 3/4" comets are replaced by rings of tiny salutes known as "beraq." This is one of the more difficult shells to build well due to the precision timing required on so many small salutes, and the sheer number of them that must be made to perform consistently. A well made beraq shell should produce distinct rings of salutes where the timing is so close that a single loud ripping sound is produced. Many different versions of beraq shells with various timed rings and colored report effects are fired during daylight hours at Maltese festivals.

Photography Credits

Production Photos: Jason Land & Kyle Kepley

Shell Photos: Tracey Baker

Video: Kyle Kepley