

The Driven BIRD SHOOT

— LARRY’S SHORT STORIES #128 —

Game, partridge and pheasant have been the primary game of driven bird shoots in Europe and the United Kingdom, since the 1850’s. The later invention of shotgun shells and break-open shotguns likely contributed to interest in the sport as well as the development of self-opening and hammerless actions, automatic ejectors, and matched pairs – all during the first fifty years of the development of the side-by-side shotgun. Most of this is trivia, of course, but not so much for those people who like to shoot driven birds.

Most shoots are two or three days, with four or five “drives” per day. Each drive provides a different position on the line (they call the shooting positions “pegs” or “butts”) and a new presentation of the birds — based on the lay of the land. The drivers are called

“beaters” as they walk through the habitat beating the brush, waving flags or yelling – all to put the birds to flight, in your direction.

Side-by-side shotguns, with

two triggers, were the exclusive choice of the 19th century shooters, because the over/under wasn’t invented until 1909. Today the side-by-side is still traditional, but the over/under likely is in the majority because it’s less expensive and has a single trigger – which is easier for some people to shoot. A matched pair of shotguns has been the norm for as long as anyone knows. Switching from one gun to the other, with your loader, is a unique experience – with multiple forms, depending on the country.



Empty shells from one drive. My guns are a pair of Purdey side-by-sides.



At the end of day one, they neatly displayed the day’s shoot of red-legged partridges – for formal pictures. Son Russell on the left.

Son Russell and I scheduled this trip a year out; his first, my second. Traveling with guns is quite an experience; there’s pre-trip paperwork, travel paperwork and arrival paperwork – both going and coming home; but it’s all pretty straightforward, if you pay attention, follow the rules and allow plenty of time.

“...shooting of the birds is the most challenging part...”

The actual shooting of the birds is the most challenging part; that is, satisfying

yourself that you’re shooting as well as you think you should. The birds often come in large groups, with little notice. Getting off a quick “first shot,” when the birds seem too far out, is counter intuitive, but absolutely essential, if your immediate “second” shot is to be effective. In the most intense part of the shoot, it is bang, bang, swap, bang, bang, swap... Yes the barrels on both guns can get too hot to touch.



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My loader, Cergio, on the right and my counter, Rafael, on the left. They have just finished gathering the birds from the drive.