

DRIVEN GROUSE SHOOTING

– LARRY’S SHORT STORIES #199 –



Russell and I are "properly" dressed for grouse shooting in the United Kingdom.

The grouse came in low and fast (in small groups), slicing through the line from the left and the right, with a few coming straight on. In three days of shooting, I never had a high overhead shot. Switching guns was easier than I'd imagined; keeping my eye on the birds, I turned slightly right and pushed the #1 gun (still closed) toward the loader. My right hand was on the grip with my open left hand extended to accept the forend of the #2 gun. Then it was mount and shoot again. Since the shooting butts were in a straight line, it was permissible to turn and shoot out the back – as the birds passed by.

The ultimate execution, for the most experienced grouse shooters, is to fire on the birds just as they're coming into range; then switch guns and fire twice more in front of the butt; then turn 180

degrees while switching guns again and fire twice more out the back. Six shots, six grouse; they tell me it's been done!

Driven grouse shooting isn't

something we get to do in the United States; but in the United Kingdom there's a long tradition – going way back into the 19th century, or perhaps even before. It's considered to be the premier wing shooting experience, because the grouse fly so fast and so low to the ground. At first glance, it seems relatively straightforward; ten shooters stand in a line of shooting butts, about 50 yards apart, and fire their side-by-sides or over/unders at the grouse as the fly by. But, it's far more complicated than that.

For there to be a shoot in the first place, there must be grouse; and that isn't a given. The English red grouse cannot be pen raised, so the game managers concentrate on managing the habitat and the predators, with their fingers crossed – hoping for good spring nesting weather. Burning small patches of the older woody ground cover (heather) every spring is one of the principle habitat management practices.

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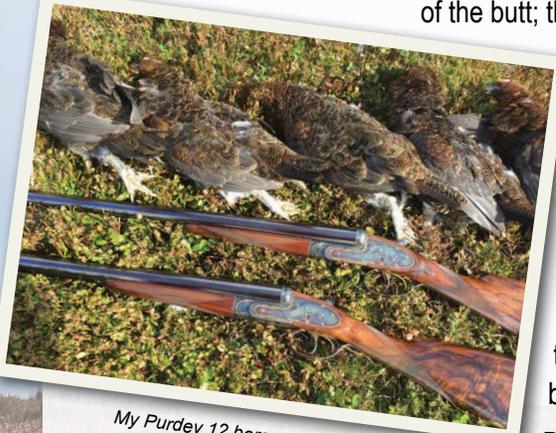
These are driven birds; and there is quite an art to ensure a good drive. The drivers and flankers advance or hold (as directed), so as to keep the birds flying toward the guns and spread over the line as evenly as possible – providing everyone a fair amount of shooting.

What an unbelievable experience; when can I go back?



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United Kingdom
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My Purdey 12 bore guns, with some of the grouse from the first drive.



A driven grouse shoot is a "big" operation; there were ten shooters (each with a loader), 40 drivers/beaters and 20-30 dogs. All are coming back to the trucks to re-deploy for the next drive. I shot from butt #1 on this drive.