

Lomas de Fuensauco ESTATE SPAIN

*An autumn day on partridge near Madrid which
brought together strangers who left as friends.*

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The sun's rays were
relentless during
the day's shooting.

Three or four years ago we went to look at universities with my son Kit. At one, I forget which, we passed an open door. The unmistakable aroma of fixer and stop bath arrested my progress and I felt compelled to stick my head in – much to the consternation of the incumbent. I apologised and explained that I was a photographer and that the smell of those chemicals was evocative. He smiled nervously and was visibly relieved when my wife drew me away. I hadn't been in a darkroom for 12 years, but that odour had taken me straight back.

Fragrance can do that. The smell of thyme will now take me back to shooting partridge in the Spanish countryside, reminding me of good times, blue skies, nippy redlegs, lavish hospitality and the finest gin and tonic I've ever tasted.

Sometimes I have the best job in the world and when my editor asked me if I'd like to go to Spain for a couple of days, I thought about it for at least a millisecond before saying yes. I love photographing and writing about shooting, so an opportunity to snap away in a

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completely different environment with different traditions was one not to be missed. The trip was courtesy of Eley Hawk and involved a day's shooting at the Lomas de Fuensauco

Estate, which is located 40 miles south east of Madrid.

I often think the pleasure of a day's shooting is diminished if the team of guns are not established friends, but that certainly wasn't the case on this trip. We were all in the shooting business, and although most of us knew of each other, we had rarely met and certainly hadn't shot together. However, by the time we lined out on the Wednesday there was a strong sense of camaraderie between us.

For the five of us that had flown from Gatwick this was partially due to adversity shared; our plane landed at Madrid, we landed at Madrid, but our baggage stayed in Blighty. We were unbowed and trusted in the organisational skills of David Thompson, Eley Hawk's marketing manager. I'm afraid we left him to it and travelled with his managing director, Eduardo Hernando, to the offices of Maxam, the parent company of Eley Hawk. Maxam are a vast company, more than 140 years old, and a specialist in explosives. Talking to the people there made me realise how complex this sector is and just how many shotgun cartridges are manufactured in the world. Our faith in David was not misplaced, and he joined us an hour later with the news that we would be reunited with clean clothes at 11pm. The other unifying factors were the old reliables of good conversation, food and drink.

Eduardo had chosen for us a hotel in the town of Chinchón – the Parador de Chinchón. Parador have a string of hotels dotted around Spain and you may have stayed in one yourself. Many are historic buildings adapted to modern life, and the one at Chinchón was once a monastery but has been turned ➤



David Thompson and Eduardo Hernando of Eley Hawk in discussion between drives.



Charlie Bull in action, watched by his loader and secretario.

into a very fine hotel indeed, luxurious but not somewhere you feel you have to dress for dinner which, bearing in mind our lack of sartorial choice at that point, was perhaps just as well.

We were joined at dinner by the three other guns who had made their way independently: Charlie Bull of Just Cartridges and John Rogers who runs the Gun Room in Ivy Bridge, Devon, had both come on different flights, but David Lloyd had taken the ferry to Portugal and driven up. David owns the

Manchester Clay Shooting Club and had good reason to take the route he did as he was able to pick up his Perazzi that had been restocked by master craftsman Manuel Ricardo in Póvoa de Varzim. Choice of menu was left to Eduardo, a case of when in Madrid do as the Madrilenians do, and the food was excellent as was the local Neri wine. Conversation also flowed and many tales were told.

The remarkable thing about our team was that despite the vast experience of most of the guns,

not a single one of us had ever shot a partridge in Spain. We were all intrigued with what the morning would bring.

Into the autumn sunshine

Sunrise found us in a covey of 4x4s heading a few miles south east to the Lomas de Fuensauco. It was all a bit different from Hampshire. Even for Central Spain it was hot and dry for November and we were expecting temperatures touching 28°C and a cloudless blue sky.

There were olive trees everywhere with dusty raked soil beneath. Spain produces 40 per cent of the world's olive oil and there are around 300 million olive trees in the country. The Madrid region might not be the greatest producer of olives in Spain but it sure has a lot of olive trees. The Lomas de Fuensauco Estate, owned by the Daurella family, covers some 2,500ha. There are 6,000 olive trees and 180 acres of cereals. Most of the oats and barley is used as feed for the horses which they raise and sell ➤



Host Igancio Basa addresses the guns in the shoot room at Lomas de Fuensauco Estate.



David Lloyd showing off his custom made Portuguese stock.



The trip was David Thompson's first taste of Spanish partridge shooting.



As on any estate, the loaders and secretarios were indispensable to the guns.

around the world. Horses and show jumping are a big part of family life. In 2017 they only shot until the end of December, but they hope to do 40 days and go through to the end of March.

In that early sunlight the lodge looked stunning; its deep ochre walls contrasting with the clear blue of the sky and with the beautiful pots of geraniums and late-season roses. The shoot room is huge and has more trophies than I have ever seen in one place. Clearly the Daurellas know one end of a rifle from the other. We had been warned to ignore the delights of the hotel breakfast, and wisely, as

the ‘full Spanish’ may not have the artery-lining properties of the English version but it is just as filling. With uniformed waiters in attendance it was certainly a great way to begin the day.

Numbers drawn and stomachs pleasantly full we made our way back to the courtyard to choose our weapons. It had been decided that in order to keep things simple, especially with the heightened security that terrorism brings that shotguns would be hired. This was the only slight glitch in an otherwise perfect trip. We were English, we would want side-by-sides, except we wouldn’t, all to a man being

adherents of the dark side. The only one to choose a pair of side-by-sides was David Thompson, the least experienced shot amongst us, for whom this was to be his first live quarry experience. If his results are anything to go by perhaps I should have chosen that configuration too.

Then it was off to the first drive to be introduced to our loaders and secretarios. Mine spoke no English and my Spanish is at best negligible, but it is remarkable how much a smile and hand gestures get you by. The only difficulty was explaining to them that I wouldn’t be shooting all the drives, photography had to come first. Fortunately Eduardo

was on hand to make this clear. Soon we were lined up at the base of a steep slope that, had it been covered in grass could have been in Wiltshire or Dorset, but with tussocks of grass, the wonderful smell of tomillo (thyme) and the heat was entirely European.

Shooting partridge in Spain is different in so many ways, so here is a heads up. First it is apparent that Spanish shooters are very competitive. Your secretario will encourage you to shoot at birds you wouldn’t contemplate in the Chalke Valley. Below the lip of the hill, at head height behind you – both are fair game. All this is safe, the beaters

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stay back from the edge and there are no pickers-up, but after years of training it is so difficult to break what for a British gun is a taboo. In the drives that I shot I couldn’t manage it and I don’t think my

Spanish friends understood. I was a disappointment, I could see it in their eyes. The birds on this first drive were, truth to be told, a little disappointing, wanting to fly round the contours rather than across the valley. I don’t know why this was the case, certainly for the rest of the day, as we moved into deeper valleys they shot across from one side to the other like the colourful missiles they are. But it would be sad if we knew all the answers.

After two drives we had refreshments sitting under a pair of awnings, and were waited on by the two attendants from breakfast. This was an opportunity to hydrate►



You don't get time to think when taking on these redlegs.

though honestly the temperature was not a problem. It was a dry heat and even in full fig the tie stayed done up (and I didn't sweat).

Two more drives followed. These were returns but the valley was a good one – deep and wide, and the birds flew well. Then it was back to the awnings and an angel who appeared bearing cool, damp towels to, as Charlie put it, 'mop our fevered brows' before a superb

lunch. Cold soup, Iberico ham, salads, breads and desert with chilled wine and coffee. The hospitality was outstanding. They even moved the awnings as the sun moved.

Two more drives in different parts of the estate finished off the day before we were driven back to the house. I was tired. It had been two long days and carrying cameras around in scorching heat had made me wilt a little. Sitting in

the gazebo in front of the house as the sun went down the two waiters appeared with huge glasses full of ice, a large bottle of gin and another of tonic, and began pouring. It was the best G&T I've ever had... 🍸

For more information on Lomas de Fuensauco Estate, visit fuensauco.com

The area guide

How to get there, where to stay and what you'll eat.



TRAVEL

We flew from Gatwick to Madrid, but there are many flights available from Heathrow, Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester and other regional airlines. It is a two- to three-hour flight and many bargains may be had. The estate will then arrange transport from Madrid Airport. If you do take your guns with you don't forget you need to get a European Firearms pass.

STAY

The farmhouse at the Lomas de Fuensauco Estate has 11 luxury double rooms and can provide breakfast, lunch and dinner in its palatial surroundings and certainly if you are planning back to back days would be the ideal solution. The Parador de Chinchón is a lovely hotel and Chinchón is a charming medieval town with many restaurants round the Plaza Mayor. If you get the chance then the 45 minute drive to Toledo is well worth it.

CATERING

The catering at the estate during the day is truly sublime. The food provided at the estate was pretty much faultless and there are many restaurants in the region that are outstanding. If you like fine dining then Madrid has no less than 17 Michelin-starred restaurants that should keep your stomach replete and your bank balance depleted. And whatever you do, don't forget that end-of-the-day gin and tonic.