

# THE SECRET CONTENTS OF A SPORTING JACKET

**I** DON'T know about a 'Sporting Life' as the sub-head of this weekly column suggests but it's most certainly been a sporting week this past week. I've been shooting, beating (twice), and watched both Beagles and Foxhounds on two separate days. Because of the weather I've needed several changes of coats too!

As it is the end of the shooting season it's almost time for me to return home to 'La Mallinza'. However, before doing so my main shooting jacket needs a trip to the dry-cleaners to rid it of mud and blood. In preparation for its annual trip, I thought I'd better empty the pockets and find a home for the objects I'd accumulated there over the past season.

Pockets have a tendency to hold more than you might think they are able to. The word pocket is a corruption of the French word poche, which means bag. And so is the word poacher as poachers often had special pockets sewn into their clothing in order to hide their illegally gotten game. Mind you, another theory has it that the name can be traced back to an obsolete French word pocher, meaning to intrude or trespass.

During my recent clear-out I discovered a live cartridge which I'd put in there for safekeeping after noticing some corrosion whilst loading for someone a spare lead I always keep in there for any Gun who has a dog but no way of keeping his animal under control: a set of earplugs, a cartridge extractor and the inevitable lengths of baler twine, in this case out for use as ties to brace up presents.

In addition, there were several dog poo bags (useful for their intended purpose on occasions as well as a multitude of other things such as keeping clean the liver of a stalked mo deer), a soggy beaver's pony cap, and at the very bottom of one pocket, my penknife.

## Penknives and pocket knives

Out beating last week, as we walked to start a drive, a group of us were talking about penknives and turned out our pockets to compare knives.

The merits of each were discussed and then someone pointed out that were we to leave our knives in our pockets, walk down the High Street and then be searched by the police, we were quite likely to be arrested. That is because, although legitimate for our purposes, none complied with what is permissible in a public place. A fact which gave us all food for thought.



Despite that possibility, no country person should ever be without a penknife or pocket knife – and those of us who are country people, dog owners, hunting and shooting enthusiasts cannot possibly be without one.

They have many uses ranging from cutting string to tying up a fence or gate; hooking the back legs of a rabbit (and gutting and punching the same); opening fence sticks; removing thorns and splinters, and, if the blade is not so disgusting, possibly even slicing up a lump of cheese or cutting an apple at luncheon.

Penknives should have a good blade – after all it is the most important component so you need to consider what it's made of, how it reacts under stress, how easy it is to sharpen, how well it is likely to resist corrosion, and

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how strong it is. Obviously they must be kept sharp and well-oiled, unless doing so is likely to taint your cheese sandwich!

The material used in the construction of the handle is a matter of personal choice but it should obviously be tough and resilient. In addition, both blade and handle must marry together well and be balanced. A good pocket knife can be expensive but my advice would be to get the best you can afford without it breaking the bank if you should ever unfortunately lose it.

Be careful in which pocket you keep your treasured knife. At one time I had a tendency to wear the waistcoats of previous seasons' keeper's suits and keep my knife in one of the shallow pockets. However, no matter where I've kept them, I've lost far too many in dog bedding and the straw of a stable or, during my gamekeeping days, by leaving them stuck in a tree or fencepost somewhere once I'd strayed up a feed ride or dealt with a rabbit.

## Pistol in my pocket!

Talk of the possibility of a pocket knife being illegal in the High Street reminds me of a time when doing such things would not incur the arrival at a police armed response vehicle. Many years ago – at least 30 – I had a Belgian .410 pistol on my firearms certificate and carried it with me each morning when checking my fox wires. It was a perfect and most humane way of dispatching foxes caught in such a way.

My favoured place to keep it dry and safe was in the poacher's pocket of my Barbour coat. One particular morning after it'd done all I needed to on the estate, I slipped into the local town to pay in some money at my bank. As is the case with my current shooting coat, the pockets of my Barbour were full of gamekeeping debris and somewhere amongst it all I'd slipped in my paying-in book.

When I came to my turn at the bank I couldn't readily find it and so started removing all from my pockets in my search. Placing everything on the counter, I added the .410 pistol to the pile without a second thought, whereupon the cashier barely raised her eyebrows and simply commented "I see you're bringing your work with you again, Mr Hobson".

Fortunately she knew me well and there was no panic pressing of emergency alarm buttons, crashing down of bulletproof panes or calling police stress – all of which goes to show how things have changed over the ensuing decades!

## David Hudson recalls an outing enjoyed by all 12 Guns

**T**HE final day on our partridge shoot always seems to me to signify the end of autumn shooting and the beginning of the winter season. Our shooting year begins on August 12 with working the pointers and setters on the hill in pursuit of grouse. Then, come September 1, partridges are added to the mix – driven and walked-up rather than shot over dogs, but still essentially autumn sport.

We hope for dry, sunny days so we can go shooting in shirtsleeve order. In my mind, grouse and partridge are associated with summer and autumn. Pheasants, though, belong to the winter even if the first pheasant day does precede the final partridge day.

Our partridges have done really well this season, helped no doubt by a decent summer that meant the release pens were nice and dry instead of wet and boggy. Last year my trip to the Hill rewarded us with beets and waterlogged fescue. It was not only boggy underfoot, but the rabbits and bracken were also soaking wet most of the time.



**Annette Kastner says this is a breed which should be saved from extinction**

# The Braque Saint Germain French with British roots

**T**he story of the Braque Saint Germain reaches into history as this breed was actually created for the gentry and the King of France himself.

There are only few breeds in the world for which the origin is so clearly documented through a narrative from the 19th Century. The King of France was given a pair of English

Pointers, 'Mist' and 'Stoop', as a gift. As both proved to be excellent hunters, they decided to breed them in the royal kennels to already existing French Braques.

The French King was pleased with the looks of the white/orange short-haired dogs (for in former times being white means noble) and especially with its



# The last partridge day

Pushing through wet bracken that reaches up to head height is not my idea of fun. This season I've been able to go partridge shooting wearing a tweed waistcoat and breeks and leather walking boots, and still end the day dry instead of being wrapped head to toe in wet weather gear and ending up soaked anyway.

Possibly, also as a result of the dry conditions, the partridges seem to have flown better than they did over the past year or so. Certainly they have been tasting good to me, though I have never found partridge shooting easy. You stand for what seems like an age in the bottom of a gully, scanning the skyline left and right for the first glimpse of those little brown bodies going across the bracken banks. This is whilst knowing that, when they do come, there will be no warning and precious little time to get up before they have whizzed past and disappeared over the bracken behind you.

## Missed your chance

A rattle of shots from farther down the line distracts you. As soon as you turn to see what is going on with the Guns down the line, to your left someone shouts "over" and you realise that you have missed your chance of a shot while you were watching someone else missing what they were shooting at.

It is the way that they bank and turn that makes partridge shooting so interesting for me. A pheasant that gets up out of the wood in front of your dog and heads your way will usually hold its course and pass over you unless there is a strong side wind to push it away. You can watch it coming and wait your time before swinging the gun up and killing it – or not as may be the case.

Partridges are much less predictable. The bird that seems to be coming right at you is liable to drop a wing and slide off to one side. While you are watching it go towards your

neighbour another bird, that you hadn't even registered, will have turned away from the Gun on the other side and flown right over your head. Shots often have to be taken the instant you see the birds with no time to get set. It is a case of whipping the gun into the shoulder and pulling the trigger. On a good day it is a great way to shoot, but on a bad day it is simply a way to waste cartridges.

Sometimes the birds turn along the face of the bank in front of the Guns and pitch into the bracken or swing back over the beaters' heads. Once they land they must run and run fairly smartly. Two or three times this year I saw birds drop into the bracken just in front of the pegs. But when the beaters and



their dogs came through the cover no birds were flushed. It is also possible that they sat tight and were missed by the dogs, and that is a disturbing thought.

If birds can be missed even when we know where they are and the dogs are put through the bracken again and again, it begs the question of how many are left behind when the beaters and dogs simply walk straight through the bracken. Our beating line is spread pretty thin even on the best attended days when wives and girlfriends are pressed into service. On a wet day, when we have the bare minimum of numbers on parade, any partridge that sat tight and refused to fly would have every chance of being missed completely.

Speaking of missing completely brings me nicely to the question of the quality of our shooting. The final partridge shoot of the season resulted in a modest bag of eight partridges and one snipe. Not a lot of sport for 12 Guns you may feel and you would be right – except that the 12 Guns fired 55 shots between them for those nine birds.

I make that a kills to cartridges ratio of roughly one in six or a 16 per cent success rate – not exactly shooting of the highest standard. However, it isn't the quality of the shooting that matters; it is the quality of the sport. I can say for sure that all 12 Guns thoroughly enjoyed their last day on the hill.

It didn't rain and that was a big plus point for starters. Actually we have been incredibly lucky with the weather on all but one of our partridge days this year. The birds flew well and the dogs all worked well and that was another tick in the good points column. The company was good, there was the usual exchange of insults and lies, and a certain amount of strong drink was taken amidst a general feeling that all the work put into the partridges was well worth the effort.

## Struggle to retrieve

I was probably more pleased than most having shot two of the partridges, both of which were retrieved by 'Zephyr', George's little Cocker Spaniel. The second one was particularly good because it was a bird I had hit on the second drive that flew well back before coming down. Since we sometimes struggle to retrieve birds that have dropped right behind the Guns it was a real treat when 'Zephyr' dove into a bracken bank close to where we thought it had fallen and emerged with the dead partridge.

Finally, I also accounted for the snipe, which was flushed by the beaters as they were walking back across the hill. It climbed high up into the sky, zigging and zagging before deciding to fly right over where I was standing. It clearly wasn't the snipe's lucky day because I swung the 20-gauge and down it came.

While I am not claiming that it was the highest snipe ever shot, it was a fair way above me. It must have been because we were going out to launch the next day with a friend who lives about 50 miles away in Cumbria. We pulled up at the door and he greeted me with "hello David, I hear you shot a cracking snipe yesterday". Things can only go downhill from here.



such as partridge, pheasant and snipe, and field work. Meanwhile, in Germany the Braque Saint Germain has to show its abilities as an all-rounder. So besides being a specialist for the field work, he proves his qualities also in driven hunts or because of his fine nose on the blood trails.

His coolness and sweet natured behaviour and affiliation makes the Braque Saint Germain a perfect mate at hunt and a close companion to the family. Because of their sensitive nature, the Braque Saint Germain does not get along with rigor.

If too much strong force is used it will cut its collaboration right away. However, if you choose companionship, you'll never find a more dedicated dog. So, compared to the world of horses, it would be a (thoughtful) horse – sensitive, but with a strong performance. And if you can handle them then the sky is the limit. A dog with a royal history, this is a breed which deserves more attention and truly should be saved from extinction.

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