

## Feature

# Revealed: what guns really want

James Horne, CEO of GunsOnPegs, reveals results of a recent survey as to what shooters want and expect from a shoot day.

WITH NEARLY 4,000 PEOPLE OFFERING GunsOnPegs and Strutt & Parker their views on shooting and fishing, our census has provided a fascinating insight into our sport, both from the participants and the providers. We believe this is the first time anyone has endeavoured to reconcile the views from both sides to discover whether expectations are being delivered.

Although I started GunsOnPegs simply to fill places on the shoot I was running near Newmarket, with over 51,000 members there is clearly a demand for a vibrant market place. Over 90% of guns now visit more than one shoot each season, with 36% going to more than five shoots.

### WHAT ARE THE GUNS NOW DOING IN THESE CHANGING TIMES?

Back in 2007 visiting different shoots was more difficult, as one relied on word-of-mouth recommendations and contacts, so roving syndicates were uncommon. Over the last few years we have seen a dramatic increase with 54% of guns saying they are now part of a roving syndicate.

Travelling to different shoots around the country is a logical development as guns like the opportunity to see new ground with varying topography, with different styles of birds being shown and, above all, getting away for a night with a group of friends to have some fun. Over 98% of guns stay away shooting during the season, with 40% preferring to be away whenever they shoot. 28% are prepared to spend more than £200 per night.

### USING MORE SOCIAL MEDIA

With over 52 million users of the internet in the UK, representing 83% of the population, and Facebook being used by over 50% of the population, we have seen a dramatic change in how we receive information. Over 40% of GunsOnPegs members also have a Facebook account and no longer is Facebook seen as

“something the young do” as the average age of a user is now 41 years old.

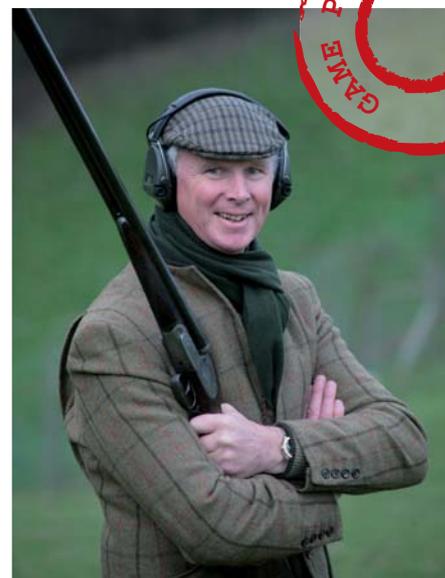
This change has created an environment where the leisure industry has had to become more internet savvy and shooting, with its sometimes old-fashioned traditions, has at times struggled to adjust. However, particularly in the last 12 months, GunsOnPegs has seen dramatic growth, with even more shoots taking up the free service we offer. We have also had a record increase in the number of guns becoming members.

### WHAT DO GUNS EXPECT? HOSPITALITY IS BECOMING EVER MORE IMPORTANT

Guns, especially members of a roving syndicate, obviously compare their experiences at different shoots and it is not surprising that guns arrive at a shoot with predetermined expectations. Interestingly, 85% of guns expect tea and coffee on arrival. However, only 32% of shoots surveyed offered it. 28% of shoots offer Champagne at elevenses, yet only 14% of guns expect it. With meals, 76% of shoots offer a three-course meal, yet only 60% of guns expect it.

Many shoots do not consider asking their visiting guns how they wish to travel around the shoot. A considerable number of shoots expect their guns to climb into a trailer with dogs and sometimes their companions and literally muck in. Although often this can improve the social part of the shoot, it can be unpleasant particularly when it's wet. Perhaps it is not surprising that 53% of guns wish to travel by their own 4x4 and 33% in a properly-equipped gun bus.

Shoots owners often talk about various numbering systems and we were intrigued that, overwhelmingly, guns are not bothered about what convention is used providing they get some shooting. Interestingly, we found that 40% of shoots number from the left and 60% from the right, so perhaps it is



not surprising that guns can frequently be seen wandering off in the wrong direction! In the same vein, just under 80% of shoots are “live on peg” with the others starting on a whistle or horn. These simple differences demonstrate the need for clear instructions at the beginning of every shoot as guns cannot make assumptions.

The use of plastic wadded cartridges without doubt causes litter and it was interesting to note that 82% of guns prefer to use fibre-wadded cartridges, yet only 61% of shoots stipulate that fibre-wadded cartridges must be used.

### WHAT TYPE OF SHOOTING DO GUNS PREFER?

It is no coincidence that that the higher priced shoots tend to be the high bird shoots. 85% of guns stated they prefer high bird shoots, yet less than 50% of shoots described themselves as showing high birds. So, how do shoots without the benefit of the topography satisfy their guns? Fortunately a day's shooting is not just about the shooting itself; the hospitality, the atmosphere and setting are all vital ingredients for a good day.

Partridge shooting used to be limited to certain geographical areas. However, now over 80% of shoots show partridges with 59% offering wildfowl shooting. Perhaps one of the more revealing insights is the same percentage of guns prefer wildfowl shooting as partridge shooting at 41% apiece.

### WHAT PRICE ARE GUNS PREPARED TO PAY?

Over the last five years, we have seen a regular increase in the average price per pheasant rising from £24.50 to over £30 excluding VAT. The cost per partridge is around £1 less than a pheasant. The question is, does this affect the number of days being shot and the average bag size? We were reassured from the survey that there is no decrease in the number of days being shot, but over 60% stated that £30 per bird is the maximum they are prepared to pay, so are we getting close to a ceiling?

There is a trend that suggests the larger bag days are decreasing as guns are indicating that there is little difference in enjoyment between a 400-bird day and a 300-bird day. Nevertheless, overall the average bag size across all types of shoot has increased from 121 to 132. This may be explained by simple economics that it is hard to be profitable with a bag size of less than 150 birds.

The statistic we are therefore watching closely is the number of days shot per person and, to date, this has not decreased with the survey indicating that last year this was an average of 17 days.

### GUNS PAYING FOR THEIR SHOOTING

Overage has always been a source of frustration and, over the last four years, we have seen a steady change in guns' preferences. The traditional +/- 10% rule has been diminishing and many shoots post 2009 introduced +/- 5%. However, the overwhelming response is over 75% of guns wish to shoot the booked bag and are buying a day's entertainment, not shot birds.

It is a given that guns expect that they have enough to shoot at to have a realistic chance to achieve the bag. However if they are team of less good shots they will generally acknowledge they have had their chances. So how does a shoot protect itself? The simple answer is by a shot count and also by telling the guns at the point of booking the likely cartridge-to-bag ratio. With this in mind we were surprised that over 55% of shoots still do not advise guns of this ratio, which makes a shoot's position much more difficult in the event a dispute.

There is a steadily increasing number of shoots that do not charge overage at all and this appears to be the favoured position of guns too. These shoots accept

the responsibility of providing a full day's entertainment and it is the onus of the shoot to manage that day's entertainment.

Payment of shooting has revealed some predictable issues from guns. Over 50% of shoots take cash for shooting and this is creating increased discomfort with guns because of the sums involved. Over 56% of those paying cash stated they would prefer not to do so. Rather than paying with cash, 62% stated they would prefer to pay using a credit or debit card, which has now become possible following the launch of the ShootPay.com by GunsOnPegs. Shoots do not need a merchant account, they just log into the system and follow the simple steps.

### INSURANCE AND THE RISK TO SHOTS

Amazingly the survey revealed that 34% of guns have not taken out public liability insurance. Although we are aware that a significant number of guns shoot without insurance, we are surprised at the number prepared to admit this shortcoming. There are a wide variety of sources of public liability insurance and many come with membership to various shoot-interest groups including the NGO and the

Triple Barrelled Cover available through GunsOnPegs and arranged with Hiscox.

Shoot cancellation insurance has been available for some time and the survey revealed that 36% of shoots recommend guns take it out, yet only 9% actually do so. This is almost certainly due to the cost. Again, the GunsOnPegs Triple Barrelled Cover goes a long way towards making insurance more affordable and with 72% of shoots now saying they would not refund the money if a gun fails either to attend or the day is cancelled, it seems a good investment at a modest price.

### WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

The expectations of those that participate in field sports and the quality of sport provided must be matched to ensure the long-term sustainability of the sport we love. As the costs steadily increase, it is vital that the shoot owners adapt their offering to ensure they continue to attract a share of the leisure spend available.

Our census has provided a fascinating insight and contains a wealth of information about what to expect, the current costs and the trends that are developing. If you require more information, I can be contacted at [jameshorne@GunsOnPegs.com](mailto:jameshorne@GunsOnPegs.com)

