

Bang on

Plentiful partridge, glorious grouse and high pheasants aplenty... but not quite as you know them.



As a keen shot and ably abetted by my teenage daughter who has an equally itchy trigger finger, we were delighted to be invited by friends to join them for a day's shooting with The Prestcott Shooting School. I don't need asking twice to spend a Saturday in the countryside of Gloucestershire blissfully separated from the seemingly endless lists of weekend chores my wife kindly compiles.

It was only when I rang up to confirm dates and times that it became clear that we were actually going to be taking part in a simulated game day. A what? Having discovered that it was clays rather than live birds and so sartorially a case of jeans and gilet rather than full on tweeds; we set forth to Postlip Farm, high above Winchcombe, just a few miles from Cheltenham.

We were still not sure what to expect, I've done a few clays in my time and we have a trap at home, but I have to admit that I'm not a huge fan. I was about to be proved wrong. It turns out that a simulated game day is exactly that. Everything is geared up to make you feel like you are on a live shoot, but with the 'birds' being much more plentiful. The day was indeed, exactly like a real game day in every positive way, except that we had the opportunity to shoot partridge, grouse and pheasant all in one day.

I'll let Daniel Martin, the owner of Prescott Shooting and their chief instructor explain, "The clays are thrown by a number of manual traps that are located in front of the gun line out of sight. You are guaranteed to shoot hundreds of cartridges at thousands of clays throughout the day and only costing a fraction of the price compared to an identical real game day."

He's right, between the 12 guns on our day we loaded and re loaded again, until the barrels of our guns were hot and, as they say, *smakin'*. Our enthusiasm was more than a little fuelled by the complimentary cartridges included in the day's price, teamed with the large numbers of 'birds' coming over us.

Post Lip Hall Farm offered a great location, straddling the high country of Gloucestershire with picture-perfect views overlooking the Cotswold escarpment with views to Sudeley Hill. The varied topography has a moorland feel, with outstanding deep valleys and gauze thickets meaning a selection of quarry was simulated convincingly; coveys of fast and straight partridges to difficult grouse all rose with great authenticity in front of us.

I have to say that after an eight hour session on Glorious Twelfth' walking up grouse through peat hags, waist high heather and boggy burns in Scotland earlier this year, it was a rather guilty pleasure to be transported between 'grouse' drives on the simulated shoot in style in Range Rovers. Despite this lack of exertion, we still managed to work up quite an appetite and do justice to the excellent hospitality on tap. Just as with the best shoots, we were greeted with a bacon buttie on arrival, restored by elevenses and an absolutely amazing lunch and truly tempted by teatime cakes and sandwiches that kept our reserves away from the red.

The atmosphere all day was relaxed and informal, my daughter, normally a shy shot in front of spectators, was completely at ease, enjoying the usual backchat that accompanies any shooting day, but without the pressure of worrying about too much etiquette or the responsibility for taking a bird's life. She found the on-hand tuition service that is included in all the days particularly helpful. I can see that this type of shooting could be a great way to introduce somebody less experienced to the traditions of live game shooting. But having said that, I'll be back, just to enjoy it for what it was: A Simulated Game Day.

I'm a convert (even if one with a slightly sore right shoulder).

Prescott shooting offers 3 levels of simulated game days to suit your budget. Let days are once a month and available for single gun and group bookings. Gold and Silver packages are for teams, groups or syndicates that already have a full team of guns (12 or more). These can be held on any day of the week throughout the year.

They also offer a range of other activities and services, including tuition. Visit www.prescottshooting.com for more information.

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