



Wake up to walked-up!

This issue of Sporting Gun marks a sad occasion as the close season once again looms. Risking marital disharmony and bankruptcy, I've occasionally been sneaking out with a suspiciously long briefcase as frequently as daylight hours permit.

But there is a silver lining. This is time for some cracking sport. Surviving pheasant and partridge are wily enough to deserve honorary degrees in wily-ness from Oxford University.

Indeed, my favourite shooting trips are late-season outings to ambush

these masters of lead evasion. It's also time to cull their idle brethren; cocks and hens that have consistently dodged a dose of No 6 shot by waist high fluttering. These miscreants never studied their flying manuals and shouldn't be left to breed air-shy offspring.

Now, to the outings; some folk call them 'outside days,' 'forestry days' or 'clean-up days' - but whatever their name, they're basically good, old fashioned walked-up shooting.

It's a sobering thought, but prior to the invention of the breech-loading shotgun all game was walked-up.

Breech loading enabled plump men to sit at their peg whilst the game was driven to them. Many other things changed - working Pointers and Setters declined in numbers and Labrador Retrievers became the new dogs on the block.

I was mulling this over during a memorable walked-up day in Hampshire. This outing had all the right ingredients; good company, beautiful countryside, a thatched pub for lunch, dog work that was a pleasure to watch, plus adrenaline a-plenty as another screamer exploded from the bracken and

As the cost of shooting soars, walked-up days are gaining in popularity. Ian looks back at shooting days that hark back to the roots of our sport.

DRIVEN shooting's brilliant fun but if you can't afford it don't worry - walked up days often offer better value for money.

Photograph: BRIAN PHIPPS



Feature photography: Ian Mason



FAR LEFT: Howard Day, an enthusiast for traditional walked-up game.

LEFT: Good fun is all part of the day. Howard brings out his modest hip flask.

until the dogs are almost on them.

Perhaps the most important factor is safety. As a pre-First World War keeper so clearly put it: "The walking up and shooting of game is a very exacting form of sport; very safe if all participating properly conduct themselves, and just as dangerous if those engaged break the rules or forget themselves. In fact I may say that it is the most dangerous form of shooting if any are

clattered away through the branches.

The day had been organised by Howard Day and his splendidly named 'Outside Days' company. Howard organises shooting parties to suit all thicknesses of wallet, but he shares my passion for walked-up game.

"I like to think of a walked-up day as an armed ramble," he told me. "It's a great day out with shooting as a bonus. If you go with that attitude, then everyone has a good time. People who enjoy working for their sport, who enjoy seeing dog work, and who make the most of the shooting opportunities offered will have a great day."

I'm always struck that birds to which no one would raise a gun on a driven day suddenly become fair game on a walked-up day. Howard agreed: "Anyone wanting 30 or 40 yard birds, unless we are talking away from, rather than above the Guns, is going to be disappointed."

The fast, rising, going away bird can

test Guns used to driven game. The old adage 'bum belly beak bang' works a treat on these receding targets.

Some teams require a bit of education, Howard told me. "We do get Guns who wait for high birds. After a dozen birds flushed to no shots, I might have a quiet word and tell them to get stuck in if they want to make a bag."

Howard's recipe for an ideal walked up day is a line of six Guns plus a dog and handler for every other Gun. The dogs must be steady and work close. Perfect weather would be overcast and cold to hold birds in the wood to be walked. A healthy population of deer is always a bonus. Deer keep down thick bramble (a bugger to walk through and always a tripping hazard.) Deer also browse lower branches giving the Guns a clear sight of rising game. Tussocky white grass makes ideal ground cover; pheasant sit tight

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inclined to be careless."

The 'rules' for safe walked-up are straightforward (see box). Always a subject for debate is how to carry your gun? "There is no definite answer," says Howard. "I've been walking up game for 30 years, and I always walk with my gun open. With experience you can watch the cover, watch the dogs, know a bird is likely to flush and get the gun closed, up and ready to shoot."

However he concedes that most Guns walk with their guns closed, in which case he prefers to see them stock on hip and pointing skywards. >>



Photograph LEE BEEEL



READY for take-off...a Springer Spaniel full of vim and vigour.

A GOOD team size for a walked up day.

Left to right: Ian Andrews, David Drew, Ian Maclean, Carol Rushdale-Jones, Daniel Burgess, Robert Burgess, Ian Mason.

Walking 600 acres of woodland on the Hamptworth Estate, Salisbury, Wiltshire, we saw some cracking sport.



He's adamant that walked-up days are no place for novice Guns. Ground game is not on the menu, unless the team is experienced and well known.

Howard works closely with several estates and sells walked-up days for around £95 a gun. A team of half-decent shots should end up with 20 to 40 head of game, but there is no bag limit. He says that the popularity of these days is soaring.

"We're getting more and more interest in walked-up days, not just at the end of the season, but throughout. With the inevitable rise in shooting costs next season, I'm expecting even more interest."

"I think there will be an increase of somewhere between £3 to £5 in cost per bird next season. It's going to make a lot of people re-consider how they spend their money. You can have three or four walked up days for one larger day - and lets face it, they're smashing days." Howard Day can be contacted on 07880 88712 or info@outsidedays.com **SG**

Keeping a walked-up day a safe day

- Guns and beaters must keep a straight line abreast - the line should be evenly spaced and only move as fast as steady dogs can work.
- Barrels should always point forward into each Gun's permissible field of fire and either skywards or at the ground ahead.
- Every time a bird is shot, the line should stop immediately and allow the bird to be retrieved before proceeding.
- When walking in line abreast shooters should be aware at all times where every other member of the line is.
- If the line of Guns is kept straight, birds going back are just as safe as those going forwards
- Swinging near or through the line is a 'sending-home' offence!
- Guns should walk steadily and plant their feet firmly so they are always in a position to take a safe shot.
- Patience and the old adage 'if in doubt, don't' are virtues for walking-up.
- In thick woodland, a bit of bright clothing is a sound idea, especially near dusk-time.