



Bang! a boar addict is born



Like achieving a taste for malt whisky, it's downhill all the way for Bruce Collinson now he has been to Austria

They had to ask me three times to join Brown Trout's boar shooting trip to Austria this year. That's twice more than they will need to ask me next time. My name is Bruce and I am a boar addict (applause). First I said: "No, I haven't the time" – then: "It's expensive" and "I don't have a .308 at present". Eventually, the wife clinched it: "You've always said you want to shoot boar, haven't you? Well, now's the chance."

Even I can take a hint like that. I remembered why I'd paid quite a bit extra with a Sauer 202 in 6.5x55 to have a take-down travelling case, Apel swing-off mounts and a spare five-round mag. This combination was deemed to be absolutely perfect, both for shooting and for travelling.

Nobody in our team had shot boar and some weren't familiar with rifles but were keen pheasant shots. We gathered on a range somewhere so far up Wensleydale that it rains uphill. We had a lot of fun learning how much lead to give running boar targets. Post-range bonding with the Yorkshire half of the team (the other half were southerners and flew from Heathrow) was good prior to the trip.

We pitched up at the impressive Hotel Veltlin in Poysdorf by mid-afternoon on the day before the shoot. This is the extreme North-Eastern tip of Austria, with both Czech and Slovak borders within a few miles and they are proud of the local wines. We did extensive research and testing, and find them reliable...

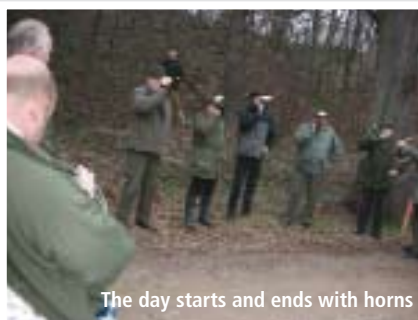
Up with the lark on Saturday, a mild, overcast day. After a safety briefing from the UK agent, the local agent turned up, allocated estate rifles and ammunition and gave a further safety briefing, then into two modern minibuses to the Falkenstein estate about 15 minutes away. Owner Hans-Pieter Cermak is an interesting man. The estate has extensive vineyards as



Much was made of Bruce's big keiler with everyone wanting to be photographed next to it



Guns gather



The day starts and ends with horns

well as a winery and cellars; he has the shoot; he's the mayor, the police chief and an MP. About 40 years old, he was dressed like a pikey with a holstered Colt Python .357 mag round his waist. The raggy trousers were something of a trophy, as they resulted from a close encounter of a boar kind. He had fired ten rounds from a Glock .40 at the animal. It knocked him over and ran straight through a metal fence and was never seen again. Those pigs do hold their shots.

One of the aspects of continental shooting which I particularly enjoy is the formality and ceremony. Six of the beaters/guides duly lined up and played a succession of hunting tunes on horns. Hans-Pieter did his safety brief: effectively don't get out of your seat, obey your guide, shoot any boar or mouflon but not the roe. All guns drew pegs and were allocated a guide each and a driver.

Falkenstein is a large enclosed wood of around 450 acres. We were 15 guns, each with



'A sizeable boar simply materialised just beyond a line of scrubby undergrowth, 40 yards away'

a ghillie. There are about 20 high seats and the topography has been used in such a way that none is in line of sight of any others. At 6ft-10ft high, all shooting is downwards. The two I used were comfy, covered, with a plank seat and room for the two of us with a bit of "swing" room too.

I imagined a single beating line "sweeping" right across the whole of the wood but there was more than one line and they swung around in a wide arc, keeping the boar on their feet.

So, at just after 9am, I was in hide no 1 at the edge of the wood, with Gustav the ghillie behind me showing me the field of fire ("anywhere you want except towards the cars"). The wood is deciduous, sparse but with clumps of cover. Field of view varied from 50 yards to a good quarter mile.

Fifteen minutes later, I was a bit puzzled to hear, then see, the beating line approaching, orange tabards to the fore, and a serious firearm every four-odd beaters. Well, thought I, that's kyboshed it for an hour. The beaters exchanged pleasantries and carried on past us.

Within five minutes, a sizeable boar simply materialised just beyond a line of scrubby undergrowth, no more than 40 yards away. Just like a roe, one moment it wasn't there, then it was. It sauntered across my front at a slow walk and the thought went through my head that it was supposed to be flat out, but what the hell. I nudged Gustaf, who whispered "ja", I popped the gun on the front ledge of the hide, and squeezed off a round straight into its engine-room. It went about ten yards and fell over.

Lots of waidmannsheils, schnapps flask out, drink from the right hand now you've opened your account etc. Jolly good fun, this boar shooting. Replacement mag in, top up the other. Another boar, away to the left, fleeting glimpses at full tilt until it cleared the ride 100 yards away; one round off as it entered the wood, not enough lead for that range, missed. Top up mag.

Guns loaded into a minibus for the 15-minute drive to the estate



There was plenty of discussion about which calibre rifle and what scope size is ideal for boar...



...and plenty of larking around

Blow me, not ten minutes later it trotted out from behind, crossed the ride at a brisk pace and I put the first round into a tree which leapt from nowhere. Luckily, I had practised rapid reloads on the range day (two shots per view) and the second hit it as it made the scrub where the first one lay. This one was smaller, regulation size. More schnapps, waidmannsheils, top up mag.

Some 20 minutes later, a third, straightish right; hit it as it cleared the trees, fell in the open 25 yards away. Same size as the second one. Schnapps, reload – you'll have the drift by now.

About half an hour later the second beating line appeared, with a couple of senior beaters amongst the Slovakian footsoldiers. A bit of rapid German was exchanged and the Slovaks were sent into the scrub.

It took three of them ten minutes to drag the first boar the 30 yards to the ride. "My", they said, "that's a handsome boar – the second best one we've seen this year. You need to talk to your gillie about getting this one mounted". "Why Gustav?" I asked. "Because he's Professor of Biology at Vienna University, and the best taxidermist in Austria", they said. "This isn't his day job, you know".

We broke for lunch on the hooter and took the ritual photos in the ride, then drove out of the wood to a delightfully rustic watering-house. All concerned mucked in together, with noodle soup (get used to it), glühwein, bratwurst and local beer. About half an hour in, there was a fuss outside as the game cart tractor hove into sight. The keiler wouldn't go in the box on the back so they had to lift it via the front actor and it looked simply huge. More pressure was promptly applied to mount the head.

I quietly congratulated myself for bringing my own gun, scope and ammo (Norma Factory 156-grain Oryx) in a set-up that was familiar. The spare guns taken by the organisers were good, bolt-action .308s, 7x57s and an over-and-under 8mm. The estate rifles were more European, including some 7x57/12-bore drillings



with a handful of Brenneke slugs each. Judging by the empties under my hide, the locals don't consider 9.3x62 to be undergunned. In future, I will either work up a 160-grain load for my 6.5 or, if Santa were near, look at a Beretta 689 o/u in 8x57 with spare 20-bore barrels (Michael Cartledge of the Beretta Gallery in London says that this costs 5,800 but adds: "Difficult one though, as they have officially stopped making 'em and are no longer listed on the price lists). The certainty of two rapid shots and a fairly fast reload could be handy.

Like a shotgun, the dynamic nature of the shot takes away all the recoil and noise. It's somewhere between stalking and game shooting. I dressed for stalking but some of the team went for fancy dress. If it had been as cold as it ought to have been in Austria in January, I would have been better off than them.

My scope, a Schmidt & Bender 2.5-10x56, was ideal. Opinions varied between 3x and 5x. Open sights, red dots and single-point sights were also in use, with no clear winner. If I were setting up a new gun, it would have a 4x fixed scope on swing-off mounts and iron sights too.

At the end of the day, everybody killed boar, regardless of weapon and calibre. Shot placement, as ever, is the key, not the maker's name I didn't see another boar, but it didn't matter. We killed a total of 39 wild boar.

The tableau afterwards was even more ritualistic, with all the bag laid out, guns to one side, horns opposite and beaters either side; two well-lit braziers, "fire to the left, fire to the right"; pine boughs, speeches, horn playing, hats off. Very dignified. They weighed my keiler at 195kg. It looked it. ■



Bruce (right) and his boar. He went to Austria with Tim Brown of Brown Trout in Harrogate 01423 709741 www.brown-trout.org. It cost £1,500 including flights, transfers, bed and board. Tips, beer and Sunday lunch were extra



Everyone shot boar on this estate: 15 guns killed 39 that day



Staff worked hard to gralloch the pigs



The evening was devoted to celebration