



## Sublime Spanish Craftsmanship

*Celebrating 75 years, a day at EJ Churchill's shooting ground was a chance to handle Arrieta's beautiful guns*

**Article by Rupert Watkins**

The family run Spanish gunsmiths reach their 75th birthday this year and in celebration of this fact, Riddle was able to get its inaccurate paws on a stunning example of the company's craftsmanship. In conjunction with the EJ Churchill shooting ground in High Wycombe, the writer was able to try out one of Arrieta's side-by-side shotguns on a range of testing stands.

Arrieta is a third generation family business based in the Basque region of Spain. Specialising in side-by-sides, the firm is looking to develop an over and under gun to offer the market in the near future. To an inexperienced shot, the guns are beautifully balanced and wonderfully finished. To celebrate its three quarter century, Arrieta is producing a limited range of shotguns, uniquely engraved (in all gauges), though many have already seen snapped up by keen buyers.

Juan Carlos Arrieta – the current head of the firm – and colleagues Lucas Urquijo and Iker Larranaga had come over for the day. Chatting after the day's shooting, Juan and Carlos explained the history and ethos of the firm. The Basque region has long been one of the centres of Spanish gun making going back to the period of the Carlist Wars of the mid-19th century. This heritage is fiercely revered and protected, Juan commented on both the retention and the extreme skill of the gunsmiths and engravers used by his company. Arrieta has never been a huge firm, its *raison d'être* lies in handmade and bespoke shotguns and hunting rifles. Lucas spoke of the relationships the firm has built over decades with its customers – mentioning one English customer who returned his guns for a service well over a decade ago... though has yet for some reason to pick them up. The firm does produce a range of non –bespoke guns of its own and produces for EJ Churchill as well.

Given the importance of the UK market for their guns, it is no surprise for their 75th anniversary Arrieta has headed to these shores. It is their largest overseas market, followed by the US but Iker commented they are now seeing strong and rapid growth in Russia. Given their quality, Arrieta guns are a very good way to buy into the market for those keen shots seeking their first top notch gun. Prices range from £4,000 to £20,000 upwards, a well looked after second hand Arrieta though can be found for around £1,000. At the other end of the scale, the only real alternative to the firm's very best pieces would be to look to the second hand offerings from the great English gunsmiths, such as William Evans and Boss & Co – esteemed and right company for this Basque family company.

The day at EJ Churchill was enormous fun, by about the sixth stand even this writer (getting used to a double trigger) was able to hack a couple of clays down. An informative question and answer session compeered by EJ Churchill's Managing Director Rob Fenwick was followed by a Spanish array of jambon and manchego before the contented guests departed. riddle\_stop 2

Riddle's thanks to the team at EJ Churchill for the day.