

WILLIAM POWELL PAIR

Michael Yardley tests guns made, in association with Spanish firm Arrieta, to match an existing English pair and finds the quality and handling sound

THIS month's test concerns a pair of high-grade, William Powell Continental sidelock side-by-sides. They have been made in association with Arrieta of Spain (with which Powell has had a long-standing connection). The guns were specially ordered to match an existing pair of Powells. Stuart Eborall, Powell's gunroom manager, notes: "We are asked to copy guns quite frequently. Typically, clients have had an old pair of our guns handed down from father or grandfather but don't want to strain the heirlooms too much. We can replicate them with guns of similar style, which can take the punishment of regular use with modern cartridges. Our guns come with a five-year warranty as well. We still make our No 1

model in England but the Continental range – carefully specified by us and bearing our name – may represent a more cost-effective option."

First impressions of the test guns, which would cost about £30,000, are dominated by their polished, tight, rose-and-scroll-engraved actions. These look well proportioned and have been filed up expertly with beaded fences and belly and significant taper towards the knuckle.

Blacking of barrels and action furniture is good. I liked the classically shaped but ergonomically efficient top levers and Purdey-style button safety thumb-pieces (always practical on a cold or wet day). The wood has pleasant, even bold figure to the rear. Far more important, there is strong,

straight grain through the grips. The stocks are oil finished to a near gloss and hand-chequered as one would expect on bench-made guns.

The Powell Arrietas both weigh 7lb 2oz and are numbered in gold on top lever, rib and fore-end. They have straight-hand grips and splinter fore-ends (other options are possible). The balance point is near the hinge pin with 28in barrels. I would not be inclined to have longer barrels for general shooting with this style of gun as made in Spain. Because they usually end up a little heavier than their English and Scottish equivalents, 30in

Clockwise from below: expertly filed up action; splinter fore-end; fixed-choke, chopper-lump barrels; double trigger

barrels can make 12-bores of Spanish origin feel too heavy and sluggish, especially for grouse. Barrel length should never be considered arbitrarily; much depends on the style of the gun and subtleties of its production.

The fixed-choke barrels – ¼ and ½ in No 1 and ½ and ¾ in No 2 – are chopper lump (so named because tube and integral lump, which are paired to form the barrels, look like a chopper in their rough-forged state). They are constructed from Bellota steel and hard-chrome plated internally (which complicates repair work but may enhance longevity). They bear Spanish proofmarks, struck at Eibar, for 2¾in (70mm) cartridges at 1320 bar. The bore diameter is marked at 18.5mm in all barrels, which equates to just over .728in (typical of many British guns). The rib is of the traditional concave pattern.

Stocks of the test guns are made in the English style as noted. The fore-ends – deep enough to be useful – are equipped with Anson rod latches. Dimensions of the stocks (one may order to requirements) were 15in for length with an extra ⅛in and ¼in to heel and toe respectively, with slight (⅛in) cast-off at heel and drop of 1⅜in and 1⅞in. The guns were a little high in the comb for me. This is to be preferred to a little too low, which may cause the wrong eye to take over (checking gun-fit with muzzles raised to 45 degrees is always sensible for this reason). ■

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“ The guns come from a workshop where Old World values prevail ”

TECHNICAL DATA

The actions are eight-pin intercepting safety sear sidelocks. V-springs power the tumblers. The cross-pins are replaceable. The disc-set strikers may be removed from the action face to allow for replacement of strikers and return springs. And, as in most side-by-sides, double bolts of Purdey type controlled by a top lever and Scott spindle meet Purdey double lumps when the barrels come down to the action table. The intercepting safety sears are an essential feature of a sidelock and take effect if the gun is jolted and the hammer falls forward. The pattern here is a little unusual, however. They are powered not by small leaf springs but by tiny coil springs in a tube acting on a rod that bears against the sear arm. The thumb safety is automatic. The ejector work is of classic Southgate pattern operated by means of over-centre cams.

SHOOTING IMPRESSIONS.

I shot the guns using a variety of loads without any vices becoming apparent. They did not sing to me as the less expensive but outstanding Powell Linhope did, nevertheless they worked well. Trigger pulls were good. Felt recoil was average for type. The handling qualities were familiar. I have used many Arrieta-built guns in 12- and 20-bore. The firm produces consistently made guns in a workshop where Old World values prevail. William Powell is another long-established firm and one that takes great care of what it puts its name to. Mark Osborne, who now heads the company, has great experience of game- and, in particular, grouse-shooting, Peter Powell still consults. All this is brought together in these traditionally made and specified guns. If I ordered a pair, however, I suspect they would be Linhopes or mid-grade 30in 20-bores with flat, file-cut ribs. Extra finish adds significantly to cost but not to shooting qualities in what is an essentially sound design.

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Price circa £30,000
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