





OVER & ABOVE

Coveys of driven partridge fill the skies over a group of lucky Guns,
who have travelled with William Powell Sporting to La Nava in
Spain for a truly unmatched two days of shooting

Author & photographer **MATT KIDD**

For those in search of an elite sporting experience, one need not look further than La Nava. Excellent shooting complemented by service fit for a king is what can be expected by clients during their Spanish excursions, and is undoubtedly what keeps them returning year on year from around the globe.

Despite the Spanish season spanning 15 September to 31 March, and offering 197 shooting days, including Sundays, La Nava is nearly always fully booked and for good reason! Fortunately for me, at the end of February, I tagged along on a trip hosted by the acclaimed William Powell Sporting for one of their regular British teams, who chose to extend their season which was plagued by grouse cancellations.

A short flight into Madrid was easy enough, with an estate driver arranged for collection from the airport and relaxed two-hour drive to the lodge. A scenic drive and stop for lunch are usually offered, navigating through quaint villages and towns, and passing a few impressive bullfighting arenas which the region is famous for too. However, for those that might wish to go a step further, there is a private air strip for those guests looking for incomparable convenience.

On arrival to the impressive lodge, surrounded by grand water features and well-manicured olive trees, the owner Javier Medem and his team were formally arranged ready to greet the arriving guests which was a lovely touch. From here on in it is pretty much all-inclusive and any requirements are accommodated – which is how I have come to learn the William Powell Team operate. After enjoying a refreshing welcome drink or two, Guns are then invited into the gunroom in ones and twos to select a matched pair of guns from a collection of premium over-and-unders, side-by-sides and an array of calibres from 28- to 12-bore. Indeed, Ollie from William Powell Sporting carried out a quick fitting for each client and any adjustments were quickly made with extender pads or raisers to improve the fit and, undoubtedly, one's performance.

The party of 11 were then led to their individual rooms, passing trophies adorning the terracotta-toned corridor walls, along with historic hunting art, illustrations and photographs dating back centuries. The lodge offers 12 double en-suite bedrooms, all with everything you could ever want for comfort and convenience. It is ideal for any occasion, whether the ultimate lads' trip, or a straightforward shooting weekend with partners, friends and family. Each of the guests are left a gift of locally produced olive oil and an essentials pack of sunglasses, ear buds, cap etc. – those often-

overlooked fragments guests leave at home by mistake that can make a huge difference to enjoyment.

While the in-house chefs cooked up a delectable supper, comprising only the freshest ingredients and local produce, including venison and game from the estate, there is a gym, massage suite, games room, tennis and padel court and pool to take advantage of, or teams could simply enjoy incredible mountainous views with cocktails or wine in hand on the terrace as the sun sets into the hills. From the layout and furnishings to the service and professionalism of the staff, it is evident that many a sportsman and lady have stayed here and over the years and through listening to their client feedback La Nava have perfected the art of hospitality. Nothing faux about it.

The next morning, excitement was palpable. In the courtyard, five sparkling Land Cruisers had appeared and were lined up in military precision before morning coffees were poured. The uniformed shoot staff were present and energetic, ready to welcome their team, all speaking immaculate English. Breakfast was light yet sustaining and benefitted from gorgeous views of the mountains below with Spanish Imperial eagles and vultures lazily occupying the thermals.

Like most UK shoots, the affable shoot manager Gonzalo led the morning briefing, covering all the details you would expect, drew pegs, and explained the necessary details of how the loader and secretario system works. For those unaware, each Gun will have a loader, sat in front and to one side of them with a table of cartridges facing out behind the Gun. They will also be assigned a secretario, who will stand behind the Gun, with a clicker and count the birds shot. Unlike where a team pays for a bag, the individual Gun is priced on their share, so they can shoot their allotted tally and choose whether to shoot overages on an independent basis. All the shots and kills are then tallied at the end of the day, with individual ratios given which can make for some entertaining banter come the evening meal. These are then indexed through a complex set of calculations unique to La Nava to decide the 'best' Shot of the day.

Anyway, a short drive into the estate and before we knew it, the nine Guns were in their blinds with the iconic lollipops in place to block the low morning sun and also as a form of Butt stick, to prevent one from shooting their neighbour. The first drive was certainly reflective of traditional Spanish redleg partridges: low to moderate height; very fast; very agile; and coming from all angles, right the way through the line. Off to a good start, the very accomplished team shot a ➔





ratio of 2.86, which extended to 3.02 for the return drive, which was a fair bit steeper.

Tacos followed; the Spanish equivalent to Elevenes which is closer to a picnic setting. A table laid out with finest salamis, sandwiches, breads, cheeses, dips, olives and more. A choice of wine or glass of lager to wash it down, and a tot of William Powell's Damson Gin if desired.

Next, we moved to a different part of the estate further south which offered much steeper topography and as Ollie confirmed, hosts some of the signature drives. Here, partridge were beaten over low cliffs, olive and almond trees, which made for exciting sport and succeeded the same ratio. Following the drive, anticipation built as secretarios – not always fluent in English – had gestured that the birds would then be returned from the near vertical peak behind.

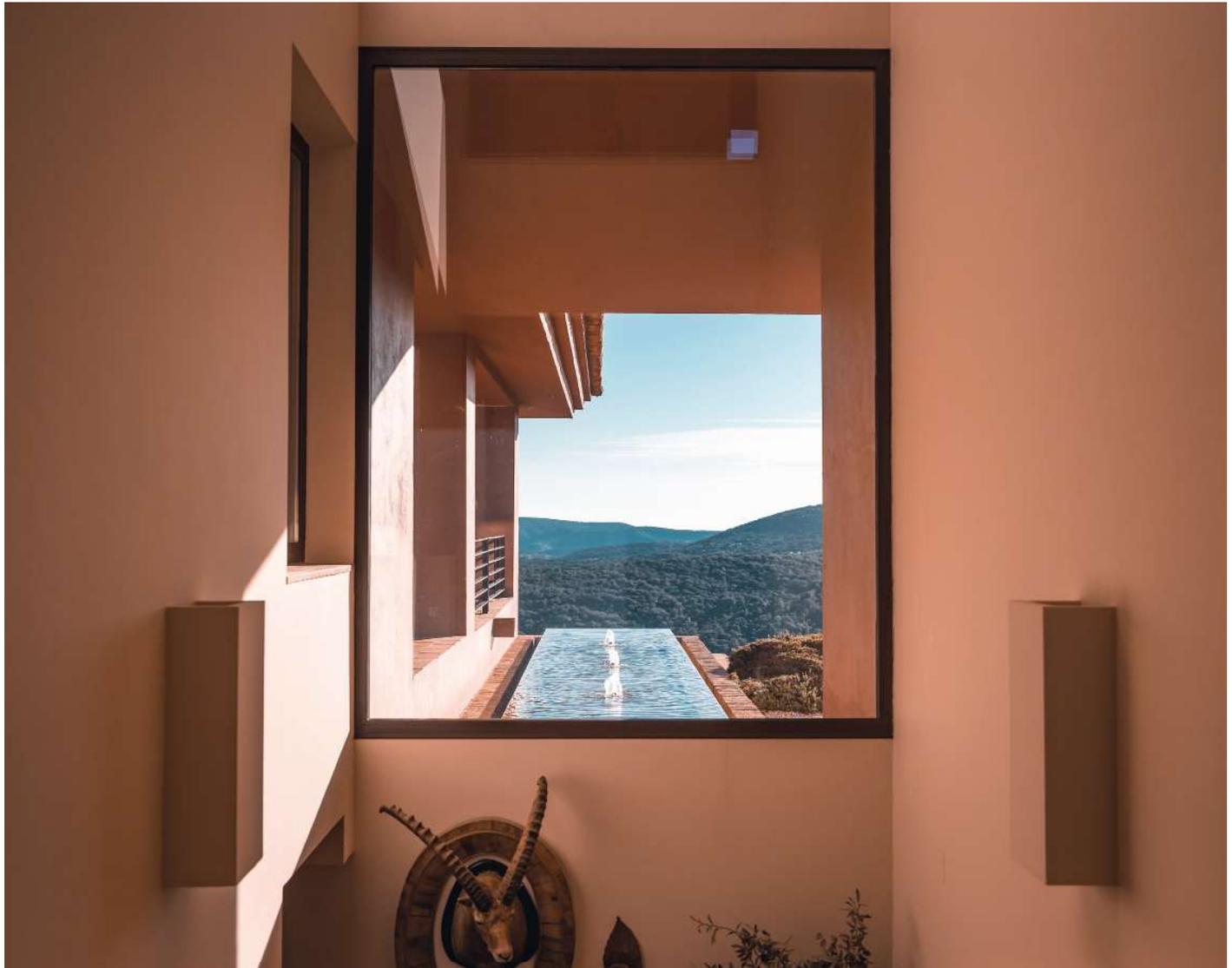
Whilst the third drive accounted for the largest addition to the bag, the volume of partridge that took on the line on the fourth drive, at incredible height and speed rivalling that of top high bird shoots in the UK, was impressive. A far more humbling ratio of 5.2 was achieved, but again with a very strong team of Guns.

An al fresco three-course lunch followed, on a beautiful white-linen laid table with estate-branded director chairs. Fresh tuna, chilli, tomato and olive salad to start, followed by barbecued beef, fries and a delicate sponge cake for dessert. At my end of the table, we listened to great anecdotes from Javier and Gonzalo, and how the estate has been nurtured from strength to strength since Javier acquired it in 2000. They spoke of the history of the La Mancha region, and of the visions they have of the estate for the future. They are always looking for the next project and to further perfect the perfected.

Often, after lunch teams decide to head back to the lodge for a siesta before evening activities or, like this team, shoot another drive, allowing for an earlier finish on the second day and chance to explore more of Madrid. It is completely down to the party.

That afternoon, I had the chance to speak with Ollie. William Powell Sporting bring a good number of teams each season and he confirmed that back-to-back days are commonplace, with a minimum of 600 birds per day. La Nava employs seven full-time keepers who manage the 6,000+ acres. Indeed, the work that takes place on the estate as a result of the partridge also provides an ideal habitat for the incredibly rare lynx, a ↗





species which is benefiting from conservation practices, and thus do not hunt small mammals such as the rabbits, hoping that they can provide enough prey for the lynx to thrive.

Another string to the La Nava bow is the option to stalk in the big game area. Guests can choose at additional cost to shoot a cull animal or a trophy red stag, mouflon or boar. This is quite the safari, with a group of us heading out in a modified Land Cruiser with the top cut off, raised viewing seats and platform. We saw a vast population of big game amid incredible scenery, including a healthy stock of the elusive mouflon and well-formed stags, and before dusk a large hind was felled. Another sumptuous evening meal

matched with vintage wines turned to aged single malts and G&Ts, before retiring to a narcoleptic sleep to refresh for another day.

A completely different collection of drives followed. The first was in a steep rocky ravine which again had great volume and offered excellent sport. This was returned before tacos, ahead of moving to the third and final drive. The latter was a large tree-lined hill with a lake in the foreground. The team shot to type and averaged an impressive ratio for the two days, which many teams would have struggled to achieve. Each of them commented how wonderful the setting, accommodation, shooting, food and



hospitality was, and how well looked after they were by the William Powell team, right the way from the first enquiry. Far exceeding expectations.

While packing bags before the return trip home, I flicked through the coffee-table book by The Marquess of Borgetto, titled *La Nava and the Red-Legged Partridge*. They summarise a typical stay at this wonderful estate perfectly: “Choosing La Nava del Barranco as a destination for exclusive and superlative hunting is, without doubt, a wise decision that will be sure to surprise.” *FJ*

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Malcolm Appleby MBE
British gun engraver, silversmith, jeweller
based in Scotland since 1969.



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