

Exciting times: a boar drive in full flow



# Unforgettable driven boar

It was the beginning of an addiction to driven boar. After prepping at Bisley, Gerald Meredith goes to Zagreb for a superb boarshooting trip with Lasarotta

**4** am arrived too quickly. D-day was here. Everything was packed and ready to go. The trusty Blaser R93 .30-06 was in its case and the car loaded. I set off in the direction of Heathrow into a miserable-looking sky.

Foundations had been laid the previous Tuesday when I had spent a useful afternoon with John Kynoch on the running boar range at Bisley, first shooting single shots each pass then venturing on to doubles to maximise chances. I felt a lot easier knowing that I could perform with the Blaser. All that remained to be seen was if I could do it for real.

It was disconcerting at Zagreb that our rifles were among the first things to appear on the luggage

carousel, not handed back to us in person as the Air Croatia dictates. Nonetheless, the Croatian authorities were efficient, friendly and helpful in booking our weapons into their country. At last we were able to meet Bogdan from the Lasarotta team with whom the trip was booked. On to the minibus in the grey skies and an hour-and-a-half transfer later we were at our hunting lodge in Petrova Gora.

The excitement and expectation was high in my mind after a long day's travelling. I could not settle. I tried to sleep and did so fitfully, haunted by the forest around with thoughts of boar teasing me from my dreams.

Soon enough, the alarm sounded at 0600 and there was time for

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**'I had spent a useful afternoon with John Kynoch on the running boar range at Bisley shooting double shots each pass'**

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a quick breakfast. The weather was cold and fresh with mist hanging about the trees. I could just see the sun starting to burn its way through. A formal meeting followed and the day's proceedings were described to us in detail, peg numbers were drawn, then into the vehicles.

Once in the woods, it was a steep climb up to our pegs. One by one we stopped at our designated spot with instructions not to move under any circumstances until Bogdan returned to collect us.

I had peg 4, standing on the ground in a wood. I was given my instructions, shown my neighbouring rifles with my arcs of fire and, rucksack off, I settled in to survey my surroundings. I decided that it was too thick for a scope so off it came,

thanks to the Blaser quick release saddle mounts. Knowing that the open sights had been zeroed back in England and that they had been tried and tested at Bisley set me at ease. I took a few practice swings and practised mounting the rifle in preparation for the drive. I then loaded with some Federal Power-Shok 180-grain rounds, three in the magazine and one in the chamber. A quick re-acquaintance with my visible neighbour's position (the one on my left was the other side of a hillock) and I gave up sitting on my stool. The less movement I had to make in order to shoot the better my chance. I picked a nice young tree about 3ft away, backed up against it and tried to look inconspicuous. I was looking into some thick young wood to my front opening out to my left. Behind was nice beech woodland sloping steeply away down the valley. At last, in the distance, the beaters started up with their unmistakable cry. My mind was now in overdrive, tuned in to every last noise of the forest, every beech leaf that fell sounded as footsteps in my head.

Then I could hear the dogs begin to cry. They've picked up scent; the boar must come soon. Out of the corner of my eye something moved. The gun started to come to my shoulder instinctively but I stopped halfway. Moving through the thick cover from left to right in front were a pair of roe, a majestic buck head held high and a beautiful doe. I watched them pass. Relaxing again, I leaned back against my tree; a shot rang out to my left cutting the silence. I thought to myself: "I hope they were lucky" and ever more doubted the draw of my own stand. I scanned the forest with even more diligence hoping not to miss anything that should pass.

I heard something out in front over the bank and at a steady trot appeared a huge dark mass travelling along the ridge, its feet scrunching the beech leaves it turned steadily and headed downhill in my direction. Instinctively the safety catch was off and the rifle came to my shoulder in one smooth motion.



Pig in snow: a Croatian wild boar in action

## 'Shot number two slammed home, my right hand reached for the bolt and chambered round number three. The boar twitched'

I started to track it through the trees with the open sights under his nose and it started to emerge from the thick growth into the open woodland. Absolute focus had taken over, the pressure started to release on the trigger, the rifle broke the silence and slammed smartly back into my shoulder – not that I noticed the recoil. The boar collapsed as my right hand reached for the bolt and chambered a fresh round. The sound of the shot still in the trees, the boar floundered down the bank trying to escape, on instinct kicking its back legs to get away from me. The sights levelled again with John Kynoch's words about a safety shot echoing in my head and the stories

of how tough boar can be. Shot number two slammed home, my right hand reached for the bolt and chambered round number three. The boar twitched and laid still in the crisp morning air. I opened the bolt and quickly reloaded two rounds. I surveyed around me for other boar and nothing moved, silence again, then the adrenaline and realisation came. Looking at the boar it began to look rather large.

Another loud crash came from my left but I could see nothing. Later I discovered that it was a roe that had lost its footing and crashed into some fallen branches. One of the hounds appeared over the rise and proceeded to give my

dead boar a sound thrashing for five minutes or so. Obviously, they had met previously and he had a score to settle.

The horn sounded the end of the drive; a little voice chirped up over the Cobra radios that we had taken with us: "Anyone have any luck?" asked Mark.

"Yes I've got one," I replied.

"I saw a medium sized one head your way," said Mark.

"If that's medium I would hate to see a big one," I replied.

Then four beaters appeared over the rise, stopped dead in their tracks, then as one surged forward to the boar shouting excitedly to the others. I joined them shortly and showing me the tusks one said: "possible gold medal."

My fears were now confirmed, damn he was big. What an animal and an honour to have shot such a fine boar. It was confirmed later that he weighed in at 228kg with gold medal tusks.

The pegs numbered above me appeared and after much shaking of hands, photos and stories we moved on towards the rest of the gang with four beaters pulling the boar to where it could be collected.

Back into the vehicles and onwards to the promise of drive number two. As we approached my peg I started to wonder where I was going to be stood. My number was called and we forced our way through a thick hedge into a hidden lane. My arcs of fire were shown. With thick cover in front and behind, I wasn't sure I liked my lot here; if anything decided to cross the lane I was going to have to be quick to get a shot, so the scopes stayed off. No tree to back up against this time so I settled and decided that perhaps my lot wasn't so dire after all.

The beaters and the dogs started up their cry and we were off. Shots sounded out to my left. Someone was getting some shooting. The shots sounded closer and then I could hear boar behind and to the left. I turned to face the noise and said to my self "keep coming." There it was, running at me at full speed. No time for a measured aim



Beater line-up: the orange outfits are a safety precaution against being accidentally shot

here. Up came the rifle and the first round left the barrel as she was about 10ft from me. She turned away and headed across the track as I fired round number two into her. Quickly I turned back behind me for my third shot at boar number three about 6ft away. Its step didn't falter as it crashed through the hedge, broke cover into open ground and changed up a gear as shot number four went after it. Still without a break in his stride it vanished into the distance. I think that pig was bred by Ferrari. The rifle was empty so I quickly reloaded and listened. There was some noise about 20 metres away in cover to my left as boar number two died, then all was quiet. More shots sounded around the forest until I could hear the beaters close in and one appeared coming up the track to my left. I gestured as best I could that there was a boar in the cover somewhere in front of him at which he looked in and shook his head saying "no" in Croatian and continued to walk towards me. I was beside myself, I couldn't have missed her, and I was right, for 15 paces further on he disappeared into the cover and reappeared with a nice 80kg sow.

Our host arrived to collect me from my peg and I explained about boar no 3 but there were no signs of a hit so, after a thorough search, I had to resign myself to the fact that I had indeed missed. Perhaps this boar shooting wasn't so easy after all. I had been brought back to earth.

The boys had some luck as well

**'Its step didn't falter as it crashed through the hedge, broke cover into open ground and changed up a gear as shot number four went after it. Without a break in its stride, it vanished into the distance'**

this time. Mark had a sow and Will had a sow and two youngsters. Lunch was held back at the lodge and we were keen to get on to the next and final drive of the day. This was a little different. We were placed on open forestry tracks. This time I was placed on the junction of two tracks between a block of conifer and hardwood. As I stood there trying to blend into the background, a fox appeared to the left and, although allowed to shoot them, I resisted the temptation. It trotted up the track towards me, oblivious to the fact that I was there, and disappeared into the conifers. Next appeared two boar from a similar place to where the fox had come. Travelling at close to light speed they crossed into the conifers where I couldn't get a clear line of fire and proceeded to cross the 8ft forestry track in one bound. I didn't get a shot off.

To finish the day we had the traditional ceremony around the

fires to pay homage to our quarry that was laid out in front of us. Then it was back to our lodge for a shower, change and a wonderful evening meal with some liquid Croatian hospitality.

Day two and we were up early for a superb breakfast to set us up for the day. The morning meeting convened and the plan for the day was described and pegs drawn, then it was off to the woods. As we wound our way out on to the pegs it looked promising: lovely wooded valleys with nice open views

through the trees. When we arrived at my peg, I got that sinking feeling. Again, the cover was thick though it had served me well yesterday. Visibility was poor and I was left to settle in.

Early on, there was a shot to my right up the valley and I listened with anticipation. Then there it was, I strained my ears and I could hear them coming. I readied my rifle and they came at an angle from my right. Three shots followed in quick succession as I worked the Blaser bolt. However, I let myself down and all three shots missed. I still don't know how but I learned there and then boar shooting isn't easy. Was yesterday just beginner's luck? The doubt started to set in. I decided to take myself to one side, gave myself a damn good talking to and came out the other side realising that thick cover wasn't such a bad place to be after all, especially with three boar materialising from the depths. I just needed to pick up my shooting.

The second drive of the day was a reasonable trek through the forest. My peg didn't look too bad



A successful boar shooter on a Lasarotta hunt



Following a wounded boar requires good fieldcraft and a shotgun loaded with slugs

## You can do this too

The trip was arranged with Lasarotta shooting breaks. [www.lasarotta.co.uk](http://www.lasarotta.co.uk). Prices start at £299/gun/day for between four and nine wild boar per eight guns.

Transfers to and from the airport were included; they were very accommodating as I left a day before the others who stopped on for a successful mouflon stalk. All accommodation and all meals along with shoot day transport were provided during our stay as part of the package. We hunted in an area that totals 53,000 acres of state forest known as Petrova Gora, 600-900 metres above sea level. The nearest large town is Karlovac. They shoot roughly three large boar of 200-250kg per season in this area. We shot in completely unfenced forest at totally wild boar. You don't expect large numbers on unfenced shooting. They average 11 animals per day for nine guns.

Lasarotta also offers shooting in partly fenced areas where numbers can almost be guaranteed. However, in the open areas, you are unlimited on bag size should you experience a large number of animals and you may also get the chance to shoot a gold medal boar with no trophy fee on a driven day. This area has a quota of 345 animals for the season (1 Nov-31 Jan) and shoots 28 days. It is all a superbly-organised and adrenaline-fuelled shooting trip, especially when a trophy boar happens your way. Even if he doesn't, the sound of the beaters, their dogs and the boar in front of them certainly get your excitement going. Can't wait until next November!

'The beaters appeared and between us I managed to get across that I had shot a boar that was now at the bottom of the valley'



Last post: as is traditional on the Continent, the Croatian hunters blow a salute to their quarry

this time, some thick stuff to my front and nice open woodland behind. Some shots sounded away in the distance, so we were off. A shot sounded close to my left. All the time I was straining to see anything coming through the trees, then two shots to my right, John must have had something for sure. Nothing for me this time but such is shooting. Mark had missed a big trophy boar that was running at full speed through the trees and John had missed another huge trophy-sized boar with two shots to my left. The beaters started to appear in front of me and we were gathered up for some lunch out in the open.

The final drive wasn't far away and soon enough we were all on our pegs. I was stood out in some beautiful beech woodland with

nice open views through the trees. Behind me was a 400-metre slope down into the valley bottom. This time I decided it would be wise to use the scopes, so I dropped the Schmidt & Bender 8x56 back into place. There was the opportunity for some long shots on this drive.

All too soon I could hear the beaters getting close in front and then I heard the dogs behind and to my right. Well that's it then, I thought to myself, another blank drive for me. I turned around to see where the dogs were and they appeared as expected. One dog disappeared from view behind some large trees and then reappeared on the same line followed by a large boar, but too far away to get a shot even though I had a look through the scopes. She and the dogs dis-

appeared up the opposite side of the valley and I turned away, only to hear the dogs' tone change. They sounded like they were coming to me. Then there she was, coming up the valley towards me, some 125 metres away. I could see her through the scope and she was running hard. I adjusted my lead and she shuddered under the first shot and kept coming. I couldn't have given her enough lead so I adjusted for more and shot no two ripped into her. She slowed, shaking her head. The bolt slammed shut and shot three dropped her dead about 70 metres away.

The beaters appeared and between us I managed to get across that I had shot a boar, only now she was almost at the bottom of the valley. However, they wouldn't believe

that I had hit her with three shots and kept telling me no, especially to the headshot. A beater who spoke good English arrived and asked how I had got on. He looked at me in disbelief as I explained and then I pointed to where she lay. He disappeared down to her and arrived back shortly with his hand soaked in blood. He confirmed with a large grin that I had indeed hit her with all three shots, number one through the top of the neck behind the ear, number two through the snout, number three behind the shoulder and he complimented me on my shooting.

It was a proud end to the day's shooting. The 150kg sow was my whole bag but I knew I had had the chances. My shooting just wasn't up to the challenge of the black pork.