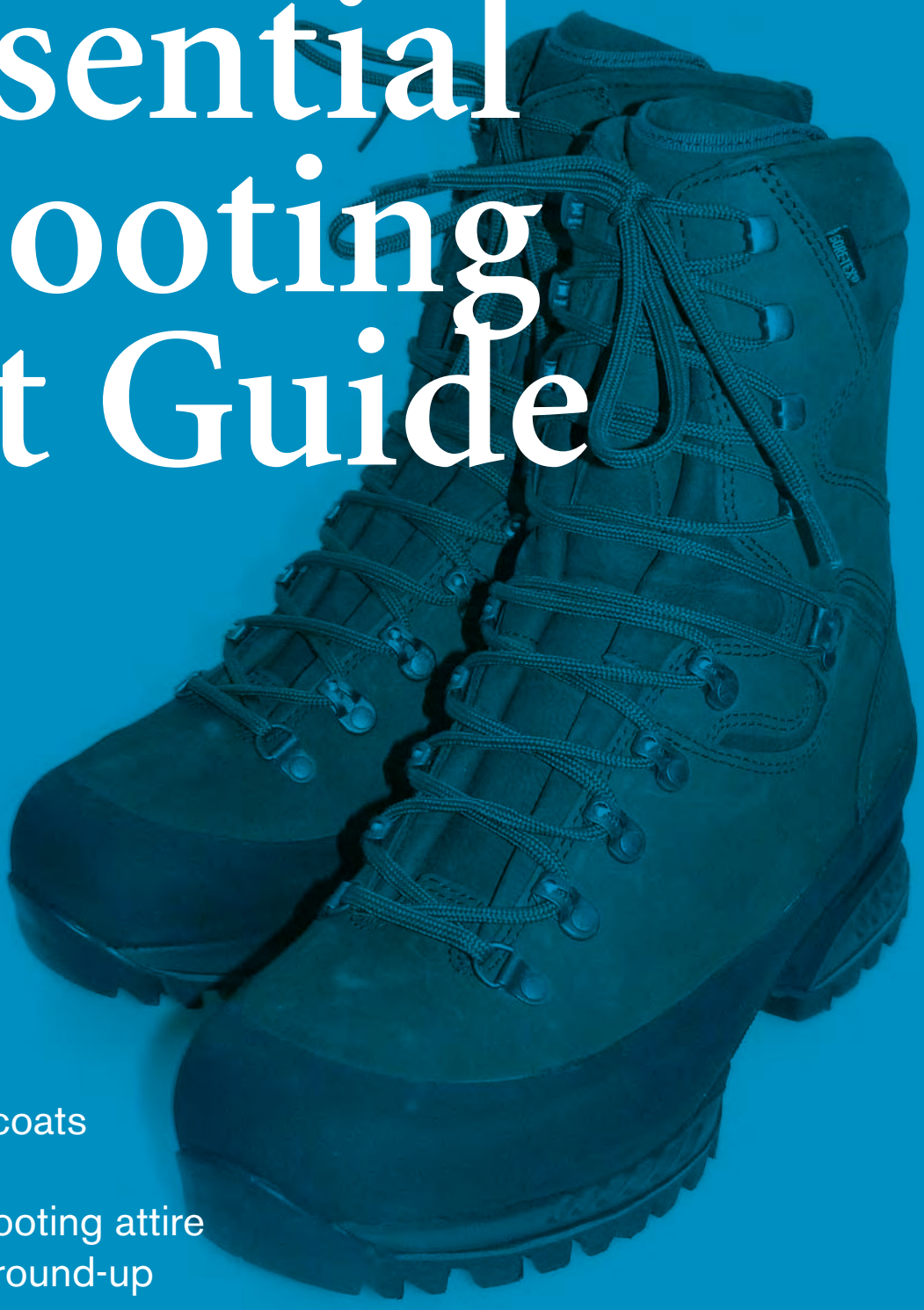
Gun Mart

Essential Shooting Kit Guide



- boots & coats
- gilets
- game shooting attire
- clothing round-up

Essential Kit

Don Brunt looks at two of the most important aspects of any shooters' clothing - boots and coats - and explain that its important to get the right one for you and your sport....



The humble wellie has undergone something of a transformation in the last 30 years or so and is now as much a fashion item as a practical means of getting around in the mud. Back when I was turning into a teenager in the early 80's green wellies were still viewed as being somewhat pretentious with many farmers still favouring the more traditional black boots. If green wellies were viewed with scepticism then the "posher" Hunters and Royal Hunters were deemed an absolute extravagance and there were at that point plenty of shooters who thought the same way.

Now the "wellie" market is a multi million pound industry with a plethora of brands from cheap and cheerful through to "Super Premium" where a pair can cost well in excess of £300. Of course most of them offer pretty much the same thing in slightly different packaging whether it be natural or synthetic rubber or even leather, however all do purport to be waterproof even though some peoples' idea of waterproof is rather different to others.

The welly wish list

When considering your next purchase these are the things that should be on your list...

Size - Do bear in mind the time of year when you go shopping for boots, there is little point buying a pair in the summer that are comfortably snug with a pair of thin socks on when they will become unpleasantly tight while wearing thick shooting socks in the season. Some manufacturers provide insoles to adjust between the seasons and these can help enormously.

Sole - Having warm comfy wellies that cosset your feet aren't much use if you can't stand upright on a muddy slope or slip and slide your way across an icy yard in the depths of winter. Look for a hard wearing deep cut tread that will give you maximum grip and will last. There's nothing more frustrating than having a pair of boots that are in great condition after 3 or 4 seasons but have worn themselves down and give all the adhesion of racing slicks in the wet. Also consider that if you spend a good percentage of your life in wellies that things like shock absorbing pads in soles and heels can make a long day seem a lot less tiring.

Material - Choose your boot dependant on your needs. Leather looks great and is really comfy, however it does need looking after carefully otherwise it can crack and is prone to scratching badly if you spend a lot of time working through thick cover. Similarly it's probably not the ideal choice if you are likely to spend a lot of time in water such as walking through or stood in "splashes". If you do go down this route don't scrimp on leather treatment creams etc., as these will prolong their useful life if properly used.

Rubber is the best choice from a waterproofing perspective though remember it won't have the breathable qualities that Gore-Tex lined leather and canvas hybrids offer. A quality rubber boot should be impervious to the rigours of brambles etc., though be careful crossing barbed wire as many a boot has received a mortal wound from a mis- placed barb.

Lining - Neoprene lined boots are the warmest and can fight off the harshest winter chills but remember you do pay the price for that extra insulation if you wear them in warmer weather. Activated charcoal and Bamboo linings are also good at wicking away moisture from the feet while others such as wool, jersey and leather can all be a comfortable choice.

Zip or not to Zip?

There's little doubt that zip up boots are the easiest to live with, and can be worn undone in warmer weather to help keep things cool or closed up for extra warmth and

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support when crossing rough ground. However most suffer from a common Achilles heel in that the zip tags often break off meaning weird and wonderful solutions end up being used to do them up from key rings to screwdrivers. If you do go for zipped boots then try to keep the zip as clean as possible through regular cleaning, once its full of mud and grit it can quickly fail. However plain boots that simply pull on are an intrinsically better bet when it comes to resisting the wet and are likely to stay in one piece for longer.

Bells and whistles.....

Another factor to consider are the little features that make living with a pair of boots a more pleasant experience, for instance do they have cleats on the back of the boot to make them easier to remove after a morning shooting in the rain? Do they have solid straps to help pulling them on? That may seem trivial but it can make a real difference and something you should consider when making your choice

Horses for Courses

As a rough guide I would suggest;

- Rough Shooting / Waterfowling - Rubber, no zip and neoprene lined.
- Formal Game Shooting - Zipped leather or rubber with a bamboo or leather lining.
- General Use - Rubber zipped or unzipped depending on whether they are used all year around.

Shooting Jackets

As with boots the shooting jacket has undergone something of a transformation in the last 15 or 20 years with sportsmen and women now having more choice than ever before. However it wasn't always like this, for many years the traditional tweed jacket ruled the roost and it had plenty going for it as it was warm, comfortable and was relatively resistant to wear and tear. However that warmth and comfort were offset by the fact that tweed absorbs water like a sponge so on a wet day a coat can quickly become 4 or 5 pounds heavier which makes the wearer feel cumbersome and eventually pretty damp! The other option was for many years the waxed jacket and this was waterproof, thorn proof and because it shed water the weight remained constant. However despite it being tough enough to cope with any scenario it too had its failings; by nature of its wax coating it gave the wearer's body no chance to "breath" which meant it was easy to build up a sweat when working hard, even on a cold day which during periods of inactivity soon became a cold wet layer trapped inside the jacket. Also in very low temperatures the wax becomes stiff and inflexible which hardly makes for an ideal garment to wear for a sport that requires freedom of movement especially around the arms and shoulders.

These shortcomings were acted on a by a gaggle of manufacturers who aided by the introduction of modern fabrics such as breathable Gore-Tex are now able to produce coats that have none of the shortcomings of their





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predecessors. New “technical tweeds” are available that offer the traditional look while being comfy in all weathers and waterproof even in the worst of conditions, they aren’t cheap by any means but if you do a lot of driven shooting they are ideal and can look very smart when complimented by matching breeks and waistcoat.

Other lightweight fabrics are also available and these effectively manage to keep out the wind and rain, keep you warm and with the added benefit of “action backed” sleeve and shoulder arrangements allow the wide range of upper body movement that shooters require.

Cargo room

Plenty of pockets are a must when it comes to jackets, deep well stitched cartridge pockets that can accommodate ammo without stretching or tearing are a must and the more well thought out garments come with flaps which can be kept open using poppered tabs to allow a shooter’s hand easy access for a quick reload. Hand warmer pockets are also useful as being stood on a peg in sub zero conditions can become rather painful to the digits after a while and pain leads to frustration when a bird appears and your hands are too numb to take the safety catch off!

A built in concealed or poppered hood is also a welcome addition as there is something particularly depressing about feeling rain invading your “waterproof” jacket by virtue of it running down the back of your neck during a deluge. Inside pockets for nic nacs, car keys and shotgun certificates etc are also helpful but these should be zippered so that you don’t get back after a long days shooting to realise you must have dropped your keys when climbing over a barbed wire fence. Poachers pockets were once all the rage but are seen less often these days as most people now appreciate that carrying around dead game in a pocket is hardly ideal for letting it breath.

One word of caution for those looking for one jacket to use throughout the season is that camo patterns are best avoided unless you have a budget to stretch to two coats. Realtree or the like can be very effective when out on the marsh or flighting pigeons but it will earn the wearer nothing but frowns of contempt should they arrive clad in it for a days driven shooting.

Your choice

Be mindful of what you are going to use a coat for before parting with your hard earned cash. A £400 tweed jacket will look great but won’t hold up well if you spend your time pushing through thick brambles while the eponymous waxed jacket or even a waterproof canvas coat will be able to take such punishment 24/7 without showing scarcely a mark.

Printed tweed is a recent newcomer to the market which looks quite traditional but its even more prone to snagging than the real thing and can in certain light conditions cause “shine” which is far from ideal. However it’s lightweight, comfy and waterproof so it has its place. A good all round plain green jacket is a safe bet, and with hard wearing weaves of man made fibres such as polyester can be resilient in most situations while Gore-Tex linings ensure that waterproofing is resilient enough to keep the wearer dry.

Prices for jackets start at around £30 for a cheap waxed version and from there the sky is the limit with some available costing in excess of £700. Don’t be afraid to buy more than one, as on a long wet day its always good to be able to change coats at lunchtime for a dry one especially if driving rain has started to creep in through the cuffs and neck. Similarly what may be a good coat for beating may be far from ideal for a day on the peg or out on the foreshore so consider exactly what you are going to be doing and shop accordingly.









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Dress for Success!



Don Brunt gives a few pointers on practicality, tradition and fashion in shooting

Whether you are out wildfowling on the foreshore, shooting pigeons over stubbles, busting a few clays or stood on the peg on a formal driven game day,, the clothing you wear can make a big difference to how well you shoot, how enjoyable a day you have and of course because us human beings are generally speaking fairly shallow creatures how we feel about ourselves and how others view us. Here's a run-down of what you need and why.

Wildfowling

By far the most extreme of live quarry shooting, wildfowling requires specialist gear as much to keep you safe as well as warm and dry. Deep mud, sometimes well over your knees that would pull off a normal Wellington boot in a few paces requires a set of waders. These also give you the ability to crawl up the side of drains and other foreshore obstacles without getting wet through. Having to carry plenty of gear including a hide and set of decoys means that lightweight clothing makes life easier, fortunately modern materials manage to combine minimal weight along with wind and rain proofing and its worth spending a few extra pounds to know that when you are out on your own in bad weather that you can rely on your gear 100%.

Underwear isn't something that instantly springs to mind when thinking about shooting clothing but in this instance a set of thermals is money well spent, as several hours sitting in a hide can be a bitterly cold experience.

Be aware that waterproof, breathable coats and the like are well advised, as if you have to walk a mile or so to get to your chosen spot you may generate sweat even in cold weather, sit in wet clothes for any length of time and you will be uncomfortable and quite possibly going down with a chill before you even get back to the car.

As with most shooting activities a hat is crucial, in this case partly to help shade your eyes as a lot of wildfowling takes place at dawn or dusk when the sun is low. Another





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reason - apart from keeping your head warm and dry - is that waterfowl have great eyesight and a hat helps break up your shape. On the subject of which, camo patterns are a matter of personal taste but many wildfowlers have adopted camo clothing which is highly effective at helping the shooter blend into his surroundings but be aware that the chances are that the pattern you use in woodland may be too dark for foreshore use, so be prepared to have a couple of jackets with different camo patterns hanging up behind your kitchen door.

Pigeon Shooting

As a year round activity pigeon decoying needs a whole variety of clothing. The good news is that the lower half of your body is usually out of sight, which means specialist kit isn't always needed and kitting yourself out for the sport doesn't need to cost the earth. A well built pigeon hide should mean that you only have to worry about your top half, and most shooters could get away with just using dark neutral shades for much of the year or the same clothing that they use whilst out game shooting. However, if you want to make the very best of your opportunities then investing in a suitably patterned camo jacket may not be a bad thing, especially if you are able to combine it with headgear such as a hat, face veil or mask that prevents the eagle-eyed pigeon from seeing a round white face staring up at it and veering away even before your gun's safety catch is off. There are those who prefer not to use a hide and instead use a head to toe "ghillie" suit of camouflage which can be highly effective. Bear in mind that as with wildfowling long periods of inactivity might be a part of the day, so in winter make sure you are well wrapped up and as comfortable as possible.



In the heat of the summer harvest, a long sleeved t shirt might be the perfect outfit for the job but whatever you chose make sure that you can shoot comfortably without wearing anything so bulky that it interferes with your gun mount.

Clay Shooting

The white heat of competition tends to focus the mind when it comes to designing high performance clothing, and the budding clay shot has an overwhelming array of items to pick from, some of which are truly world class. Other than the obligatory baseball cap which shades the eyes and protects from stray fragments of clay the most important item is the skeet vest. They vary hugely in terms of design; some are waterproofed jackets while others for use in warmer weather are made almost entirely of mesh that keeps the wearer cool as the mercury rises. All of them share some common features; deep rugged pockets capable of holding 20 or 30 cartridges and reinforced shoulder areas, often of leather or a similar synthetic material to help ensure that gun mounts are consistent and smooth with minimal risk of the stock snagging on clothing during the movement into the shoulder.

Many often sport further features such as smaller additional pockets for other paraphernalia such as chokes or score cards and the like, while attachments for holding other items such as ear defenders or attaching shooter back numbers at major events complete the picture and can be found on the high end brands such as Castellani of Italy. Many shooters will remain 'brand loyal' choosing clay clothing emblazoned with the same name as the gun they use – Beretta and Browning for instance carry a fine selection of clay-shooting clothing, indeed they both have huge ranges of shooting clothing in general.

Fashions do change over time and in the United States the trend is moving away from skeet vests towards using belt pouches instead, though considering the very high temperatures that American shooters compete in this is hardly surprising. Very lightweight cool polo shirts made using high performance fabrics produced by companies such as Under Armour make a perfect base layer for those warm days of summer, though they do tend to demand a premium price over the more common cotton versions that have become the standard choice of competitive shooters.

More so than in any other form of shooting, a range bag is an absolute necessity in which to carry cartridges (up to 150 may need to be carried at a time), chokes, eye and ear protection as well as other bits and pieces including a rehydrating drink - vital for the shooter, as visual performance can decline if you become dehydrated.

Game Shooting

Those seeking sartorial elegance need look no further than the gun line on a driven game day, the sky is quite literally the limit when it comes to price for some of these exquisite

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creations, and there are plenty of places that are more than happy to provide the keen shot with a custom made shooting suit of the finest tweed if you feel inclined to spend a few thousand pounds.

Obviously the majority choose off the peg clothing from specialist brands such as Barbour, Musto, Bonart, Schöffel, Ridgeline and Jack Pyke and with vast differences in tailoring, materials and price points there really is something in the market to suit every pocket.

What once was the preserve of the waxed jacket is now very much a market full of lightweight yet warm "Gore-Tex" jackets which are waterproof yet breathable, so that a perspiration inducing climb up to the peg of the next drive doesnt mean you have to be stand in 'cold sweat' for hours on end.

Starting from the bottom up of our shooter the 'wellie' is an absolute must and prices for this most traditional of shooting footwear start from around £40 and climb as far as £300+ if you want the latest most stylish offerings – Hunter, Le Chameau andAigle have all made their names in this area. Next up is shooting socks which are generally speaking pretty colourful items, which help keep the feet warm and are often rolled over the bottom of the next item in our trip up the shooter which is a pair of breeks. Often made of tweed these short trousers usually end just below the knee and are similar in nature to plus 2's or plus 4's.

A check shirt is pretty much standard issue amongst the shooting community and if the weather allows it early season days are often shot in shirt sleeves, traditionally paired with a tweed waistcoat that matches the breeks, though lightweight fleece type sleeveless gillets from the likes of Barbour and Musto are now almost considered to be uniform in many shooting circles.

Colder weather means a coat is added into the equation and once again many chose to make up a "suit" by having one that matches the rest of their ensemble but whatever is chosen it needs stout deep pockets to hold ammo, hand warmer pockets to ward off the cold and it needs to be of a fit that allows the wearer to mount and swing their gun without impediment. Expect to pay anything from £50 up to £500 for a jacket. Bear in mind that some traditional fabrics such as traditional tweed can absorb a great deal of rain in wet weather, turning a comfy light jacket into a ten pound millstone around your neck so check out how your preferred fabric will react to climactic conditions. To top off our virtual outfit a hat is an obvious requirement, and although the flat cap is by far the most popular choice there are plenty of variations on the theme if you want to stand out from the card.

Keeping a grip on things is as important as being able to mount the gun properly so its worthwhile bearing in mind a pair of gloves, as standing on a peg in January with fingers so cold that you can hardly get the safety catch off is no laughing matter. Companies such as MacWet offer some great gloves in modern synthetic fabrics that keep your hands warm in winter yet don't slip on wet gunstocks and



other summer weight versions that keep you cool and in control. There are other options such as soft leather if you want to spend more money and these can also be very effective, though in the authors experience they tend not to react well to a good soaking.

Beating

Be aware though that if your involvement on a game shoot is more likely to be that of being part of the beating team, then there is a good chance that clothing that would work well on the peg would be quite unsuitable for thrashing through thick cover in pursuit of pheasants. Wellies are still perfectly adequate footwear but an increasing number are choosing rugged waterproof walking boots as an alternative, especially on rough ground or where traversing steep slopes is a regular part of the day as boots offer far better ankle support and arguably superior grip. Waterproof over trousers or leggings are a godsend when beating through standing cover crop, for without them legs can become running wet in seconds and more than likely stay that way for several hours to come. Beaters jackets also need to be thornproof, as there is little point having a wonderful lightweight shooting jacket if it tears on the first thorn bush encountered so heavier weight fabrics and sometimes even the ultimate thornproof coat, the waxed jacket, is still a popular choice, though the non breathable nature of that type of jacket presents its own problems.

Keep it practical

Whatever your sport and whatever you choose, be aware that it's probably going to have a pretty tough life, so don't be surprised if it looks a little the worse for wear after a season or two. Also accept that no coat will keep you completely dry all day long in torrential rain despite what marketing departments might tell you. Water will eventually make its way in through sleeve cuffs or around the neck, so experienced shooters will depending on the weather forecast always have a second coat; perhaps an older one that is in semi retirement in the car, ready to change into at the lunch break if needed. Get the right gear and it will enhance the enjoyment of whichever shotgun sport you choose to participate in but get it wrong and you will most likely be either too hot to concentrate - or cold, wet and miserable and not able to shoot to your full potential. Choose carefully.

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It's not all Tweed

Dressing for game shooting

When it comes to shooting, clothing options have become vast and seriously expensive. It goes without saying that if you've been invited on either a day's walked-up or driven, you'll want to dress correctly. But whilst clothes maketh the man, your apparel needn't cost a fortune, likewise, heavyweight tweeds and breeches are not always necessary. Wearing the correct label is all well and good but you'd be surprised by some non- shooting makes whose products work just as well.

Head first

Yes you need a hat or cap to shield your face (but do lay off baseball caps irrespective of the fact you can buy them in tweed!). Still best are flat caps, especially the old-fashioned Bond-style cap or if not, how about a fur felt trilby. Both work well, keep your head and neck dry and cut down on heat loss. Make wise, Christie or an Olney tend to be favourite along with Gently Tweed or Farlows. Don't forget though that your High Street gent's outfitters or M&S also stock suitable hats and caps.

Check it out

Thermal underwear is personal but winters are getting progressively milder. Plenty of companies produce suitable first layer options; Ussen, Swanndri, Lundhags, Ridgeline and Damart are all notables although plenty of other proprietary stores offer more than serviceable alternatives. Next is the shirt, nothing being more inkeeping than the Tattersall check examples. Warm and absorbent, cotton is the material of choice; once again M&S producing an attractive range whilst Le Chameau shirts are well made and long lasting.

Equally, Blaser's thicker cotton examples are superb, slightly harder to find but well worth the effort. Another alternative is the fleece lined shirt by companies such as Bonart, ideal on cold days, do beware though, they're exceedingly warm.

To round off you'll probably opt for a tie. Unless a member of your family has bought you one of those pheasant bedecked polyester jobs, go for wool. Better, in my opinion a cravat, especially the renowned rain choker. Barbour's Towelling is one of the best, slightly pricier than the rest, it's thicker, softer, longer and a better quality than most.



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Inner or outer

As to what you wear over the shirt is once again a matter of personal taste and style, so in this instance I'll once again use myself as the example. I tend to wear either one of Beretta's moleskin waistcoats although Deerhunter and Moss Leather Goods produce similar garments. The reason being that during the early part of the season, this is all you need, only the colder months requiring an additional thin fleece or a V – neck lambs wool sweater.

Complete with bellow pockets and addition stowage, the game shooting waistcoat encompasses everything you need in an outer shooting garment. The other option is to go for a lightweight Norfolk style jacket; many of the modern offerings use waterproof, breathable linings that significantly increase wearability throughout the season.

I tend to wear something such as my green Deerhunter shooting jacket or corduroy Beretta Corbara jacket for walked-up, both ideal on slightly cooler days because of their loose, spacious fit. If wearing a heavier coat such as a waxed cotton Barbour or a 'technical' waterproof – which I do sometimes whilst waiting at the peg - no matter how much it's been designed for shooting it's removed immediately the drive starts even if the rain's torrential, freedom of movement being paramount.

Absolute pants

Bottom ends tend to be dictated by comfort. You may think breeches such as plus – twos or fours look archaic but let me assure you they work extremely well. Slightly more spacious than your average trousers, whether it's traditional tweed or some of the new technical fabrics, the main benefit is that since they end at the knee they don't catch on wire fences and fit unimpeded into boots.

For those who prefer something more conventional, trousers can still be worn. You won't go far wrong with moleskin or corduroy but they (and you) can suffer if exposed to relentless rain, remaining cold and wet long after the day has ended. If trousers are a must, Deerhunter Montana in green or Blaser's Argali are two of the best although there are plenty of others to go at. The one point I would suggest is that you look for the ability to adjust and tighten around the ankle and boots if worn over the tops.

Best foot forward

One item that receives the least amount of thought is socks, although they are essential if your feet are to remain relaxed. Likewise, if you're wearing plus-twos then knee length items with roll tops and garters is part and parcel - mountaineering examples are as good as it gets. The main objective is to wear a pair of thin lining socks, apart from that most shooting and guns shops are awash with a mind bending choice, all you have to do is opt for a quality pair preferably with reinforced toes and heels. Do remember though, even the best will only provide around a season's worth of wear.

Suitable shooting footwear is an extremely personal choice although most people opt for rubber boots. Once again Le Chameau, Aigle and Hunter are the doyens of the infamous green wellie offering a variety of styles and linings from neoprene to leather. Great if you like such things, but personally I prefer leather; Musto's knee length Buckdens or any of the Dubarry range or Le Chameau's Jameson are excellent choices.

A growing number prefer the more substantial lace-up leather boot such as Lundhags' Professional High, Meindl's Glockner or Dovre Extreme or good quality hiking boots. The main benefit of these is that they offer heavier duty Vibram style soles, Gore-Tex or similar linings, variable tension around the leg and, most importantly, ankle support.

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Dress for Success

Soft Parade

Mark Camoccio gets under the shell of Jack Pyke's Soft Shell Gilet

Whether taking part in shooting sports, fishing, or other outdoor activities, one thing is for sure – being prepared is the name of the game. As ever, unpredictable weather holds all the cards; yet the right gear can make all the difference between relaxing and enjoying the event or forever trying to get warm and regain valuable body heat. Thick overcoats and waterproof outer layers, are of course a pre-requisite for any outdoor sportsman, but sometimes, having extra layers underneath can be the answer if full insulation is needed.

Soft shell

On show here is what Jack Pyke term their Soft Shell Gilet, and it really is a slick piece of clothing, which is not only nicely made but highly versatile. It's manufactured from 340g Breatha-Tex soft shell material, which basically means some good old technology is at work where we need it.

In fact, to the touch, the high-tech material feels similar to a wet suit; yet with a super soft fine fleece lining, comfort is paramount. Breatha-Tex makes this Gilet waterproof, (as you would expect from the feel of the garment), and windproof. In addition the makers claim it's also breathable, although in my experience this largely depends on the individual. Getting caught wearing the wrong kit or too many layers when conditions are milder than thought normally leaves me sweating regardless, unless something is removed, irrespective of maker's claims in this department.

That general grumble aside, this Soft Shell Gilet really does impress. Twin zip-up lined pockets feature, along with a trendy and highly functional stand-up 'storm collar'. Zip that collar right up, and it's well-nigh impossible for rain to enter the neck – a handy feature in miserable conditions. The full-length nylon zip is neat, and here, an internal flap runs the full length, to keep any possible ingress (unlikely in my experience with this product) from the wearer.

My test sample was sent through as a size XXL and, with this in mind, I would say, for just a little extra comfort room, I'd be tempted to go one size up than you'd expect. Outer garments invariably look better that bit bigger, in any case.



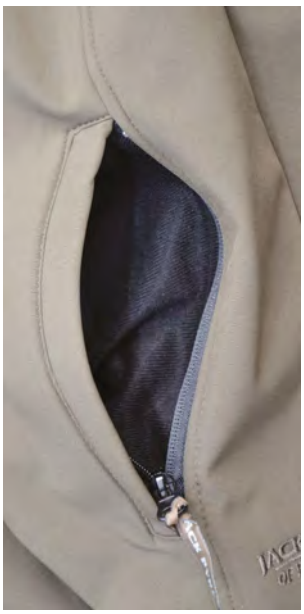
As for flexibility, the Gilet gave great freedom of movement, whilst adding a nice layer of padding around the chest; appreciated when I adopted a prone shooting position incidentally

Conclusion

In short, Jack Pyke as a brand continue to impress, and this Soft Shell Gilet is another quality product to ponder over; equally at home as an undergarment on extremely cold days, sealing the inner body to the elements, or worn as a smart over waistcoat in its own right.
Available in Hunters Green or English Oak Camo, in sizes Small to XXXL.







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Looking Good

Dressed for best in Browning's latest line, Mark Stone brings high fashion to the field





If there's one thing you can guarantee, it's that Browning ensure their shooters always look good. So for the 2015 season the famous name and Buckmark logo now appear on a much-improved version of a familiar range, whilst two new style have also been introduced.

Masters Range

Already a best seller and a name that's been around for quite a while, the new Masters Vest (£139), Pro Cap (£13), and Masters Pro Polo shirt (£36) have all got even better. The choice of Browning's own top shooters and featuring the familiar black with red piping, trim and logos the vest now features wider, water-resistant shoulder patches, a larger pocket should you wish to fit the optional Reactar G2 anti-recoil pad, and flexibility, whilst wearing and shooting has been improved ever further. And, as before, larger bellows pockets ensure that more than sufficient cartridges can be safely and comfortably carried, the design ensuring even weight distribution.

To complete the outfit the new Masters Pro polo shirt is made from quick-drying stretch fabric that kills off odour-producing bacteria. Soft and comfortable to wear when worn with the vest and matching cotton baseball car, the entire Masters outfit still looks good, smart and sharp.

Claybuster

For those looking for a brighter, more in your face outfit, you won't go far wrong with the new Browning Claybuster range. The orange and black ambidextrous vest (£99) features deep, black quilting along both sides and shoulders can be fitted with the optional Reactar G2 recoil reducing pad. Matching black bellow pockets provide plenty of ammo stowage, whilst the orange and mesh panels allow for ample cooling air to pass through the vest and circulate around the shooter's body. A two-way zipper and side adjustment tabs allow the vest to be fitted to the shooter's exact needs, whilst a large rear pocket means various accessories can be easily carried. Elsewhere, the Browning name and shattering clay logos are loud and proud whilst the complimentary, fully adjustable black and orange cap (£16) keeps the sun out of your eyes or the rain off your head.

Ultra

With garments specifically for both men and women, Browning's new Ultra range of clay shooting kit adds style, distinct looks and sophistication to any layout.

The predominantly mesh ambidextrous vest (£85) is a combination of black quilted panels with anthracite and orange inlays. Deep quilting with the facility to fit a Reactar G2 pad complement the deep bellows pockets, two-way zipper and side adjusters and back straps for attaching your shooting number.

Super stylish in anyone's book, the full outfit can be completed by the addition of one of the three 95% cotton/5% spandex blended material, quick-drying polo shirts (£36) that feature discreet Browning logos and stylish detailing. Comfortable and soft to wear, whether it's black, anthracite or orange, this trio of shirts has all been designed to match and complement the Ultra vest. Similarly, shooters can also choose between the orange and black or anthracite and black baseball caps. A modern twist on the familiar pattern, the cotton Ultra caps (£16) feature a lower crown, elasticated adjustment for a closer fit and a more defined profile.

Simply the best

All these new items of clothing feature the best quality materials, zippers, press studs and stitching, which means once you've bought it you can rely on it. And whether it's the older Masters Pro gear or the latest Claybuster or Ultra, the vests, polos and caps will deliver years of service and ease of washing, whilst maintaining their looks and shape after years of service.

If you're going to put in the big scores and walk away with the trophies, you have to feel cool, comfortable and have everything you need to hand. This means your clay shooting clothing must fit and perform exactly how you want and need it to, and when it comes to fit, finish and quality, you'll go a long way to beat Browning. The fact you'll look good wearing this latest clay garb also means you'll more than show your intent to win, something Browning have been doing for years on end.

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French Connection

Mark Stone gets to try a selection of distinctive clothing from Verney-Carron

A few years ago I had the pleasure of spending a few days with the Verney-Carron family at their factory in Saint Etienne in France. Still family owned, the Verney-Carron's have been designing and manufacturing their own range of distinctly French shotguns, rifles and accessories since 1820, the name, brand and Sagittaire astrological logo a guarantee of quality, distinctive styling and value for money. And so it is with the new range of Verney-Carron hunting clothing; the looks, materials, cut and practicality are perfect examples as to why French clothing as a whole enjoys a worldwide reputation for individuality.

There are three ranges in all; the Percussion range is aimed at those who value performance and practicality above everything else, whilst the top-end Club Interchasse collection offers ultra-stylish shooting and outdoor clothing plus après shooting apparel and bespoke luggage. Placed between these two and with its own distinct looks and style is the standard Verney-Carron range which does a fantastic job of combining elements and qualities from both the others, as demonstrated in the Fox Original suit.

Fox Original

The Verney-Carron Fox Original suit is manufactured from waxed cotton, the brown antique colour and look of the jacket, waistcoat and trousers fool most onlookers into thinking the entire outfit is actually leather. Reason being whilst most waxed cotton is stiff and cold to the touch, Verney-Carron's take on this traditional material has resulted in a 43% polyester, 57% cotton mix that's dry, soft, malleable material that looks good, is silent, moves with ease yet is robust enough to shrug off anything you can throw at it and that includes hard abrasions and barbed wire.

Lined with what's referred to as Sagitex, an inner membrane that ensures the Fox Original suit remains 100% waterproof, this and Verney-Carron's famous check lining allow all three garments to breathe, ensure the seams, zips and heavy duty stitching remain resilient to the elements and allows for a lighter weight construction and more stylish cut. All available as individual garments, where the Fox Original suit wins out is in the fact that as a complete suit it makes the best sense, top, bottom and extra layers all perfectly suited to being worn together.

Fox Original Jacket

Three quarter in length, the Fox jacket (£132) is ideal for any form of outdoor activity. The weight and cut allow for excellent freedom of movement whilst the reinforced shoulders and sleeves mean carrying a rifle or shotgun won't inflict excessive wear. Complete with a two-way radio mount (mandatory over in France), large, internally expanding, broad flap bellow pockets are complimented by deep, useful hand warmers.



Inside, a concealed pocket is augmented by two larger pockets and a mobile phone slip (also mandatory for all forms of European hunting), whilst a deep wading strip ensures the bottom edge is sufficiently resilient. Kept together by a strong, large tooth zip, durable rivets and strong press studs, the jacket will withstand virtually anything you can throw at it whilst still looking good.

Fox Original Waistcoat

An ideal companion to the jacket and a standalone garment in its own right, the Original Waistcoat (£72)

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features ambidextrous padded and quilted shoulder pads and four expansive external pockets for a large and varied selection of cartridges to be carried, whilst the zipped internal pockets keep valuables safe and secure along with the familiar mobile phone slip. Like the jacket, the waistcoat features a Sagitex membrane, check lining along with the usual deep wading strip, big zip, solid rivets, press studs and reinforcing exactly where it matters, when the weather turns a little colder it fits perfectly underneath the matching jacket.

Fox Original Trousers

With more reinforcing than any other hunting trousers I've worn and complete with a wide, deep kidney flap, the Fox Original trousers (£73) have been designed with hard work in mind. Two concealed zip pockets to the rear, deep slash pockets on the front along with a knife pocket and two external pouch pockets back up a non-slip, elasticated waistband, strong belt loops and soft mesh lining. Matching the Fox jacket and waistcoat on the front, a thicker, more robust yet still matching material forms the seat and back of the trouser legs with concealed zip around the ankles that pull the legs tight against the wearer's boots. As per the other two Fox garments, strong stitching, press studs and stitching add to the trousers durability whilst the fit and cut ensure they remain comfortable to wear in either cold or warm weather, when walking or riding a quad.



Herve Shirt

Just one of a vast selection of Verney-Carron shirts, under any other name the Herve (£24) would cost at least twice the price. Complete with fine corduroy lining that runs around the inside of the collar, this 100% cotton and button down collar shirt is comfortable and easy to wear whilst providing plenty of movement. Complete with the usual breast pocket, like all genuine quality shirts, the checks match up at the same time as the ample material that allows the shirt to be tucked securely into the trousers.

Prisca Scarf

A little touch of luxury (actually part of the Club Interchasse collection and available in three colours) this soft, luxurious 70% silk, 30% cotton Prisca Scarf (£38) is of the modern, multi-pleated style that allows you to wear it in a variety of ways. Not an absolute necessity but a piece of clothing that keeps your neck warm, soaks up sweat on warm days, fills up the gap at the top of the jacket and acts as a cravat for the shirt. Measuring a generous 180cm x 110cm, once you've worn the Prisca you'll wonder as to why you never got yourself a scarf like this before. And being French, it adds that all important finishing touch to the Fox Original outfit – alternatively you can buy one for your other half!

Looking good

The one thing this Fox Original suit, shirt and scarf all personify is the logo that runs along the edge of the Prisca scarf and that translates as 'the passion, the instinct and the style'. In other words just because you're wearing a practical, hardwearing shooting outfit, fending off driving rain, up to your knees in mud and at the end of a long, hard day's hunting there's no reason whatsoever not to look good and be that little bit different to everyone else.

I've now been intensively wearing all these Verney-Carron garments for the past six months and I can't fault any of them. When walking up the quarry the jacket, waistcoat and trousers move with you and remain silent even when brushing past undergrowth. Heavy enough to keep you warm, light and technical enough to ensure you don't overheat, all three main garments work equally well sat in a high seat and excel when working or hunting from on-board a quad. In other words, everything I've asked of every garment, whilst my wife is more than impressed at the washing and ironing qualities of the Herve shirt.

An outfit that looks good, fits well and exudes style and uniqueness of cut, Verney-Carron's Fox Original suit along with the Herve shirt and Prisca scarf or combination of each offer excellent quality and first-rate value for money. For more detail on all the Verney-Carron garments on test along with the full range visit www.ligne.verney-carron.fr or email Treesco's UK representative at david.gauthier@treesco.com to find your nearest outlet.

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Use A Rubber



Looking for a classic pair of Wellingtons fit for all outdoor pursuits? Jack Pyke has just the thing

At times, choosing appropriate footwear for the terrain or 'type' of hunting you're intending upon doing isn't so cut and dried. In fact for many it's a matter of personal preference whether they opt for mid, high-leg, heavy or light weight boot. However, when it comes to the times you'll be operating in very muddy, grimy, waterlogged and marsh type conditions, the majority will agree that a good pair of Wellington Boots are the optimum footwear of choice.

Available in sizes 6-12UK and standing 16¾" high, the Countryman (SRP£89.95) and/or the Fieldman (SRP: £79.95) Wellington Boots from Jack Pyke Ltd are just the ticket when conditions underfoot dictate their use. Both are manufactured using an 'increased rubber compound' for the outer with 3mm of neoprene lining. Their 'off track rubber soles' have thick, deep cleats for grip and ease of cleaning. Integral in the build are slightly raised toe grips, plus kick heels at the rear. These afford extra traction for walking and give extra protection at these key areas.

Which to choose is down to personal choice, as the Countryman have a full-length waterproof gusset with a heavy duty self-sealing YKK zipper for ease of putting on and off. Alternatively if you don't prefer this style of fastening – the Fieldman Wellingtons have a waterproof gusset but with a top buckle fastener.

Brace Yourself



Purveyors of refined countrywear, Maude & Fox, unveil the latest in outdoor attire, The Brace

The Brace shooting jacket for men is one of the latest garments from Maude & Fox, the urban country chic brand, demonstrating the brand's commitment to quality and style. True to Maude & Fox's ethos of taking traditional country clothing and giving it an urban edge, The Brace is made from water-resistant Teflon-coated British tweed with stylish twists in the detailing to set it apart. The new shooting jacket is aimed at the discerning chap (or lady) who wants some individuality in the field without being too overt.

The Brace combines function and comfort with clever contemporary styling. Made from100% British tweed, with a soft anti-pill fleece lining for extra warmth, the jacket also offers superior comfort to allow freedom of movement in the upper body and arms. Unusual technical detailing includes a vented bellow pocket with the underside pocket flap made in a quirky patriot tweed with a magnetic fastening (much less fiddly on a cold winter morning!), a zipped inside breast pocket for a phone, special fleece lined hand warmer pockets just below the chest and horn mottle buttons.

"We have listened to our customers and retailers and the jacket has been developed with their feedback in mind. We have found that our customers are looking for quality garments to wear in the field that are well made, practical and stylish," says Sue

Longmore, Managing Director at Maude & Fox. "As with all our pieces, The Brace is hand-cut and made exclusively by one of our team here in rural Dorset with good old fashioned attention to detail."

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