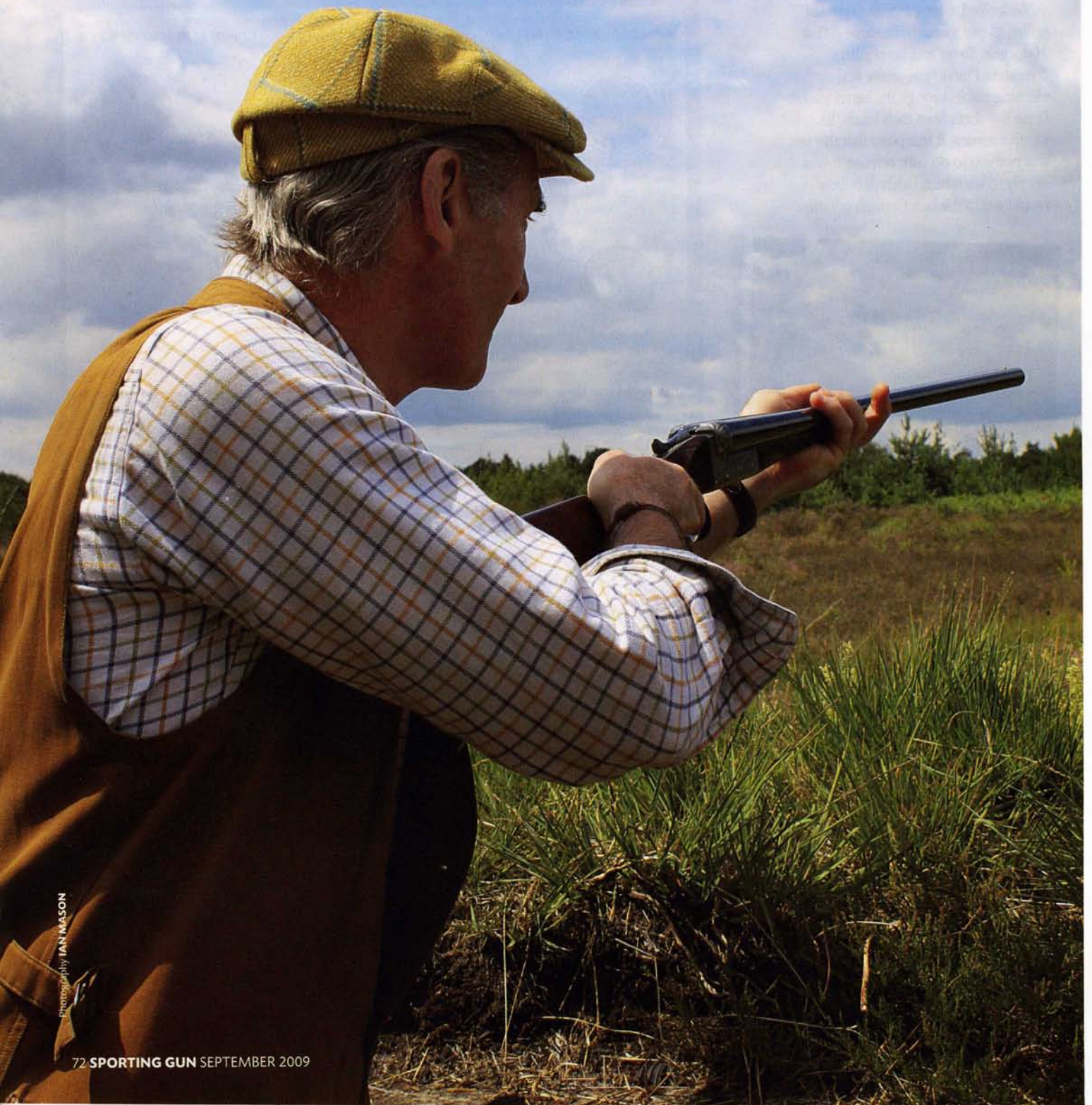


# Pay & play

Clay pigeon grounds will be busier than ever this month as game shooters get in some final pre-season practice. Ian previews a new, fully automated, layout at Bisley, Surrey.



photography IAN MASON



Looking for a pre-season sharpener? Then why not head for Bisley Shooting Ground in Surrey? BSG boasts higher towers (200 feet plus), more grouse butts, and generally more stands than any other shooting ground - and having recently mooched around Bisley's glorious heathland putting a ton of lead through a newly acquired side-by-side, I'm forced to agree. Better still, starting September 1<sup>st</sup>, BSG's popular Pay & Play sessions are going digital.

A word of explanation; Bisley's 3,000 acres are split over two ranges, Cottesloe Heath and the more wooded 'Long Siberia'.

On Cottesloe, clay shooters must go out with an instructor or pay for a guide to button the traps. However, on the Long Siberia ground, Bisley's owner Anthony Roupell, has been experimenting with a 'Pay & Play' scheme. No need for an instructor or guide, you and your pals turn up on any Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, present your shotgun licence and proof of insurance (BASC/CPSA etc) and you're given the run of stands presenting just about every target; driven pheasants, rising teal, bolting rabbits, low skimming grouse, bursting partridges - absolutely ideal for polishing your technique before the season warms up.

I think Pay and Play is a great idea. First of all you can take your time - all day if you want. Second, you are not paying for an instructor to be a glorified button-pusher, and third you can mix and match your own clay programme from the multiplicity of targets on offer. If one target proves tricky, keep shooting until you have it nailed!

As is happening at several other major clay grounds, Anthony Roupell

is now taking this idea a stage further and is going digital. From September, shooters will be given a 'smart plug,' which is inserted into a control panel on the stand you are shooting. Thirty stands have been fitted with this system, 20 two-trap stands and 10 five-trap stands. So straight away you have a choice of ninety different clays. The clever bit is that you can shoot by yourself and programme a sequence. So on the five trap stands, you can have singles, simultaneous pairs, or pairs on report, in any combination from the five traps. Programme your choice, load up, and a series of beeps counts you down to the trap firing.

Excellent. This also removes the problem of the nuisance buttoner who is too deaf, too senile, or just too cussed to punch the button when you actually shout 'pull.' It also makes it a breeze to go out alone. Now I enjoy a sociable round of clays as much as the next man, but on weekdays it can be tricky for everyone to slip away from work at the same time. Furthermore, there are times when I'd like to quietly sort out a particularly testing target without an audience commenting on my laboured adjustments between maintained lead and swing through.

Once you have finished shooting, it's back to BSG's wonderful Victorian colonial clubhouse where the staff read your 'smart plug' and tot up your bill according to how many birds you have shot.

But what are the possible down sides to this marvellous system?

Maybe, the chap on the next stand who acquired his shotgun licence only last week and who's waving a semi-auto around all over the place?

Anthony tells me that his reception staff weed out novices as they enter - and there's always a groundsman filling

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traps and a 'host for the day' roving around keeping an eye on things. The cost of installing the system is eye watering, but Anthony tells me that with his shooting ground getting through 3,000,000 clays a year, 'it makes sense to count them!'

'I genuinely believe that this will offer a great service for experienced guns who want to shoot unguided - a regular round or practice on particular targets - and if they can't crack the targets on their own, we still have our team of instructors on hand to sort things out,' adds Anthony.

BSG's regular 12-stand Pay & Play for two or more people still runs Tuesday to Thursday 9am to 3pm until September 1<sup>st</sup>, when the 30-stand digital layout launches. The digital layout will also run at weekends in the winter months (Nov 1<sup>st</sup> to the end of March). The cost is £30 per 100 (£25 for members) with 10% overage included and shooting your own cartridges. Further 'overs' are charged at the same rate. Fibre wads only. Guided sessions or practice with an instructor will continue on Cottesloe Heath as normal. Call 01483 797017 for further details. **SG**

**BELOW: EACH team of gun gets a 'Smart plug' used on each stand to record the number of clays presented.**

