

CLASSIC DRIVER

Sporting Guns: Gleneagles sale, 22 August 2011



With Britain's red grouse population currently ducking for cover in advance of the Glorious 12th, writes *Simon de Burton*, it seems fitting to bring you details of the annual Sporting Gun auction taking place at Auchterarder's swish Gleneagles Hotel this month.

Sotheby's has travelled north every year since 1967 to stage its Scottish-themed sales that used to include sections dedicated to silver, pottery and Wemyss ware, before the categories were reduced in 2007 to just sporting guns and paintings.

The gun sale is now organised by former Sotheby's specialist Gavin Gardiner, who has garnered shotguns from numerous leading makers including Holland and Holland, Boss and Co., Purdey, Beretta and E.J. Churchill for the 173-lot sale that also features shooting accessories.

The star of the show is a magnificent-looking Purdey single trigger sidelock ejector with 'over and under' barrels that was delivered to its original owner in 1974 – after five years in the making. The frame locks are heavily decorated with images of flying game birds by the legendary engraver Ken Hunt, which partly accounts for the gun's pre-sale estimate of £75,000 - 95,000.

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A pair of Henry Atkin self-opening sidelock ejector guns, 12-bore. c. 1910: £10,000 - 15,000.

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Boss and Co., an over-and-under ejector which was the factory prototype for all future Boss over-and-unders. 1909: £10,000 - 15,000.

Also worth a look is a Boss and Co. factory prototype from 1909, the firm's first over-and-under shotgun which uses a mechanism that is still regarded as state-of-the-art more than a century later. The gun is on sale for a modest £10,000 - 15,000, although there are numerous lesser offerings available in the sub-£10,000 range, some with estimates as low as £500.

Historically, however, the 'top gun' has to be the 1895 Purdey 12-bore built for the celebrated Lord Ripon, Earl de Grey, a man widely regarded as having been the greatest game shot of all time. How good? Well, his immaculately kept game books record a lifetime's bag of 556,813 kills across all categories. He liked to keep three guns on the go simultaneously, employing two hard-pressed loaders to ensure nothing escaped his deadly aim.

Ripon keeled over and died in the field aged 71 on September 22, 1923 – but not before he had terminated 51 grouse on a single drive. His trusty Purdey, which was inherited by his head keeper, is estimated to fetch £14,000 - 18,000, while the cork-handled walking cane that His Lordship always carried on shoots in his twilight years is also up for grabs at £800 - 1200, complete with gold escutcheon engraved with the Ripon coat of arms.

The Sporting Guns sale takes place at the Gleneagles Hotel, Auchterarder, Perthshire, on 22 August at 6pm. All lots will be on view at Sotheby's, 34 - 35 New Bond Street, London W1 on 15 and 16 August, as well as at Gleneagles from 20 - 22 August. More information from Gavin Gardiner Ltd on +44 (0) 1798 875300. Catalogue on line at www.gavingardiner.com.

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Photos: Sotheby's

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