

I have hunted true boar in France, Poland and Croatia, not to mention bagging warthog in Africa on several occasions, both for the pot and sport. I have also been learning by my errors. In France, where I took my first boar rather than feral pig, I made the mistake of using a single shot 7mm break-action Ferlach single barrel. Wonderfully accurate, it left me in a situation where I was alone in deep, dark, woods having just heart shot a modest sow after a walk and stalk. Going forward to examine her and reloading at the same time a bit too casually, I came face to face with a very large and angry male. I had a stand off with him at about 10 yards. It was tense, and for some

The wild boar boom

Wild boar shooting in Europe and beyond is a growth sport for UK shooters and here MIKE YARDLEY explains how to do it and where to go.

reason I entered into conversation with the beast: "Well, you can try me if you want, but I have one shot in this and then I'm off up that tree." He looked at me meanly, poked the dead sow, grunted, brought his head up and, after a pause, walked off. Phew...

In Africa I have had many happier close encounters with pigs, usually the wonderfully ugly warthog when scouting for other game or taking pictures. I have also shot a good number of warthog with a rifle, mostly at longer ranges. Africa has also taught me what very worthy adversaries both warthog and the semi-nocturnal, potentially aggressive, bush pig are. Intelligent beasts, they are very sensibly wary of man – as, indeed, are their European and antipodean cousins.

Of course, Boar hunting has always been a major sport in Europe, but an increasing number of British sportsmen, myself included, are adding boar shooting to their annual sporting calendar.

Wild boar are challenging quarry and can be hunted around the world.



Deciding where to go

The sport of boar hunting in countries like Poland is steeped in tradition. You can hunt in either an open or enclosed area. Open area hunting is to be preferred, although the results tend to be less predictable. Don't reject enclosed shoots out of hand, though. It all depends on the ethics of the operation. Either way, don't book a hunt without personal recommendation from someone who knows the provider. As with driven bird shooting, most people adopt good standards but some are seduced by commercialism. On the Continent it is very common to see an end of the day ceremony to honour the quarry.

I have been to Poland twice with Bob Kwisiuk in recent years and been most impressed on both occasions – one of which was written up in *Shooting Gazette* (February 2007). Bob is of Anglo-Polish descent, speaks both languages and is totally reliable. I went to Croatia with Bogdan Srejc last season, who also gets my endorsement. He is relatively inexperienced as a hunting agent, but he puts the effort in, has integrity, and is genuinely enthusiastic. His fees, moreover, are still reasonable for the quality of sport he is providing.

I have yet to return to France – it tends to be pricier than Eastern Europe as far as driven boar are concerned. However, my old friend Paul Roberts is probably the most



experienced boar shot in the UK, and is a great enthusiast for gallic battues. He recommends them because the shooting on the better estates is reliable and the food and wine as good as one might expect.

"The best shoots for numbers are in enclosed areas. In open areas there is good sport, but it is not often that the whole team (usually a dozen or so guns) get really good hunting. For big trophy boar Turkey is very good, but the numbers tend to be low. For numbers, my first choice would be an enclosed hunt in France but not on a place under 500 hectares. For value, I would go to Eastern Europe. Germany is very tightly regulated and you have to be especially careful not to shoot sows – they take a very dim view of it. Italy has some good areas too, but they are controlled by local hunting clubs and are difficult to get into. Russia and the Ukraine have vast open areas but the chances of all the team getting some shooting are slim. Romania has some very big boar but expensive trophy fees." ○



Shooting advice

In terms of quarry identification the best advice for beginners is to control the red mist and ignore all quarry but boar and foxes. Similarly, there is always a prohibition on shooting leading sows (sows with a litter of young trotting behind). You may be encouraged to shoot youngsters once they have lost their stripes because they are good eating, and the society managing the estate may have an obligation to control numbers. Nevertheless, I do not shoot young boar.

Zero your gun and become familiar with it before you leave the UK. Shoot deer with it if you can, or foxes. Take a collapsible seat and a rest with you. I prefer a tripod, rather than sticks. I do

not shoot off this, but rest my gun upon it so it is instantly ready. This technique has put my shot-to-kill ratio above 50 per cent. If you see a boar coming, don't put your rifle to shoulder until it breaks out into a ride or clear window. If you move prematurely you will spook it. When scanning right and left, as you should, move your head very slowly.

If you hear dogs some distance away, remember the boar may well be in front. If fox or deer cross the line go onto red alert – there are probably boar behind. If you shoot a beast and it is still running, shoot again. Even if it goes down be careful. Many a time beasts have been hit, mortally sometimes, gone down, got up, and run off. If you have

Trophy fees

The fees need to be thoroughly checked out before booking. In some places they could double your costs, in others they may not be payable at all. The eastern European countries, meanwhile, are a good choice for first-time hunters and all on tighter budgets (although no-one is going to do much shooting for less than about £2,000 these days). Places like Lithuania, Poland and Croatia remain relatively inexpensive if you choose your provider carefully.

Bogdan Srejjic, my host in Croatia, told me: "We can offer exciting sport with good ethics at competitive prices. It is something different from the UK. Our tariff averages at about 680 Euros per day, though we go up higher. I would advise a three-day minimum hunt. You can expect 10-15 boar a day between 11-12 guns, though of course this cannot be absolutely guaranteed. The idea is that every shooter



Do your research to avoid getting stung by trophy fees.

has several chances. As far as supplements are concerned, we charge no extra for up to 11 boar per day, up to 16 we charge 180 Euro, up to 20 we charge another 220 Euro (180+220). We take group bookings mainly, but

have some places for single guns with potential dates in November and December 2008."

Going with a group of friends, though, has to be good advice, unless there are a significant number of single

guns in the party. Hunting abroad can bring out the best and worst in companions. Safety and etiquette are major subjects. As any game shot will be aware most are more comfortable shooting with people they know. ○



It is very useful to have a tripod rest for your rifle when you are not shooting and the author has found this has improved his success rate.

shot a big trophy boar, it may make sense to put a second bullet into it if it is visible.

You must stay alert too. Last year I was surprised by a beast three yards in front of my peg, as I was beginning to switch off after a long wait in the bitter cold. I brought the rifle up, the boar turned, thankfully, and I brought it down at six paces. That could have been a bad situation. Boar should always be treated with respect – they are a potentially dangerous quarry. I routinely carry a large 9" bladed knife in my boot as a last resort, should I get knocked down. You may think it over the top but it is for good reason – this is a boar tactic; once they get you on the ground they will then attempt to open up your thigh or stomach with a tusk. ○

Getting the right gear

One hears quite a lot of opinion about equipment for boar shooting. It can be extremely confusing for the inexperienced hunter. First, the ideal tool for shooting boar is considered, by many authorities, to be a double rifle. Good over-unders and side-by-sides may be bought for as little as £2,000. My double preference would be for a 9.3 side-by-side. The calibre, like 8x57 rimmed, is well proven. I like side-by-sides because they are easier to load quickly.

Sights may be open, or if a scope is fitted it must be of low power. Something like a 1-6 times zoom is ideal. You need the low magnification option so you do not get in a muddle at close range. You will find yourself put in position on some drives when encounters at less than 25 yards are probable. In some countries (Poland, for example) a low magnification option is a legal necessity. My preference is for Swarovski, Zeiss, Kahles and Schmidt & Bender glass, because I know it can be relied upon. Don't skimp on your scope - it is as important as your rifle. Illuminated reticle dots are useful. I am not especially fond of dedicated red-dot sights, however, because it can be difficult to make shots at range as the dots can cover too much target.

Any reliable bolt, straight-pull or lever

gun will do the job (semi-autos are also popular abroad). Purists might advise a 'controlled-feed' action, such as a Mauser 98 or pre-64 type Winchester, because it will function in almost any circumstance. I manage quite well with an old Tikka, though I have a 45-70 Marlin on order, and have recently bought a 450-400 black powder double. Vintage guns are increasingly popular for boar hunting.

I had my Tikka .300 Win Mag customised by Border Barrels. They fitted it with with one of their precisely machined barrels with glass bedding to make it less susceptible to atmospheric change. It offers excellent energy and knock-down power.

The 9.3x74 is a relatively low pressure cartridge with a wide range of good bullets available. Apart from the rimmed 8x57, other good calibres for boar include 30-06, 300 Win Mag, .444 Marlin and 45-70 (the last two in lever action rifles).

The ever popular .308 is suitable for boar in heavier bullet weights and with a good quality bullet such as a Nosler, Trophy Bonded or A-Square. .338s and .375 Holland & Holland are other powerful options for those who do not wish to feel under-gunned. I am not a fan of shotguns for boar, though you must use one in Morocco. ○

RECOMMENDED CONTACTS

- Paul Roberts, J. Roberts & Son (Gunmakers) Ltd, 0207 6221131, email: shop@jroberts-gunmakers.co.uk
- Robert Kwisiuk, Poland Hunting, Welham Lane Game Farm, Great Bowden, Market Harborough, Leics, LE16 7HS 01858 433565, email: kwisiuk@btconnect.com
- Bogdan Srejjic, Lasarotta Ltd, Ingles Manor, Castle Hill Avenue, Folkestone, Kent, CT20 2RD, 01344 457052, email: info@lasarotta.co.uk

Swarovski is one of the top names in global optics, and can always be relied upon.

BASIC RULES

- Do note where your beast falls or runs.
- Do unload and make your rifle safe once the drive is over.
- Do wear highly visible clothing, such as orange hat-bands and waistcoats.



When following up shot animals it is advisable to have dogs with you.

- Don't load until you are in position.
- Don't shoot in front once you can hear the beaters.
- Don't take any shots in front beyond 40 metres or as instructed.
- Don't shoot deer in front ever, even when they are legitimate quarry - they must be shot behind because of their body height.
- Don't be flashy, go for simple heart shots.
- Don't leave your peg until told to do so.
- Don't follow up wounded animals, unless given a specific instruction by the shoot captain or similar official. And then only do so if you are comfortable with the situation and supported by dogs.

