

They think it's all over — it is now!

Well, not quite. Mike Barnes extends his shooting season with a trip to Mallorca where it all ends on April 16.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MEIBOL

At the time of writing it was mid-February and I had just enjoyed two wonderful days of partridge shooting in the hills that create a dreamy backdrop to the elegant town of Palma, Mallorca. Only 25km from the beach and marina, but another world. Meanwhile back in the UK the weather forecast predicted (accurately) -4°C.

In two-hours-10, the boys and girls of Ryanair delivered me to this never-never land. Palma was a complete surprise, a fabulous mix of ancient and modern to create the evening ambience of which they are rightly proud.

I was in a team of six Guns (Belgian, Swiss, French and English), and were to meet in the morning when collected by our drivers.

The trip had been arranged by Carlos Rua, an old friend who is a vastly experienced shoot organiser, and can call on 35 years of delivering great sport. He also has more charm than almost anyone

I have met. High-octane stuff. Nothing is any trouble – literally. I had checked in at the hotel which, like pretty much everything else, exceeded all expectations, had a bite to eat and took in a little of the town, which was just coming alive as I decided to turn in for the night.

At 8:30am on the dot, my driver José arrived, in a Mercedes people carrier.

In no time he was calling me Mr. Mike – he was onto a winner and whisked me off to another hotel to collect my new best friends for the next two days.

Let's be honest, for many of us of a certain age Mallorca did not conjur up a great image – beer, bingo and all-day breakfasts. While that may be the case elsewhere on the island (Magaluf?), it was definitely not here. ➔



Carlos Rua – the perfect host

With wind in their tails the birds flew brilliantly

PARTRIDGES ABROAD

The sheer volume of seriously smart boats in the marina give a pretty impressive argument as to what we are talking about.

José swung away from the waterfront (and its fabulous EU-subsidised roads – they clearly opted in!) and headed for the hills. Twenty minutes or so later we turned under a bridge and up a three-mile track onto Las Barracas land, where on arrival we were hit with introductions, welcomes and smiles, lots of them.

Carlos was his attentive self, and we were invited to choose our guns for the day. There was a big selection of Beretta over-unders (12, 20, 28 bores) and Arrieta side-by-sides.

Our host really does talk the talk when it comes to organising shoots. He started in 1980 with several French parties at Alcubillas, a traditional wild partridge shooting area not far from Valdepenas. “I was 18,” he smiled. “So organising and selling days was my first serious job.”

He inherited his love of the sport from his father. “He was a self-made man, who created a waste paper and plastics recycling

business after the Spanish Civil War – the business is now successfully run by my older brother.

“My father initially enjoyed his shooting with local friends and later invited guests to his shoot.”

Carlos, meanwhile, studied at Madrid University and speaks five languages fluently. His wife, Eva, is a qualified lawyer, but now runs the European School of Coaching, Spain’s leading executive coaching business.

Carlos leased his first estate in 1993 near the historic town of Chinchon, and is renewing it again for another eight years. It is called Encinilla, and is where he also runs an award-winning labrador kennels, situated 45km south-east of Madrid. Clearly a very convenient location.

The shoot has been a great success and, with new land, now offers some outstanding high-bird drives. “But I had been looking for another shoot. Not just any shoot but somewhere special,” he explained. He felt sure he would find it in Mallorca.

“And as for the ground, it was perfect.”



Good teamwork from loader & secretario Claudio & Louis

After drawing one or two blanks he came across Manuel Rossinol Foster, owner of Las Barracas, 1,000 hectares of long-established family estates. “When we met we immediately hit it off,” said Carlos. “And as for the ground, it was perfect.”

This was five years ago. They formed a partnership and now have a 20-year agreement, and are building a 14 room lodge/hotel. Since properly hitting their stride three years ago, they can accommodate 70 days per season and

have created 28 drives.

The terrain is terrific for the bird presentation and we were presented with a wonderful mix of high, wide and handsome.

Headkeeper 33-year-old Ismael Tomas has been with Carlos for 15 years and moved to Las Barracas five years ago to take up his role. It has worked out well.

The beaters were a cheery bunch, all 22 of them in the line

plus two keepers. They are all local, the island enjoying a strong tradition of rough shooting – partridges, pigeons, hares and thrushes. The atmosphere was good throughout, both in the field and back at the lodge where the owner’s daughter Sio and her team looked after us incredibly well.

As for the shooting... it was excellent. There were six Guns, pegged nicely 40 yards apart. The settings of the five drives were a touch idyllic – as was the weather with blue skies and 20°C. There was also a brisk north-westerly, which didn’t affect us, but the partridges really had the wind in their tails and flew like dingbats.

Carlos added: “We can only show you today some of what we have to offer. All of the drives are good, but some are exceptional. We had a team here from England last week who shoot mostly in the West Country and they were both surprised and thrilled at the quality of sport on offer. Though very experienced, it was their first shooting trip abroad and it exceeded all expectations. They have already booked for next year.”

And there is good duck shooting, too.

So how does their shooting compare to the UK? The answer is very similar. On a personal note, it was good to be numbered from the left – it was like being back home in Lincolnshire!

The between-drives serving of tapas and light refreshments was to a very high standard, while the lunch at the end of the day was stunning. Not surprising as the chef was the recently retired head chef at the Ritz, Madrid. Now away from the pressure which that entailed, he enjoys keeping his hand in with shoot meals.

It made for a very happy ending to what had been a memorable day. And there was the added treat ➔



A keen & cheery team of beaters



Excellent bird presentation

PARTRIDGES ABROAD



Room with a view – the table is set for lunch

of some very enjoyable walked-up shooting the next morning. The birds were skittish and made for good sport.

My plane was due to depart at 5:30pm. I left the lunch table at 3:30pm and was back at the airport before 4pm; no rush. Looking around me, it was obvious that quite a few passengers were on a Valentine's trip. But I would guess that many would not have had a better time than yours truly.

NO ENEMIES

There is little or no ground vermin on the estate – no foxes, no wild boar.

As can be seen from the photographs, the terrain lends itself perfectly to bird presentation, and there is no necessity for planting cover crops. With brush and scrub covering the ground, the beating line is able to get round sufficient birds to put 4,000 of them over the Guns on any given drive.

Mediterranean oaks and pines add further colour and breaks. And I am told that the almond trees look a picture when in bloom.

Bags are to the requirement of the shooting parties' preference – five Guns to 10. All driven shooting is double gun and loaders and secretarios are provided – mine were excellent, good fun, too.

You can take your own guns – Carlos will pave the way with the paperwork – though it's an awful lot easier to use a pair of house guns. I

opted for Beretta 28 bores, but all standard gauges were available.

THE SEASON

The shooting season in Mallorca opens in September and closes on April 16. In Spain, dates vary from region to region and as a commercial shoot they could, if they wished, shoot the year-round. But as birds are breeding, extending the season into the heat of summer does not make sense.

The team: Carole Voute, Le Comte de Fels, Alexandre Cardon de Lichtbuer, Cedric van Quickenborne, Pascal Pailleau & Mike Barnes.

Bag: 364 partridges, 88 mallard.



Le Comte de Fels double gunning



The team

HOW MUCH?

Gordon Robinson of Royal Berkshire Sporting Agency, who have a long-term relationship with Carlos, said: "With the current exchange rate the cost per bird is now down to £30, which is remarkable value."

SHOOT BOOKINGS

Royal Berkshire Sporting Agency
www.rbss.co.uk

ACCOMMODATION

Highly recommended – Hotel Sant Francesc, a stylishly converted 19th-century manor house in the heart of Palma, complete with rooftop swimming pool and terrace.

www.hotelsanfrancesc.com

HOW YOU SAY

Wrong spelling: Majorca
Correct spelling: Mallorca
How you say: Mayorka



Headkeeper Ismael Tomas and Sio Rossinol (the owner's daughter)