

# THE SINGLE SIGHTING PLANE

UK Ambassador for Fabbri and Director of Calvert Sporting Adam Calvert considers the age-old debate of over-under shotguns versus side-by-side, and concludes there is a third option, the 'inbetweeners'.

There is no question that the over-under shotgun has become much more popular than the traditional side-by-side in recent years, and it has proven its dominance both on and off the game shooting field. Clients frequently ask me to put a percentage on how much easier it is to shoot an over-under in comparison to a side-by-side, to which I answer that it is somewhere between 10 to 15 per cent in favour of the more modern configuration.

The three main reasons for the over-under's dominance are as follows:

**Eye and rib alignment:** The single sighting plane of an over-under allows for a much better relationship to be built between the eye and the gun, thus making the gun more pointable and easier to shoot.

**Less recoil:** The over-under gun is heavier, and due to the barrel configuration which is more in line with the shoulder, there is less felt recoil. The barrels of an over-under are often longer than that of a traditional side-by-side which reduces muzzle flip. Both of these factors make the gun more stable to shoot, and due to this reduction in recoil the shooter is less likely to lift their head or shy when squeezing the trigger. As a result, they will be more accurate.

**Stock dimensions:** The over-under is also stocked very differently from a side-by-side. This starts at the fore-end which is often wider and thicker, thus allowing the lead hand to have a greater control over the barrels. Another benefit of this is that it is rare to experience the problem of fingers coming over the top of the rib which is frequently





experienced on a side-by-side and can make you shoot off line. Moving back to the main stock dimensions, the grip of an over-under tends to be a full or semi-pistol grip which is wider and thicker in the hand, allowing for a better wrist and hand position which not only helps mount the gun consistently but also to control it. The stock itself tends to be wider in the comb and have a heel plate which has a slightly bigger surface area in an over-under. Again, all the above factors help to reduce recoil and make the gun easier to shoot.

With all of this in mind then, is there still a place for the side-by-side to be used?

There are many traditionalists who would argue that a gentleman only shoots a side-by-side, although I have to say that the number of these people is becoming fewer and fewer. There are also those who will point to very capable side-by-side users in an attempt to defy my arguments for over-unders. These noted hotshots are rumoured to buck the trend of needing an over-under to be an expert shot, however at the danger of being banned from some of the

best shoots in the north of England, dare I suggest that these gents are not true purists but ‘inbetweeners’?

Yes, these inbetweeners are shooting side-by-side shotguns, but these are not the side-by-sides that we would all typically think of. These guns are based around old ‘live pigeon/duck guns’ which as a rule are heavier than the traditional old English side-by-side. Indeed, these guns tend to feature slightly longer barrels and have a raised single-siting rib which can be referred to as ‘pigeon ribs’. The stock dimensions on these guns are very similar to the stock dimensions of an over-under, often having a full or semi-pistol grip, slightly wider comb and a larger heel area. They are nearly always fitted with a recoil pad or, in some examples, a full recoil-reducer system.

As you can see from my description, these ‘inbetweeners’ have very similar handling characteristics to over-unders whilst still maintaining their side-by-side aesthetics. Perhaps this is the future for traditionalists who want to stand toe-to-toe on the accuracy stakes with their over-under counterparts? But I can’t help wondering how much better the ‘inbetweeners’ might shoot with full over-unders. *FS*