



# Pimp my Purdey

Conventional kit simply doesn't do it for some people. But when a venture into the world of wacky tweeds has been exhausted, shotgun bling is the next option, says **Rosie Nickerson**

**S**HOOTING clothing and kit tends to be rather traditional. Plus-fours have remained largely unchanged since Edwardian times. Anyone not familiar with shooting would find it deeply odd that we tog up in this bog-coloured garb from a bygone era. Most people's shooting accessories or shotguns wouldn't grab anyone's attention, but there are some individuals who thrive on being different.

Nothing acts more like an ice-breaker than your fellow gun being decked out in some eccentric outfit, particularly if he has the personality to carry it off. And at least it means you definitely remember him afterwards, even if you can't recall his name. AA Gill, *Times* journalist and author, is a big fan of unusual tweeds, which he teams with gorgeous cashmeres

from Loro Piana. William Gascoigne, one of our finest shots, eschews the up-to-the-minute technology of modern fire-power for the pleasures of hammerguns and flintlocks. And Nigel Hawkins can sometimes be spotted with his old zebra-skin gun sleeve.

Some people genuinely like to stand out from the crowd a bit. Most are happy enough just to pep up their mud-coloured shooting attire with bright socks and garters, a loud tie or, in some cases, a spotty bow-tie (Lord Gerald Fitzalan-Howard is never seen without his). However, some really aspire to be different from the rest, creating for themselves a "signature look" that renders them unforgettable.

Matias Rojas Bruce, a mountain of a man (at least 6ft 4in), with a beard and swarthy Continental looks, arrived in our

CHARLES SAINSBURY-PLACE

midst on the coldest of days, wearing a rather neat bottle-green tweed kilt complete with sporran. To say he made an impression was an understatement. He's Peruvian by birth, with Red Indian blood and a Scottish great grandfather, making a wicked combination with the kilt. The outfit became a major talking-point among the keepers.

## LOUD AND PROUD

A loud tweed is a perfect way for the more dapper gun to indulge a sense of originality and individuality while still wearing the most durable and traditional shooting fabric. The more extreme the tweed, the more he or she can set himself or herself apart from the crowd. The world would be a dull place if these characters conformed to the identikit

**The ultimate accessory for a king of bling: Paul Carlbom's sidelock, which is studded with crystals and plated in chrome (above)**

Barbour or Schöffel jacket. Jeremy Shaw of Carters Country Wear in Helmsley, says: "Loud tweeds go in phases – some of the old estate tweeds can be pretty loud. These days people like to be different; you wouldn't want to turn up for dinner wearing the same thing as everyone else. It's the same with shooting. We can make real one-offs, and even if it's in a loud tweed, if the fit is right and the cut is right, it works."

Robert Gibbons, the former chairman of Hunters of Brora, wins the prize for immaculate turnout. He always wears his smart estate tweed three-piece suit, and his loader/driver wears an identical one.

"The Lawers tweed is distinctive, durable and warm. I still wear one of the original shooting coats made some 30 years ago. There's no doubt the tweed is one of the more >



**Above: four of Paul Carlbom's glittering guns. Below: a not so bling shooting party from the Edwardian era**

dramatic estate cloths. It was the custom for some families and estates to have their own livery and I suppose having your own tweed is an extension of that. Sadly, it's dying out. Dress code generally is deficient and a traditional sports jacket and tweed suit is a rarity."

### KING OF BLING

An Austrian friend of mine wears lederhosen when he comes to shoot in the summer months. These nubuck shorts are really quite short. They come complete with braces and a little centre panel with horn buttons. He wears them with a rather small black straw trilby. While this outfit would cause no flusters in Austria, it happened that the last time he came,

*Bruno*, the film starring Sacha Baron Cohen, had just been released. Throughout the day, clusters of beaters pointed and sniggered, while the rest of the team just called him Bruno.

Lady guns often manage to get away with a bit more colour and pizzazz than their male contemporaries, so it's quite common to see purple trim here, wacky leopard-print gumboats there, or an outsized fur hat. Not so common, however, is a lady gun who shoots in a full-length mink coat. This particular lady lives partly in Wiltshire, partly in Texas, and this is her usual get-up, complete with large stetson. At lunch she removes her sumptuous coat to reveal the cutest tweed mini skirt. You wouldn't forget her in a hurry.

However, none of the above can possibly compete with a man who turns up with a pair of gold-plated shotguns encrusted with Swarovski crystals. Let me introduce you to the man with the golden gun. Or rather, pair of golden guns.

Paul Carlbom is a charming Swedish entrepreneur in his early forties, who exudes enthusiasm for everything to do with shooting. Paul routinely wears a made-to-measure three-piece checked tweed suit from David Saxby. His nickname on the shooting field is The King of Bling. He has just taken delivery of a pair of golden guns, adorned with Swarovski crystals all along the rib, ready for next season.

Paul has set up a group called: Pimp my Purdee, whose members all have customised shotguns. The idea came to him about three years ago while he was watching a US TV show about car customisation, called *Pimp my Ride*.

"Shooting is a very traditional sport and all the kit is very functional, so I thought it would be fun to do something a bit



Matias Rojas Bruce's kilt was a talking-point



Robert Gibbons with loader (left). Philippe Harmer in lederhosen (right). Paul Carlbom and his bling guns (below)

different," he says. "A lot of people own flash watches but I don't even have one. I can't bring myself to spend money on a watch, but when it comes to a gun... well, that's different."

Paul's first foray into the world of bling was a pair of Zabala 12-bores plated in chrome. This was about three years ago. When he turned up to shoot grouse in Yorkshire, there was quite a throng of beaters around his grouse butt after every drive. But I heard one of the loaders mumble: "The thing is, with a gun like that you've got to shoot bloody well, haven't you?" No one had ever seen anything quite like it and I know Paul's



“The thing is, with a gun like that you've got to shoot bloody well, haven't you?”

neighbouring shots were quietly hoping his guns, which glinted in the sunlight, would flank the birds their way.

"They're like Marmite – you either love them or you hate them," says Paul, who clearly loves them. "People either think they're really amusing or utterly revolting. They're a real ice-breaker, though. I will arrive at the shoot and while everyone is busy at the back of their cars getting their kit together, I will fish out a hanky and give the barrels a quick polish. Before long a little crowd has gathered. I don't know if I shoot better or worse with them but the theory is that I out-psych the other guns before the first drive."

### GOING FOR GOLD

About a year after Paul had his chrome Zabalas done, he happened to sit next to a girl who worked at Swarovski. They got chatting and he asked her whether the crystals could be put on a gun. She put him in touch with Jonathan Bullas at Crystalroc, based in London, the recommended applicator in Europe for Swarovski crystals.

"We used 2,820 crystals on each gun, which equates to 48 man-hours," says Jonathan. "The glue was specially made to withstand heat of up to 250°C, so they won't come off even if the barrels heat up."

Now, I will be completely honest here. I am a stickler for etiquette and tradition on the shooting field and was not prepared to find these guns at all attractive but, to my surprise, I found myself admiring the workmanship. The gold ones truly are a one-off – quite extraordinarily flash and incredibly tactile. Because the crystals are not all over the barrels but just along the rib, on the trigger guard and the sideplates, it's actually quite an attractive, dainty design. It's not everyone's taste but if you want to cause a stir, dipping your shotguns in molten gold is the way to do it.

Paul has a friend who took one look at his chrome-barrelled guns at a charity day a couple of years ago and wanted to order a pair for himself. He also loved the idea of incorporating Swarovski crystals along the rib and has commissioned a pair for next season. He wishes to remain anonymous but tells me: "It's so amusing and a completely alternative way of looking at it. It's at the opposite end of the scale to all the heavily engraved old English guns. I am going to commission a black crocodile skin case for them, with a black velvet interior, incorporating a silver cigar box." A friend of theirs has also ordered a pair, complete with crystals, and the plan is to re-model a violin case specially for them.

"Because I won't be unique on the field anymore, I decided to stay one step ahead of my friends and go for gold-plated barrels," explains Paul. "When I first saw them I couldn't quite believe how beautiful they looked and now I can't wait to shoot with them."

*Paul Carlbom is donating a Swarovski-encrusted Zabala gun to the auction at the GWCT Ball to be held on 14 October at the Savoy. For more information call Felicity Cranfield on 020 7290 0110. Our thanks to the Holland & Holland Shooting Ground for letting Paul put his guns through their paces there.*

