

Big guns wear **TWEED TREWS**

Britain's top shots have put aside "outdated" plus-fours and are sporting ankle-length trousers. They're comfortable and flattering, and perfect for that late-night fuel stop, says **Rosie Nickerson**

THERE'S a definite trend emerging for more experienced shots to wear long tweed trousers out shooting. They confer a degree of smartness and individuality in a way that no other piece of shooting apparel can achieve, imbuing the Tweed Trouser Brigade with a sense of chic that sets them apart from ordinary plus-foured mortals.

BARBOUR

There are many reasons for this new departure in shooting fashion. Tweed trousers certainly flatter those whose figure may have expanded since their svelte youth. Plus-fours have the unfortunate tendency to make all but the most tall, willowy guns look rather portly. Women shots abandoned plus-fours long ago and have been turning up on shoots in slim-fitting moleskin trousers or nubuck

jeans for years. One well-known lady shot was seen by several million viewers on TV walking-up grouse in a pair of white jeans. The bag wasn't huge at the end of the day but she looked fabulous all the same. Austrians often sport either teeny-tiny lederhosen shorts or go >

Top gun's choice: Lord James Percy (below) feels the need for trousers in tweed



in for the long-length plus-fours in a thick, cotton twill. Spanish guns are partial to elongated, suede plus-fours and their spouses turn up in divine, soft-suede skirts in mossy hues. Finally, British men are catching on that tweed plus-fours may not be the most flattering attire.

Jeremy Shaw of Carters Country Wear tells me, "Tweed trousers are getting more popular. I've made more for people in the last couple of weeks than in the last couple of years. It tends to be the estate owners more than anyone else who wear them. Maybe it's more practical if they've got meetings to go to before or after shooting. The tweed does tend to be a bit louder. I've been told by clients that once you've worn tweed trousers, you'll never go back to plus-fours. They say they are warmer and you have complete freedom of movement."

The growing fans of this form of trouser are truly evangelical. Extolling the virtues of freedom of movement and the fact you can blend in at service stations, William van Cutsem and his three brothers are some of the earliest pioneers of this new trend; they started wearing them in their teens. William van Cutsem explains, "I've been wearing them from the age of 18 - for ease really; they are more comfortable, and driving back, when you stop off at petrol stations, as long as the tweed isn't too ridiculous you can blend in more."

Another pioneer of the tweed trouser is Sir Michael Farquhar from Wiltshire. "I abandoned plus-fours a long time ago. I don't like stockings or any constriction around the knees. I think trousers are much more comfortable. They're just easier, especially when I stop at a fuel station, I don't feel so out of place." Everyone I spoke to mentioned this important advantage, and I can completely identify with it, as many's the time I've been eyed up at petrol stations - for all the wrong reasons.

It seems normal at most shoots for guns to change into trousers before the shoot tea so they can hit the road back in "ordinary" garb. I am told that this is heartily encouraged at Sandringham, where the correct form for the shoot tea is for the guns to change into flannels. One can only assume that the Duke of Edinburgh doesn't find them comfortable for sitting about in either. Having read *Young Prince Philip* by Philip Eade, I was surprised to learn that on his first visit to Balmoral, Prince Philip wore flannels not plus-fours to go shooting, so he was clearly ahead of his time.

Most tweed-trouser wearers team them up with ankle boots rather than gumboots, which



COURTESY OF JOHN GRAVE



Sir Joseph Nickerson (top, centre) donned white spats on the moors, while King Alfonso XIII of Spain (above) also set his own style

are, of course, far more practical for walking on the moors. Because you are not exposing your calves, clad in their woollen stockings, you don't then need the additional protection of gaiters, which are fiddly to put on and have the effect of thickening the calves and ankles, so that any elegance conferred by wearing a pair of plus-fours is forgone. This was not lost

FOR TWEED TROUSERS

- You will stand out from the crowd.
- You will be more comfortable as your knees are not constricted.
- You won't get heather bits scratching your legs and sticking to your stockings.
- You can wear them for other occasions, not just shooting.
- You will look thinner, as they are a far more flattering cut if you have a figure that is anything less than perfect.
- You won't get odd looks in service stations.
- You won't get your ankles nibbled by relentless midges.
- You won't have piles of woollen shooting stockings to hand wash.

AGAINST TWEED TROUSERS

- You might look a little like Rupert Bear.
- You'll be unable to show off a well-turned calf or ankle.
- You may feel uncomfortable in gumboots.
- You might be taken for a spectator.
- You might get teased by your fellow guns.

on my father, Sir Joseph Nickerson, who took to wearing old-fashioned white spats to cover his ankles when he was wearing his signature clothing on the moors - tweed shorts. Believe me, this was a unique look in the Seventies and Eighties and the spats were highly impractical as wearing them necessitated a man with a silver-button fastener to hook up and unhook all the tiny buttons.

For pure convenience and practicality, tweed trousers have the edge. The only time that tweed-trouser converts lean towards plus-fours is when it is wet and muddy, so they

Right: William van Cutsem is one of the earliest pioneers of the tweed-trouser trend. Below: Lord Margdale wears his as a shoot spectator

have to wear gumboots. On these occasions, some tweed-trouser fans revert to plus-fours. However, even then some will stay with the trousers, such as Sir Michael Farquhar: "They're quite narrow at the bottom so it's not a problem as they do fit into the wellie."

Another very keen member of the Tweed Trouser Brigade is Richard Compton of Newby Hall, Yorkshire. He looks terribly smart in his, and "started wearing [them] about five years ago. I probably saw someone wearing them - maybe it was Ralph Northumberland - and thought, 'how incredibly practical'. You don't get heather down your boots and your socks don't get destroyed. I hate wearing gumboots as they're so uncomfortable walking in the hills. I think as long as you make the effort it's OK. They're not jeans;

they are smart. I don't wear them with a matching jacket but I wear a tie, occasionally a bow-tie, and maybe a matching hat."

In fact, of all the people I've met who sport this fashion, none wears his tweed trousers with a matching jacket. I suppose it would look like he was off to church or to have tea with the vicar. But there is an exception to every rule and Paul Carlbon (or Scaramanga because of his Swarovski-encrusted 12-bores) is one. He is rarely seen not wearing his three-piece tweed suit, irrespective of whether he's on home ground in SW3, in Sweden, or on one of his visits to Verbier. So besotted is he with his tweed suit that many suspect he sleeps in it.

And there's no doubt that if you're going to the expense of having kit made, a pair of tweed trousers is far more versatile than plus-fours, and can be worn at the local point-to-point, a matins service or on Christmas Day. ➤



BRUCE WILKINSON/DE GEMIR



SPOTTED IN TWEED TREWS...

Richard Compton (right)
 Michael Cannon
 Duke of Northumberland
 Lord James Percy
 William, Ed, Nicholas and
 Hughie van Cutsem
 Lord Churchill
 Mark Firth
 Lord Ashcombe
 Paul Carlbom
 Sir Michael Farquhar
 Lord Margadale



For some guns, though, the tweed trouser isn't a complete abandonment of the plus-four, just a refreshing change. Mark Firth says, "I haven't abandoned plus-fours, I just find tweed trousers a nice alternative. I just wanted to do something different. I was wearing them recently and someone said, 'Only a Yorkshire earl can get away with that', but I think they're perfectly respectable and smart; they're just different. I never wear wellies – just ankle boots. This season, there was only one place where it was so soggy, muddy and smelly that I regretted it."

Perhaps one of the unspoken reasons for this change in trend is that the Tweed Trousers Brigade are seeking subliminally to distance themselves from ordinary shots who wear what they perceive as the "correct kit". Perhaps by espousing this new fashion, they are subtly saying, "We don't have to try to look the part, we don't need to pay lip service to this ridiculously outmoded, uncomfortable, Edwardian fashion by wearing this outdated uniform. We are perfectly confident enough in ourselves and in our shooting to do things a little bit differently."

Either way, I suspect that this new look will take off and we will be seeing many more members of the Tweed Trousers Brigade out and about in the years to come. But just remember, you read it here first. ■



Claire Zambuni shoots in slim-fitting "longs"; and Paul Carlbom in full fig (left)

JAKE EASTMAN/BARBOR

IN PRAISE OF THE PLUS-FOUR

There is something rather quaint about the tradition of plus-fours worn with the bright, contrasting woollen shooting stockings. It is a rather uplifting and quintessentially British sight on the field. Shooting is often the only time that even the most strait-laced gentleman can quite happily don a pair of bright-pink or purple or even orange stockings (right). After all, these vibrant colours are all the rage on the catwalk for 2013, so they are bang on trend. And if the plus-four wearer has a well-turned calf and a slim ankle, they might even look rather attractive.



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