

COVEY RISE



DRIVEN TRADITIONS

Carrying forward European traditions properly and authentically, Blixt & Company is bringing driven shooting and instruction to the US West.

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Following his distinguished service for the UK and Allies in World War II, Percy Stanbury brought his shooting skills to the West London Shooting School in Middlesex, UK. There, he developed a rich tradition of what's now called the Stanbury technique of shotgun shooting—favoring shooting off the front foot and for that reason called the “nose-over-toes” style—and thousands of sportsmen trained in this technique have benefited by becoming more skilled, and stylish, at the shooting grounds and in the field.

Lars Magnusson helped carry on this tradition as an instructor at West London Shooting School. The Stanbury technique is one of the favored styles used for driven shooting in the UK, during which pheasant or red-legged partridge flush high and flare wide and guns (as shooters are called) must swing through the birds and make challenging shots. A Swede by birth, Magnusson moved to the United States and brought this body of shooting knowledge with him from West London Shooting School, as well as a wealth of experience from European driven shoots.

Driven shooting in the UK is based at estates and is a social occasion during which guns wait at shooting stations called pegs while red-legged partridge or pheasant are driven to them by beaters. If you've tuned into the PBS Masterpiece Theatre program *Downton Abbey*, you may remember the classic British estate shooting scenes and the “Shooting Party” episode in Season 2. Or maybe you've lived this type of shooting in the UK or other European destinations? Where you break for elevenses after spending a morning at several assigned pegs, attempting to shoot pheasant or red-legged partridge? Or maybe you trained at an estate's shooting grounds in the UK for this type of shooting—which itself is rather enjoyable, you might say.

Nowadays, you don't have to travel over the Atlantic to enjoy driven shooting: You can find this type of shooting in the US at events organized by Blixt & Company, the sporting company run by Lars and Jen Magnusson. When Lars came to the US, he worked with Griffin & Howe in New Jersey, managing and directing the shooting school at Hudson Farm, about an hour outside Manhattan. Later, while working as shooting director for a private shooting estate in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, he met Jen working on marketing projects and they became a couple. Lars and Jen then took up residence in the Teton Valley, Idaho. They started Blixt in 2008 and offered their first shooting season in 2009. (*Blixt* is Swedish for lightning and is an homage to Magnusson's great-grandfather.) The shooting they offer has a style all its own, grounded in tradition, with ways of decorum and etiquette and even a specific wardrobe prescribed through generations. In the UK, the guns (shooters) wear a collared shirt and tie and plus-2 or plus-4 breeks and a shooting jacket and vest (or gilet), often in tweed because the fabric is durable and

AT A BLIXT SHOOT, IN THE US WEST

Stationed at pegs, guns and loaders prepare for a flight.







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in Picabo, Idaho, on Silver Creek, a well-known spring creek and productive trout stream. Fly-casting instruction creekside by Picabo Angler was followed by a fine dinner prepared by Blixt's chef and social hour with cigars and beverages around a Cowboy Cauldron over an open fire. Last summer's event at Twin Peaks Shooting Estate featured a Simulated Shoot, mirroring the schedule of a driven shoot—shooting from pegs at clays launched to replicate the flight of partridge, a snack break for elevenses, more shooting at the next peg, a demonstration with the dog handlers Steven and Claudia, more shooting, and a gourmet field lunch in a comfortable safari tent. Though guns were encouraged to dress for the part, it was not required and was a bit more casual than a driven shoot in the fall. (I was there, and given the July temperatures in Teton Valley, we appreciated not wearing tweed, and many guns skipped the necktie.) We were encouraged to poach our neighbors' clays, in a show of good-natured sporting gamesmanship.

I enjoyed being paired at the peg with fine artist Natalie Clark, with personal instruction and loading by the incomparable Willie Cole (shown teaching on page 40)—who gave me a lesson on the importance of positive shooting and lead, adhering to the Stanbury technique he's been teaching for decades in the UK. "It

THE HOSTS AND THE GUN BUS

Lars and Jen Magnusson (*right*) and their shoot transport





SUMMER EVENTS

Blixt & Company is planning several events this summer. "We're seeing more interest by women in the shooting sports, so in Sun Valley, Idaho, and at Blue Sky Utah in Park City, we have shoots so women can get to know other women in the sport. We'd like to customize more opportunities for ladies because they're participating more and more in shooting sports," said Jen Magnusson. Also, Shooting School Workshops are set for June 6 to 8 and June 13 to 15 in Teton Valley, Idaho. Blixt Sporting Days are scheduled in Sun Valley from June 28 to July 1, and at Blue Sky Utah from July 6 to 8. A Fine Gun Live Auction with Holt's Auctioneers is scheduled for July 16 in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Go to blixtco.com





was fantastic to be outside on the pristine preserve, really, it's a special thing. It's a luxury sport, with instructors at Blixt from the best shooting school in the world (West London Shooting School). There are lots of nuances to learning, it takes time to become intuitive about how to shoot driven birds," said Clark about what she's heard described as the "butt, belly, beak, bang" of successful driven shooting. Clark grew up in the UK and lives now in Teton Village, Wyoming, and Washington, D.C. The Blixt program is familiar to her from estates in England.

"Speaking for myself, the Blixt experience was a new endeavor for me. I had done a number of tower shoots for pheasant, and I do a lot of traditional hunting for quail and pheasant behind dogs, but this was completely new to me," said Richard Donofrio, who was at the Blixt summer event and I spoke to him later at his home in Pine Creek Sporting Club, Florida; he also has a home in Wilson, Wyoming. "I was thrilled to be part of the Blixt event. The operation is unique, and I love the fact that traditions such as this are carried on. It's important for the sport, and for the next generation. And for me—I love being out in the field, doing the things we love to do."

Roger Sanger points out that Blixt's new Ash Hill Estate will offer particularly challenging birds: "Lars is raising the bar even higher for those who want to shoot really high birds," Sanger said. "Some people say, 'I don't care about the bird count, I care about the high, high pheasant'—like the 50-yard pheasant that you'll always remember. The new property has some extremely deep canyons so the birds will be flying from canyon edge to canyon edge. This is seventh heaven, because these are birds you

will only find otherwise on the great estates in the UK."

Indeed, Magnusson told me that he intends to make the Teton Valley known for driven shooting—in the classic, traditional way. Sanger agrees: "Blixt emphasizes the ceremony and methodology of the UK, and Lars is bringing it over to the States. People love to see the dog work and the pickers-up. Sometimes you just want to put down your gun and watch them work," he said. Or to join in (when allowed) on directing the dogs, as attendees were encouraged to do at the summertime Simulated Shoot. Natalie Clark was one of the first to step forward and help handle the Labradors during a retrieving demonstration.

Sanger continues: "Lars and Jen are trying to uphold the heritage, for example, with necktie and breeks for gentlemen. They haven't tried to 'Americanize' the sport. Many of us like that, it gives you a different feel. You can't use an automatic or a pump gun, for safety and also because of tradition. Only a two-barrel gun is allowed, for safety and for the sport of it."

The driven shoots are no-limit events, with no shell count as at UK estates, although gun safety is similarly paramount at a Blixt shoot as one gun shoots and a trained loader readies the shotgun, and the partner guns alternate at the next peg.

Once the flurry of gamebirds (or clay pigeons during a Simulated Shoot) abates, you can pause and take a deep, satisfying breath, watch the pickers-up begin their work, and appreciate the fresh Western air and the smell of sage on the breeze.

It isn't the scent of heather in England or Scotland, but you'll find the experience is the same. 🍷