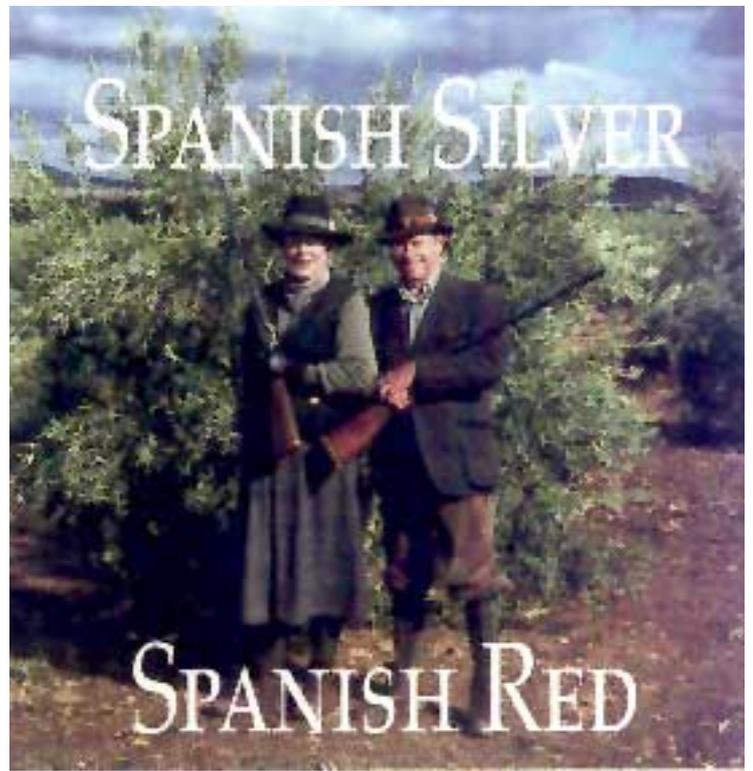


By David F. Dorn

WONDERFUL ADVENTURE!

**CATHERINE BOUGHT
THIS HUNT AT THE
AUCTION IN PALM
BEACH, COURTESY OF
RICARDO MEDEM.**



Visited our Kristen in San Sebastian in late October. Then on to Barcelona by November 10th where Alvaro Villegas met us for the drive to the region of La Tinenca de Benifassa in the northern part of Castellon.

Here a varied chain of mountains, summits, hills and impressive ravines form a massif. A few hours and we are near the city of Morella and a rural hotel, Mas de Terre, isolated and not very promising from the outside, but inside, Wow! What a hunting lodge! First things first. Great bar and dining room with fireplace. We had a nifty bedroom, clean and well appointed. Catherine and I took a brisk walk, and then the three of us had a fine supper. Then off for a good sleep.

Alvaro gave our door a knock a little before six the next morning, an English breakfast half an hour later. Catherine decided to take the morning off while the two of us will do a reccy. The plan unfolds for the reccy... Alvaro and I will have about a thirty-minute drive to rendezvous with an area game warden, Salvadore. This in the heart of Beceite, Els Port Maestrat, and will be our hunting ground.

Crisp this morning, about 6 degrees centigrade and cloudy. We met as planned and followed Salvo in his Land Cruiser for several miles, then all of us in the Cruiser as we left the main track and began climbing an old rough cart trail. We glassed some along the way, but saw only females and two small males in a valley below, five to six hundred yards away. Finally the track gave out so it was shanks mare from there and we began a slow, and at first, easy climb. About an hour into the climb we spotted two males fighting a couple hundred yards above us. Salvo did not like either one of them.



PERDIZ SHOOT-LOADERS AND SECRETARIOS.



VALLIBONA GAME STATION

The climb became steeper, so more frequent stops, until we finally topped out. What a spectacular view! A great basin below and the sierra for miles. We rested and glassed the better part of an hour. Weather is holding fair, still cloudy and some warmer.

The lads confer and decide to descend a slightly different face to the one we came up. We will go slowly and see if we find any hopeful signs. Some recent tracks and spoor on the climb up but, except for the two contentious youngsters, no game.

We stayed on the high ridge for a quarter of a mile, then a slow quiet descent, easier for me with only rifle and binoculars. Alvaro and Salvo, however, backpacks, spotting scopes and binoculars. Across a ravine to our left a branch breaks and Salvo, in front, signals up to higher ground and quickly. A fast ascent, almost vertical, that one nearly got me. We are above them now and can look across a deep sharp declivity. The three of us are crouched down and still. After a few minutes Salvo signals to take up a position. I slid a few yards down and set a back pack on a rock, chambered a shell and scoped an opening on the far side of the ravine, maybe a

hundred yards or a little less. The only thing I can hear now is my breathing.

A scraping sound, a branch broken, they're gone. I saw two, both males. The lads, a little above me, say five, two of them good.

Salvo wants a straight descent, steep and fast to the trail we had left just earlier, then on the double to glass the far side of the ridge where the Ibex have gone. He put my left hand on his shoulder "hang on" and we scrambled and slid. A few minutes of this and we were down. Moving as fast as we dared, we rounded the promontory and took a position behind a rock formation that gave us a fair view of the far side.

There were two small openings a hundred yards in front and twenty to the right, probably fifty feet higher than where we were. I eased the rifle over and looked at the opening on the right. An Ibex showed me a shoulder. Alvaro... "No, wait." The target moved left behind a dense bush separating the two openings. He was suddenly butted back. Quiet... then the big one turned behind the bush and moved left. He more than filled the left opening and that is all there was to it. Alvaro and Salvo dragged him down to the trail and we took a break.



PERDIZ SHOOT-CATHERINE WITH BOYS AND BIERDS

Later, back at the lodge, Catherine was expecting our reconnaissance report and then a hunt together. Instead, I handed her the empty brass. Disappointed, since we had figured several days here sorting it out, but happy for me, thrilled for both of us.

A few miles away in Salvo's village of Vallibona there is a game station. He had taken the Ibex there and we joined him mid-afternoon. Photography and then the cape. Later Catherine and I waited in the local social club while officialdom presided. Back to the lodge's barkeep and then dinner in the old fort at Morella.

Mid-morning the next day we packed up and motored to Valencia, then northwest to Madrid by early evening. Breakfast in our room next morning and we packed our duffel for partridge shooting, hand bags for camera and hardware. We leave all else at the hotel since we will be back in a couple of days.

Richardo's son, Gonzalo, picked us up in his new Mercedes SUV and we headed south to the La Mancha region. La Nava is our destination, the Medem partridge ground and hunting quarters. About a two-hour drive on the autostrada, then another half-hour through the country. Vineyards and olive groves as

far as you can see.

BEAUTIFUL!!

The accommodations at La Nava are fabulous. A party of French hunters occupies the main lodge. Catherine and I are assigned a casita of our own, old and charming, one cozy bedroom and large bath. The living room, with its corner fireplace, served as our dining area. The floors were tile and a comfortable sized vestibule at the entrance doubles as a mud-room. A fine red wine with lunch for the three of us, served from the main lodge.

During lunch we made plans for two late-afternoon drives after the French are finished.

A magnificent view at our two-position stand, groomed slopes with several mature olive groves. Catherine has a pair of over and under twenties as do I... residence copettas. Pantalles are set, loaders and secretarios at the ready, two signal shots fired, an answering horn, and the drive begins. A couple of early partridges slip through. Then out of the corner of my eye I see Catherine drop one as I was concentrating on two angling away to my left... missed both. My loader was at once fast and efficient. If I hesitated more than a couple of seconds between shots, I had the other gun handed to me. "Como se llama?", said I. "Maximo", said he. "Well named!" thought I.

The birds are coming now, dozens of them. They are a bit high, but after a few misses, we get the range. A double, a low one does not escape. I sense Catherine is scoring well. A few minutes more and the beaters appear, flankers' flags now, the horsemen and a horn sounds ending the drive.

We will have another later. In the meantime, the milieu, beaters, loaders, secretarios, riders on their Andalusians. I traded the Ayas for my Leica. The second drive was as good as the first one. Different terrain and the partridges flew lower



DAVID AND CATHERINE WITH BICETE IBEX-SILVER

and, of course, seemed faster. What a show! Everyone pleased with their work, including the gunners.

There is a definite chill in the air now so our little house and a cheery fire are most welcome, not to mention a generous dram of single malt. Awhile later, Gonzalo joined us for supper. Excellent, as was the wine. Tomorrow will be stalking for partridge. Have done a couple of walk-ups in the past, but quite a while ago. It's really a nice way to hunt birds. A smaller bag, of course, but hopefully we will see some good dog work.

Next morning Gonzalo whistles up his dog handler, Paco, and we make off to a likely area. The walking is over gentle by rock-strewn ground. The dogs are away. After a couple of newly plowed fields, the dogs put up a pair. Tried a shot, but no luck. A few minutes later, another flush. Catherine tries both barrels. No joy! The range is too far. After about an hour of this, Gonzalo stations us along an old road behind some low bush. He, Paco and the dogs flank a hillside to our front. We shall have a mini-drive. It works well as we bag a half dozen partridges. A couple repeat performances and a few more birds.

After shooting a small olive grove, we stopped and lunched on ham, cheese and a beer. Later we did some SUV stalking, since it had a sunroof for

spotting. We would see some partridges in a field and drive quietly along. Then Catherine would slip out, chamber a couple of shells, move within range and try her luck as the birds flew. Wonderful way to spend the remaining light. One final shot as she downs the last bird.

Great couple of days! Back to our casita, bathe, Knockandoo, backgammon and a welcome supper. We will pack up in the morning after breakfast.

The next night in Madrid, Ricardo hosted Catherine, Gonzalo, Alvaro and myself to an elegant dinner. So ends our Spanish adventure.



CATHERINE AND DRIVE MASTER