

# Arrizabalaga sidelock

Bold yet attractive, this eye-catching and exquisitely crafted Spanish best 32in sidelock side-by-side pigeon gun performs flawlessly in the field, discovers Michael Yardley

THIS month's test focuses on a best 32in Arrizabalaga sidelock side-by-side pigeon gun. It is equipped with an inertia-operated, non-selective single trigger, a flat file-cut rib and chokes fixed at  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$  (relatively open by pigeon gun standards). The gun has side-clips to the barrels, a capped full-pistol-grip stock and extended trigger-guard as well as exhibition-quality wood. It weighs in at a hefty but well-balanced 7lb 12oz, with the point of balance on the hinge pin.

The gun is profusely, indeed rather wonderfully, engraved with Celtic scrollwork by Eibar craftsman Inaki Azku. This extends to the rear of the barrels and there are encircling gold-line inlays near the breech to make this exhibition piece look even more arresting. It creates an overall effect that is bold but attractive. Even if gold isn't your thing, it is tastefully done and the workmanship, as the decorative inlays follow the edge of the side-clips and breech face, is first class.

As would be expected, the 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ in (70mm) chambered barrels of the test gun are chopper-lump (a term derived from

how the barrels are constructed – from two forgings in which the unmachined barrel and breech-end lump are one piece of steel and look rather like a chopper). More commonly today one encounters monobloc barrels, where two barrel tubes are inserted into a short breech-end block, upon which the barrels will also hinge, which is then jointed to the action face.

“The gun looked good and felt right between the hands. It is beautifully presented and most satisfying to shoot”

They are less expensive to make, though perfectly sound when done well. Our test gun is not proofed for steel shot because of its choking, but it would be an option on any new order (as would 3in chambers).

The stock of the Arrizabalaga is well proportioned, with Miguel de Oriol of

Arrieta and Arrizabalaga telling me it was taken from my own gunfitting book. Grip angle and comb taper were excellent. This type of grip, reminiscent of some classic rifles, very much suits a single-trigger. I also liked the hand-filling (but not too full) beaver-tail fore-end, which partially wraps the lower part of the barrels. Dimensions as tested (and one may have whatever desired in an entirely bespoke, £35,000-plus, best gun) were a length of pull of 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ in, with a drop of 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ in forward and 2in at heel.

What of Arrizabalaga itself? Since 2014 the firm has been incorporated into Arrieta. It was one of the main Spanish names a generation ago alongside Arrieta, AyA, Garbi, Ugartechea, Sarasqueta and Grulla among others. For record, another prestigious gunmaker in the Basque country, though barely known here, was Mateo Mendicute. This business stopped in the 1970s but was notable for using British machine tools as well as Whitworth and Krupp steel.

The high point of the Spanish gun trade was around 1950 to 1975, when the King brothers made AyA famous and developed its shotguns for the British market. AyA became fashionable in the home market, too, because it was selling to Britain. Arrieta and Arrizabalaga were also main players. The Spanish trade, like the British before it, went through the doldrums in the 1980s. This resulted in the creation of DIARM (Desarrollo de Industrias Armeras), a cooperative of manufacturers, by AyA and others. It lasted from 1984 to 1988. Since then, individual makers have reasserted themselves.

De Oriol notes: “Spanish shooting was lots of birds very close and fast, but it has changed to higher birds. Spanish guns have evolved from 27in and 28in copies of London guns to a type in their own right – longer, weightier and intended for heavier loads. Recently pigeon guns have become popular again, sometimes rebranded as ‘high bird’ guns for the UK. The Spanish still tend to prefer shorter barrels for their own game shooting with side-by-sides, though.” ■



The Arrizabalaga's action takes inspiration from the Holland Royal  
Right: this sidelock is tastefully decorated with Celtic scrollwork engraving and gold-line inlays



**ARRIZABALAGA  
SIDELOCK**

- ◆ RRP: from £35,000
- ◆ Arrizabalaga,  
Park Lane, Lane End,  
Stokenchurch, High  
Wycombe HP14 3NS
- ◆ 020 7499 1801
- ◆ [arrietaandarrizabalaga.com](http://arrietaandarrizabalaga.com)

**TECHNICAL**

Mechanically, this gun is in essence a Holland & Holland (H&H) Royal. H&H's famous design has inspired many Spanish best guns but the externally similar Beesley-Purdey is less commonly copied as it is harder to make and regulate. The Holland is no second best, though, being favoured by many gunsmiths. Our gun is built on one of five large pigeon actions dating from the 1990s that the reborn Arrieta and Arrizabalaga 'inherited'. Many Holland sidelock actions used in the Spanish gun trade have been made by AyA but this one was made by Sarriguarte, another now defunct firm. The bar action locks are seven-pin with cocking indicators, while the tube and sprung-plunger self-opening mechanism is pure H&H. The single trigger, however, is an inertia design perfected by Arrieta and Arrizabalaga's master gunmaker, Angel Mazorriaga. Earlier single triggers were harder to regulate (AyA offered one of the first on its No 56 pigeon gun).



**SHOOTING IMPRESSIONS**

As a fan of pigeon guns, I was eager to test the new Arrizabalaga. The gun looked good and felt right between the hands when I shot it with Miguel de Oriol and Alan Shearing, a shooting pal who is a keen side-by-side man. It has 32in barrels but is still balanced on the hinge pin. I am delighted to report that the Arrizabalaga shot exceptionally well – it was pointable, recoil was controlled and the single trigger functioned flawlessly. It moved well too. Alan and I missed very little.

The 32in barrels were not overly heavy; they have been well struck up. I am, however, coming to the opinion that 32in may be a bit too much gun once one hits 50 (years not birds). In the meantime, this is a wonderful creation, beautifully presented and most satisfying to shoot. Would I order 30in or 32in? Now there is a delightful dilemma.

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