

HOLT'S

AUCTIONEERS OF FINE MODERN & ANTIQUE GUNS

“The Kipplauf rifle...?” Nick was mystified. “For years I’ve travelled around Europe seeing these incredibly expensive things. And I could never understand why anyone would set so much store by a one-shot wonder – something that gives you only one chance.” When the veil is lifted, he realizes that this “one chance” characteristic of the rifle actually defines its attraction. “The Kipplauf raises your game,” he says. “In Europe it’s seen as the gentleman’s way of hunting. It’s you against the quarry; you’ve got one chance, and that chance has to be perfect.” St. Hubert was surely smiling when the single-barrelled hunting rifle was invented. Bologna’s Massimo Orsi, hotfoot from hunting with his uncle Count Bulgarini in Vienna and sighing: “I have seen such good trophies of red deer shot by my uncle ...” bangs the drum. “My very first rifle was a single-shot and I am still using a single-shot because I think I am a hunter; I am not a shooter. I prefer to get very close to the animal. I think ‘one shot’ should maybe be a philosophy in terms of the ethics of stalking,” he says.

His sentiments win total approval from Holt’s Chris Beaumont. “The Kipplauf is for the expert hunter who will only ever require one shot,” says Chris. “If he’s not 100% sure that shot will do the job, then the trigger doesn’t get pulled. Which is a beautiful way of doing it. And while you can buy a mass-produced Kipplauf by Blaser,” he concedes, “when I think of a Kipplauf, I think of it as a boutique rifle.” The purist’s rifle, it is not for those who might prefer to turn up with a machine gun, and it remains very much within the province of the Germans and the Austrians. Ralph Paschen’s German company *Jagdhaus Wilhelmshöhe* builds sporting guns and rifles whose quality have won him entry as a liveryman to the City of London’s Worshipful Company of Gunmakers, a rare accolade for a foreigner. “The Kipplauf gun, if you are familiar with it, gives you the greatest challenge ever,” says Ralph who travels the world to hunt, and it was this life-long passion for hunting that originally spurred him into the gun trade. The complete expert, he demands both precision and beauty from a sporting gun.

Ralph being Ralph, he illustrates the infinite possibilities afforded by a fine Kipplauf’s winning balance of engineering and artistry with a vivid metaphor. “What would you like to do with a stunning girl if she is only ‘stunning’ by the looks?” he asks. “If she’s got some brains it is so much nicer.” Like every smart woman, the Kipplauf has more than one card up its sleeve. “A single-shot carries, of course, less mechanism than a multi-function tool or a double-rifle,” he says, “and is perfect for an exhausting stalk when you want to carry as little weight as possible. The Alps are a little bit steeper than the hills in Scotland. Secondly, the Kipplauf is a gun you can break down and reassemble without losing accuracy. It can be stowed in your

rucksack then assembled very quickly when you need it without losing a fraction of its accuracy.” Single-shots are only found in small European calibres. “You will hardly ever find them in African calibres because they are built for species which are not dangerous – just for stuff which goes into the kitchen for food,” says Ralph. “In Africa I need the stopping power of a bolt-action. A bolt-action never struggles; it is less delicate than some of the little princesses. On dangerous game, if the animal is pumped up on adrenalin, you can die easily.”

At home in Austria, Prinz Ludwig (Louis) zu Sayn-Wittgenstein-Sayn sings from the same hymn sheet. “Anyone who has ever gone hunting with a Kipplauf loves the gun,” he says. “It is the more noble way to hunt.” He uses his own Ferlach Kipplauf at home in Austria on roebuck. “We go out to shoot a single beast – you don’t want three stags or three roebuck at the same time. The moment you have a bolt-action you start to shoot less well because you know that if you don’t hit the animal the first time, you have a quick second or even third shot. I believe in Scotland, when stalking for the big red stag, the Kipplauf is the perfect gun. A high-end piece, slim, elegant and traditional, the Kipplauf is the exact same thing as a fine English shotgun – a side-by-side, perhaps a Boss. While he appreciates that the Blaser Kipplauf boasts the merit of being one gun with the option of five different sets of barrels, the maker he lauds above all others is Herbert Scheiring. “Even the other Ferlach makers would say the Scheiring is the Rolls Royce of guns. They have the most elegant engraving, and are worth around €50,000.”

The gunmaker who wins Ralph’s plaudits is the Ferlach’s Wilfried Glanznig. “Wilfried builds maybe one or two rifles a year and his Kipplaufs are the most beautiful things you’ve ever seen in your life. But Wilfried is also top of the tops technically. At present Hartmann and Weiss too are also making a beautiful Kipplauf which is based on the Sauer & Sohn design from the 1930s,” says Ralph, emphasizing that the design’s longevity proves its worth. When markets get panicky, investors fly to quality and Ralph can see enormous scope for the high-end products of the gun trade, Kipplaufs such as these. “But we need to educate all these ignorant people who don’t understand the true value of a connoisseur product,” he says.

“There are nice .375 Holland & Holland rifles and .460 Rigby bolt-action guns and so on,” says Louis, “but they are never as nice as a Kipplauf.” He reports that Russian hunters currently have no defence against the siren call of the Kipplauf. “We sell the Kipplauf to the Russian like hell. They did not know for years what a good gunmaker was, but the point came when they had learnt about Purdey, Holland & Holland and Boss. Now they want to get back to the days of the Tsars and want not only quality but also elegance, which a bolt-action gun will never have.” However, the lingering tendency of some of the converts to opt for guns that are “richly engraved”, (the word ‘richly’ is uttered with heavy irony), gives him pause for thought. Similarly, as you might expect, any high-priced horror produced to snag naïve customers as yet unable to distinguish between superficial glamour and true beauty provoke Ralph’s most unprintable condemnation.

Ralph’s heritage colours every aspect of his hunting; everything must be correct, and this goes a long way to explain the single-shot Kipplauf’s appeal for German and Austrian sportsmen. “In my country, when I wanted to shoot, I needed to go to school for one year, three times a week and study. After this one year of theoretical and

practical education, we needed to pass a test which was held over three days. If you passed this, then you were given as a personal slave to an extremely experienced hunter and you had to work pretty hard in his hunting field to prepare everything to the best of your ability. If you were lucky, you might be given permission to shoot, say, a little spiker. So the trophy, from the beginning, was something you were really looking for: to bag a nice one.” Clearly every serious hunter should number a Kiplauf amongs his or her suite of guns. But as with any sport, the maxim is always if you don’t know the rules then don’t play the game.

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