

HOLT'S

AUCTIONEERS OF FINE MODERN & ANTIQUE GUNS

IN THE GUNROOM

Jan-Olof Swanteson is *Holt's* representative in Sweden, but he was no stranger to the Sandringham estate before he assumed this role. Indeed, it was David Clark, Sandringham's estimable head keeper, who suggested that he and Jan-Olof should use a lull in their pigeon shooting to visit *Holt's* HQ. It was an inspired move. "Although I had heard of *Holt's* of course, that was the first time I met Nick," Jan-Olof recalls. "But one week later, Nick was in Sweden visiting me." Jan-Olof and his father Lars-Olof hold pole position in Sweden's gun trade and their international connections are nonpareil. "We are part-owners of a wholesale company in Sweden called *Gyttorp*," he says, "and we import guns, optics and accessories from all over the world to sell throughout Scandinavia. We also have a cartridge factory where we produce shotshell cartridges branded *Gyttorp*." The town of *Gyttorp* boasts a 500 year-long tradition of producing munitions and it is famous for its association with Alfred Nobel. And if all this were not enough to qualify Jan-Olof as the perfect poster boy for *Holt's*, Nick adds the essential detail of personal chemistry. "I had found an expert that I like who is very approachable, circumspect and very old school," he says.

When I meet Jan-Olof he is on another flying visit to HQ and sharing with Nick news of the death at the age of 87 of Heinz Ulrich Krieghoff, a Swanteson family friend. Krieghoff and the Swantesons once took a memorable hunting trip to northern British Columbia during which Lars-Olof dropped a marauding grizzly bear at 80 metres with a single shot from the Krieghoff double-rifle that continues to be his favourite gun. "Every bear story is unique," says Jan-Olof, "and this was no exception: it was good!" His own attainments centre on a trophy of a very different stripe. When he was seven years old, Jan-Olof's mother spotted a mouse in the yard at the family's beach house. "I looked at my Dad, and said: 'Can I shoot it?'" Permission granted, the intrepid hunter took up his air rifle. "So I shot the mouse but he was not a mouse; he was a weasel. And they are never standing still for one tenth of a second. It's my best shot I ever fired. And it was my first!" So it's been downhill ever since? "From that moment it was uphill, actually," he says, laughing. "And I still have the weasel, mounted, back home."

Sweden is very heaven for the country's 300,000 hunters. "The country is 1,600km in length and we have an endless amount of nature around us," says Jan-Olof who terms hunting in Sweden an "Everyman" sport. As a consequence, hunting is generally accepted. "When it comes to moose hunting, especially in the north, almost

everyone gets involved. Schools are shut down because the teachers want to go hunting, the parents and children too. It's a tradition. The hunt is conducted with a special breed of dog called a Jämthund, and sometimes the moose just stops and stares at the dog – and this is a beautiful hunt – then, if you own that dog, you can sneak up, being very aware of the wind direction. And this can go on for hours. Sometimes the moose gets so tired, it starts to lie down and fall asleep. This happens.” Roe deer is the next most popular quarry, and as Sweden's hunting descends through the latitudes it encompasses everything from wild boar to capercaillie; from red deer to mountain hares; from black grouse to pheasants. The appropriate breed of hound is used for each discipline, and Jan-Olof reports that “Hunting in Sweden is at least as much a ‘dog’ sport as it is a sport about firearms.”

He describes the sport as “very regulated”. Prospective hunters face a stringent written examination that is followed by a test of shooting proficiency. “You can own six guns, with each one separately licensed,” says Jan-Olof. “If you want more, you must have a very good reason such as hunting big game in Africa and needing a bigger calibre. However, around 20 years ago, gun ownership was unlimited so the new regulations have flooded the market with used guns. *Holt's* is a very good source of assistance to the dealers with this problem. There are some buyers from the United States, but usually dealers, not private buyers.” What is his personal preference in guns? “I mostly shoot a Browning B25 shotgun – we represent Browning - and I have, or course, a Krieghoff rifle, also Brownings,” he says. “English gunmakers are regarded very, very highly in Sweden but at present very few people can afford them.” Is Sweden faring well in the global recession? “We are doing a lot better than the United States,” comes the succinct reply. “The krona has been devalued, and we are an extremely strong export country, and the exporting industries have taken that advantage. On the other side of the coin, import prices are skyrocketing.”

Once Jan-Olof and Nick have quit discussing diets and clothes (theirs) like a couple of girls, with a conjurer's flourish Nick produces two matching gun cases stamped with the Prince of Wales' feathers. Opened, they release an evocative smell. “The smell of history...” says an appreciative Jan-Olof who puts one of the Stephen Grant 16-bores to his shoulder while Nick explains they were given to the Prince of Wales, who would succeed as Edward VII, by his mother, Queen Victoria. “The lovely thing is that from the dates on the cases, it's clear she split the pair and gave him one gun for his birthday on November 17, 1870 and the other on December 25, 1870. Evidently she felt she had been too generous. Quite fun.” On vacation from Stetson University, Florida, where he studies business and tennis, Christopher Swanteson has accompanied his father on this trip. It is Christopher's first taste of Norfolk, (“I notice it is very flat...”), and he plans to make tennis his profession. A clue to his talent is the name of his principal practice partner at home, the legendary Stefan Edberg.

But who knows? Perhaps he will eventually find his way into the gun trade to enjoy the satisfaction that a ‘find’ brings to his father. “One unique gun was a Simpson with nine sets of barrels,” sighs Jan-Olof, “and not only because it could be

used in so many different configurations. The gentleman who ordered it from the factory was a German called Bengt Berg who was a world famous ornithologist, zoologist, artist and academic who was very good friends with Hermann Goering. He moved to Sweden and bought a fabulous hunting estate where the Red stags were almost all trophy-sized. Unfortunately, he introduced the Canada goose to Scandinavia; today we have millions. His son asked me to sell the gun and it reached £17,000 at *Holt's* last year, and found its way home to Sweden. I met Bengt Berg when I was quite small..." - here he pantomimes childhood intimidation - "he was very powerful, with a strong voice. Very 'old German'."

A stranger to intimidation is one Nicholas Holt. "I've been out with Nick here in Britain, in Sweden and at shows in Germany," Jan-Olof reflects, "and he's a world champion at social competence! He can sit and talk with a duke or with a tramp in the street." Clearly this is a skill that appeals to an egalitarian Swede who also values Nick's apparently casual way of operating. "We do business on a handshake. Very few people are able to do that. And I like it." There's more laughter before he signs off with, "I am happy!"