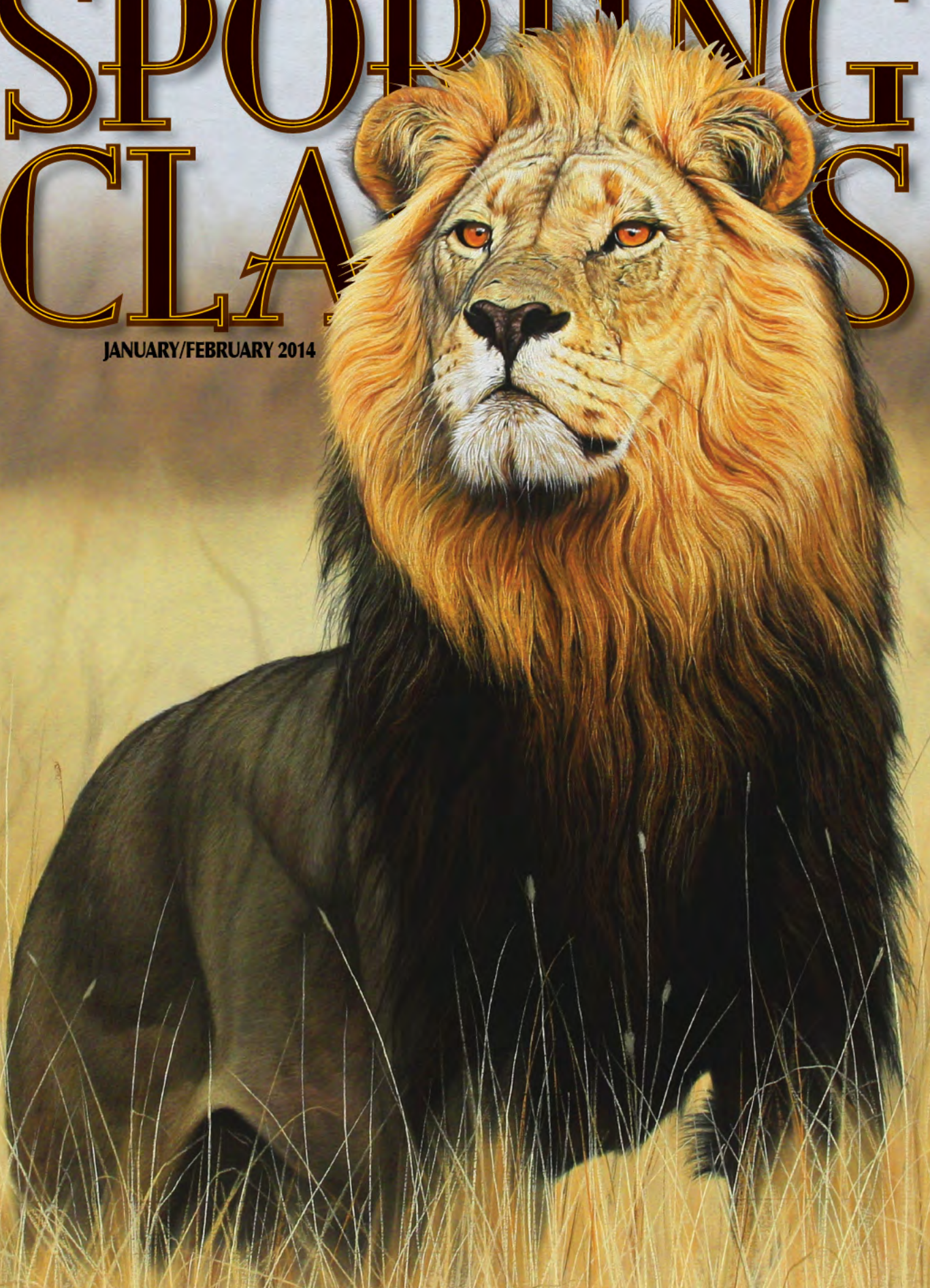


SPORTING CLASSES

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Sporting Life

By Pat Wray

*The world's oldest
firearms company
launches a bold new
marketing strategy.*

Pretend, for a moment, that you are tasked with unveiling a bold new marketing strategy for one of the world's oldest and most respected gun manufacturing companies. How would you do it? Here's an idea: Invite your most valuable retailers, plus a few select representatives of the outdoor media to a single upscale location, where during bouts of hunting, shooting, eating, drinking and occasional presentations, you can explain to them the new direction your company is taking.

Afterwards, between the copy your invited writers have generated and the information your retailers are sharing with their clients, you can begin to develop the worldwide excitement, or "buzz," within your target audience that is the goal of every advertising program.

Where should you host such a program? If you're smart, you will pick one of the premier hunting lodges in the country, one where every view is postcard-worthy; where every major room has been featured in a magazine; where the chef creates, and I mean creates, culinary masterpieces for each and every meal; where the best hunting guides in the state show up every day to take you out and where a young lady waits after each hunt to pass out hot washcloths.

And that's exactly how the marketing gurus of Beretta approached their task, and how a bunch of very happy people ended up for three days at beautiful Highland Hills Ranch outside Condon, Oregon, learning about Beretta's Premium Division.

The Premium Division spearheads an effort on behalf of Beretta's higher end products that is not so much a rebranding – Beretta is already recognized as a premier gun manufacturer – as it is a reemphasis. With its feet firmly planted in the commercial and military/defense markets, Beretta is pivoting a significant portion of its considerable advertising and marketing expertise toward the higher end markets.

In the rarified atmosphere where double-barreled shotguns retail for more than \$30,000 and top-of-the-line models reach \$110,000, Beretta is attempting to create a culture where the Beretta name and reputation for quality become the centerpoint around which a new lifestyle revolves.

So here we all are, being well looked after by Highland Hills owners Dennis and Mindi Macnab

Ed Carroll, editor of Shooting Sportsman magazine, swings his Beretta double on a partridge at Highland Hills in Oregon.

and their capable staff as we absorb the information being provided by the Beretta folks. As you might expect, the program begins and ends with hunting and shooting.

In one of our hunting sequences, I joined Rich and Jona Cole, owners of Cole Gunsmithing, in the hills above the ranch in search of chukars and Hungarian partridge. With shops in Harpswell, Maine, and Naples, Florida, Rich is one of the best gunsmiths in the country. He specializes in Italian guns, having apprenticed in Italy with Beretta. Amongst an entire lodge full of gun experts, Rich is the one to whom others turn with questions about the inner workings of the various models. He claims not to be a hunter, but I don't remember him missing, as bird after bird erupted around us.

Highland Hills birds tend to fly very well; Dennis buys only the best and the lush habitat of the ranch allows a great deal of carryover. So we were very busy shooting with Beretta shotguns that were a joy to carry and fire. I used the Beretta 687 EELL in 12 gauge. It's pronounced "double E, double L," which denotes extra luxury, both in structure and beautiful engraving. Interestingly, everyone refers to these guns by their full nomenclature. No shortcuts here. "Double EE, double LL." Every time.

Later on, Dennis takes all the participants down to his Sporting Clays range, where I have a chance to shoot the SO10 and the new 20-gauge Parallelo, which should be available for sale in the next few months. I find it invigorating to shoot a shotgun that costs more than I paid for my house, especially during the famous Highland Hills 'Starwars' shoot, which involves hundreds and hundreds of clay pigeons launched over a line of shooters from a nearby cliff as rapidly as electric throwers can propel them. The shooting is as fast and fun as anything I've ever seen and all the more enjoyable with the exceptional shotguns we are using.

Firearms of extraordinary quality may be the underpinning of Beretta's new lifestyle creation but every good lifestyle requires statement-making clothing. The Vintage Years collection of upscale clothing is a marked deviation from the functional outdoor wear available in the Beretta catalog and online. The autumn and winter selections recall British tweeds, plaids and waxed rainwear. The spring and summer

products are more Italian in design, with a narrow, urban cut. Both selections emphasize fashion more than function. Undeniably trendy and attractive, they are designed to evoke a hint of hunting, with subtle camouflage patterns and generous pocketing. People who wear those clothes may not be hunters, any more than the majority of people with cowboy boots and hats are buckaroos . . . but if the marketing



Rich Cole of Cole's Gunsmithing totes a Beretta 687 EELL Diamond Pigeon for gunning ringnecks in a lush field of sorghum.



Ed Carroll carries a Beretta 486 Parallelo, a beautiful new side-by-side from the legendary Italian gunmaker.

folks at Beretta are successful, their luxury hunting lifestyle clothing may become as common and as popular as Wild West attire is among city dwellers.

Of course, premium lifestyle clothing is not the sort of thing you'll find in the nearest sporting goods store. Beretta has special outlets for their customers. The Beretta Galleries, of which there are only six worldwide (Manhattan and Dallas in the U.S.), are the epitome of luxury sales locations. They are also the third of four facets of the Premium Division's efforts.

In the Galleries customers will find every firearm Beretta makes for the commercial market, from \$500 handguns to \$150,000 express rifles and everything in between, accessories and clothing to match their lifestyles and desires, as well as the kind of preferential treatment that will make them want to come back again and again.

When customers emerge from a Beretta Gallery carrying the firearms and accessories of their dreams, they need a place to put those beautiful new products to use. Once again, the Beretta folks are anticipating our every need.

Welcome to the Beretta Trident Program, a system of rating and recommendation of the very best hunting lodges and shooting venues in the world. The Trident Program is overseen by Ian Harrison, a native Brit who until recently was managing the Dallas Beretta Gallery. Using an extensive checklist, Harrison and his team personally evaluates every facility, and he requires that his visits take place during the hunting season so he can evaluate the most important aspect of the venues. Poor, unfortunate Ian.

The checklist helps Ian rank the various aspects of the lodge's service, and it helps him as well to deflect requests from lodges that obviously

won't make the grade.

"I can just refer to the written requirements," he says. "Black and white is easy to explain, and most places simply don't have what it takes. People think we are in the lodge business but we're not. We're a lifestyle brand that wants to ensure our clients have exceptional experiences with our products. The Trident program helps us do just that."

Certainly, if my experience with the Beretta folks at Highland Hills Ranch is any indication of how they intend to do business with their Premium Division – and it is – then high-end Beretta customers are in for an even better treat than they've become accustomed to in the past.

Beretta may be one of the world's oldest family owned companies, with their first invoice dated 1526, but they have their eyes focused on the future . . . and the future looks luxurious.



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