

Smokin' sport

A shoot-day smoke or after-dinner Scotch and cigar are all part of the fun for many game shooters. **Nick Hammond** offers some advice on choosing the perfect cigar-related gift to keep you in the good books forever.

There's many a gun who enjoys a good cigar before, during and after a day's shooting. The 100 per cent natural, hand-crafted product, which is meticulously cultured, aged and manufactured by scores of dedicated artisans before it reaches our shores has long been associated with The Good Life. That's why it makes the perfect gift for your shoot captain, land owner or gamekeeper.

If he likes a cigar, you'll win a place in his heart forever.

The cigar world can be a mysterious, ritual-filled place. But with a little thought, some good advice and an upstanding merchant or two, you're well placed to find something special for a friend or loved

one, or simply to provide a decent box of cigars for guests to enjoy in the shoot room.

Spoilt for choice

There are countless brands on the market – some Cuban, some 'New World' – much like the demarcation

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there is in wine. Cuban cigars are, on the whole, regarded as the best, and they have the price tag to prove it.

A Robusto (just shy of five inches in length and with a 48mm 'ring gauge' or circumference) is a great size for the shooter; large enough to clamp in the teeth to leave the hands free when necessary, and thick enough to provide a depth of broad, intense flavours that can easily withstand a cold, blustery day. They stay alight better, too. On a really cold day, though, perhaps a Corona or even a Tres Petit Corona cigar is called for; these are small smokes with big volumes of flavour.

Tubed cigars, often available in off-licences, can be a good buy for the outdoorsman, as the cigars stay fresh and damage-free in your pocket until you're ready to fire them up.

Cuban cigars, also known as Havanas or Habanos, are made from 100 per cent Cuban tobacco, whereas New World cigars may have

a mixture of leaves from several different tobacco-growing countries. And one excellent purveyor of cigars I would recommend is McGahey The Tobacconist, 245 High Street, Exeter, cigar-merchants.co.uk

How to enjoy your smoke

To make the most of cigars, some simple but important equipment is required. The first and most important is a humidor. These are essentially ornate boxes used to store your cigars and they come in different sizes, from pocket ones to entire rooms. What they have in common is they need to regulate both the temperature and humidity of your cigars. An optimum ratio of approximately 70 per cent relative humidity and 70 degrees centigrade is required to stop your cigars drying out and losing the oils and phenols that give them their extraordinary flavour and body.

Any cigar smoker worth their salt will also carry a good cutter. These are typically double-edged guillotine affairs used to slice the small piece of tobacco (the cap) from the head (mouth end) of the cigar just before lighting. Fine, hand-rolled cigars are traditionally created with this cap being fitted as a final flourish of the roller's art. You can cut your cigar in fancy ways or 'punch' a small hole in the cap to smoke – but trust me; the straight cut is all you'll ever need.

Beautiful inlaid, carved, glittering, priceless cutters are of course available; but good, well-priced options are also to be had if you know where to look.

You face a similar problem when it comes to lighters. There are large tabletop versions, pricey Dupont specials with exquisite finishes, antiques, soft flame and jet flames to choose from.

But take my advice and opt for a jet flame or torch for your days in the field or shoot room; they are more practical and easier to use in adverse conditions. These are high-powered blue jet lighters that will

Cuban Robustos

Partagas Serie D No. 4 (right) – a classic Robusto with spicy flavours and a full body. (Single cigar around £13.50, box of 25 from £340).

Bolivar Royal Corona – another bold, punchy smoke suited to the outdoor life. Intensely satisfying. (Single cigar £12.99, box of 25 from £320).



New World Robustos

Dunhill 1907 – recently released and an instant hit, some Brazilian leaf in this superb blend gives a hit of sweetness to the medium to full-bodied smoke. (£10.50, box of 25 from £210).

Ashton VSG – wonderful depth of flavour thanks to the wrapper – sun-grown as opposed to being cultured under shade. Rich and decadent. (£14, box of 25 from £270).

Cutters

Palio (right) – straightforward, easy to use and pleasant in the hand, these cutters come in their own leather pouch and a variety of finishes. (£32, cgarstld.com).

Xikar – Cool and user-friendly series of ergonomic cutters in a huge range of finishes, from the funky x11 range through to special-release models featuring woolly mammoth ivory. Available from all good cigar merchants.



Lighters

Torjet – buy several Torjet refillable jet lighters for just a few pounds, and make sure you have one in the pockets of all your shooting jackets, or several scattered around the shoot room. They're so useful for everything from lighting the bacon butty stove to singeing down feathers and more. Find stockists at torimports.co.uk ■

work in wind and rain when others fail. You should only use butane gas – traditional fluid lighters impart a strong smell and taste.

Invest in the right tray

A cigar ashtray needs to be large and heavy enough to house a big cigar in one of its specially-cut grooves; this leaves the ash end (or foot) clear of the bottom of the ashtray, as it's desirable to leave a long ash on a cigar. This is mainly for aesthetic

reasons, but there is a theory it helps cool the new smoke. A good cigar ashtray is a gift to be treasured and if you're purchasing one for communal use, make sure it's large enough to accommodate several cigars at once without them touching.

Rest assured that a gift of cigars or related accessories is always warmly welcomed. You'll be the toast of the line next time fine Cuban leaves are toasted and set free to mingle with the evocative perfume of gunsmoke.