

In season

Unleash hunter-gatherer instincts, prepare your wardrobe, and let's hail the arrival of "The Fall", says **Charlotte Reather**

AUTUMN is by far the sexiest time of the year. Forget the string bikinis and wafty, opaque skirts of the past few months. The British summer is no more; it has become an aging stepfather who dashes our hopes year-on-year leaving us generally SAD and miserable. Consign the heatwave fashions to history and focus on the sexy, provocative clothing Britain now has to offer: ladies and gentlemen, I give you the autumn field-sports-wear collection. Women in rain-sodden breeches, turtle-neck jumpers that give just a hint of the curves beneath, and tight leather boots. They are not only sensational to look at, they're exciting to wear.

And the menswear is fabulous too, turning stressed-out chaps into red-blooded romantic heroes: rugged anglers, big guns and hot huntsmen. Oh how we women quiver and flush with scarlet fever at the sight of capable men in the field, literally dressed to kill. As they don their smart clothes, they become the men they've spent the past six months longing to be. Chivalry returns to them as they open gates, doff their caps and are even willing to share the contents of their hip flasks. When out shooting, my gun and cartridge bag are carried at all times, jackets are laid out over barbed wire to prevent a scratch and I've even been given a cheeky piggy back across a swollen brook by an attentive keeper, but that's another story...

As the hunter-gatherer instincts kick in, masculinity and femininity become keenly defined. The very nature of courtship is about the roles of hunter and prey – well, it was until recent generations started jumping into bed within hours of meeting, working out if they had anything in common later. Such primitive hunting instincts coupled with nature burgeoning all around make ripe territory for unwise indulgence. The autumn is, after all, known as "The Fall" in the Land of the Pilgrims. And fall they do while out in the field: in love, from grace (after falling in lust with another's wife), and off their mounts.

They also fall over. The indulgence of alcohol during the "season of mists and mellow

fruitfulness" increases autumn's sensuality. Even birds and badgers are at it, getting "lashed up" on spoiling fruit littering orchard floors. After much gluttony, men, or indeed badgers, become rather sleepy and ready for hibernation – especially if they've been up early hunting. After a big feed and surfeit booze there is nothing like a cosy evening by the fire or snuggling under a duck-down duvet. This dozy ambiance even causes husbands to fall in love with their wives again (same old reason). And if the sight of him unclad (I'm talking to women married for over seven years) doesn't bring on a headache, there's no better time to spice things up in the bedroom.

My father once shot with an Irish gentleman who had a proven "season seduction" technique. After a day's shooting, he would get his wife in the mood by putting an extra shot of brandy in her mulled wine and plying her

more buck for their bang on the accessories – hunting whips and boots are not cheap, and as for the price of a new jointed pelham...

An infamous huntsman from the Midlands admits he prefers the autumn time not only

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with copious amounts. At home he'd let her win a few games of gin-rummy before suggesting a little afternoon "nap". What he was really after was a LAPI (Late Afternoon Put In), which invariably followed. He said she wasn't much of a looker but the advantage of lazy autumn days is that it gets dark earlier.

Some people take things much further and find an extra use for their sporting equipment. My friend Bungalow (there's nothing upstairs) and his wife are mad keen on hunting and when they can't go, make up for it by chasing each other around the family pile wearing nothing more than a pair of chaps each, indulging in their favourite game ever, ever: naughty horses. Perhaps urban deviants could take a leaf out of their book and take up hunting on the side, thus receiving (or giving)

because he's a hunting-nut and is employed again but his wife tends to wear a coat. He says: "I like to slip my house keys in her pocket and then phone her when she's in the supermarket to demand where they are. She of course finds them and is horrified at how stupid she's been. I summon my flustered and apologetic wife home and say to her: 'Sally, you've been very bad; I'm going to have to punish you so you never do it again.' But she always does."

So, whether you're getting back in the saddle, tickling an old trout, letting rip with both barrels or engaging in a sub-genre of the psychological suspense thriller, aka stalking, I wish you happy hunting this autumn. ■

Charlotte Reather is winner of the Gloucestershire Glamour Award 2008

