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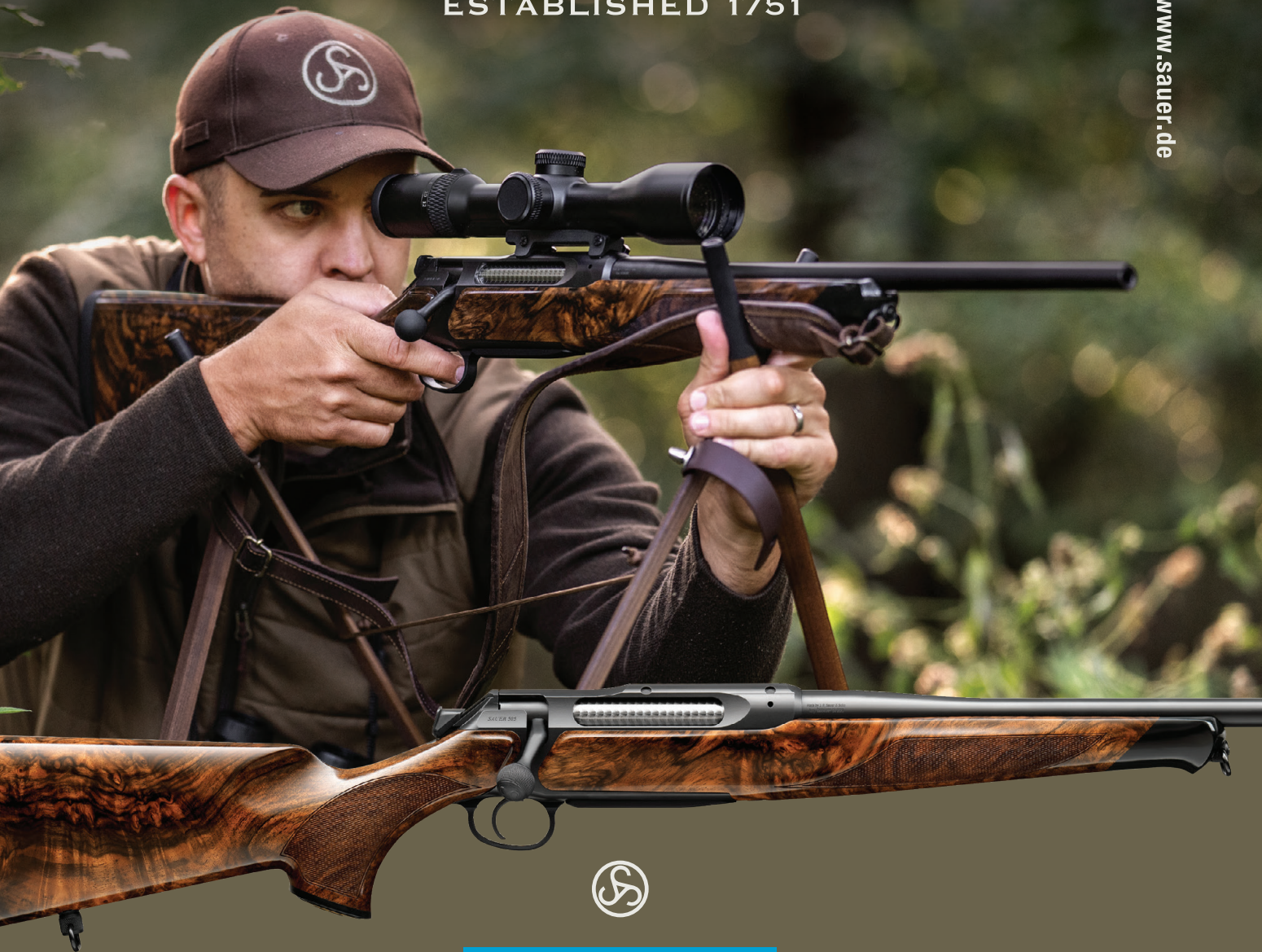
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## Being more involved means being more effective

**B**y the time you read this there's a high chance the federal election will be all over. There are any number of people who make predictions about elections and I won't try to join their ranks but, at the risk of telling you how to suck eggs, I'll make a few observations about politics and firearms.

Firstly, just because you leave politics alone doesn't mean politics will leave you alone. Politicians will take action if they think it's in their interests to do so and there are no consequences for them politically. One of our goals is to make them understand there are electoral consequences when they attack law-abiding firearm owners.

Secondly, almost all regulation regarding firearms takes place at state level and are made by state ministers and parliaments,

so it's super important to pay attention to and be involved in state elections. That doesn't mean we ignore federal elections but it does mean most of our focus will be at state level.

Thirdly, the SSAA can't have a political effect if you, the members, don't become involved. I'll address the issue of how to be politically effective in future editions, but the bottom line is numbers count. And that's not just the SSAA saying we have numbers, it's about members writing emails, signing petitions, having conversations with friends and families and other shooters. From time to time we'll ask you to take action and the more members who do, the more effective we'll be.

**Tom Kenyon, CEO**

## SJS lands prestigious Walther contract

**M**any Australian shooters will welcome the news that SJS Trading Co. of Dandenong South in Victoria, has announced their appointment as exclusive Australian distributor for Walther Arms of Germany. The prestigious brand, known for producing some of the world's most iconic and quality rifles and handguns, continues to manufacture firearms to the highest standards and will now be represented here by SJS.

It would seem that since the Covid-19 pandemic, the previous representative of the brand was having difficulty providing stocks of Walther firearms and spare parts to Australian shooters, though that situation should be reversed in the coming months thanks to SJS's appointment.

"We're thrilled to be able to provide Australian shooters with greater access to these first-class products and drive



**Walther are renowned for making high-quality firearms.**

the brand's presence in Australia", Steve Sayers, Director of SJS Trading said of the appointment. "The inclusion of Walther Arms rounds out our brand portfolio, allowing us to offer an all-encompassing product range to meet the needs of our dealer, military and law enforcement network."

Marketing manager Leisha McCallum told *Australian Shooter* in late March the ink had just dried on the contract and the full inventory of Walther products will start to arrive in the country over the coming months.

**Rod Pascoe**



**222,334**  
MEMBERS STRONG  
MARCH 2025

## NSW should follow Vic lead

I'VE JUST READ Matthew Godson's Open Season column (*Shooter*, December 2024) regarding bounties on foxes in Victoria. It's a shame New South Wales can't introduce a similar scheme as it appears the 'powers that be' can't comprehend how many foxes there are out there and the amount of damage they do.

I'm in southern NSW on a small farm (560 acres) in the middle of cropping country. Since the start of lambing season last April, I shot 72 foxes on my farm alone yet they just keep coming. The problem will never disappear but sustained pressure (baiting, trapping, shooting) makes a real difference.

My program was initially for lamb protection, yet it's quite astounding to see the difference in wildlife presence which has occurred on my holding since beginning a concerted effort to keep fox numbers down. I hunt with a thermal and night vision, so get to see all the other animals and birds that come out at night. As a 'for instance', there are now more than a dozen plovers residing in a 20ha paddock and rearing young where previously there were none.

It's difficult to change the opinions of people with set views, despite all the evidence, however I appreciate the ongoing efforts of the SSAA.

Tony Gestier, via email

## Vote with your wallet

MARK VAN DEN BOOGAART'S 'An Outdoor Life' column in the November 2024 issue of *Australian Shooter* struck a chord with me, concerning where we spend money buying our outdoor kit and what sympathy or support retailers may demonstrate to the shooting fraternity.

Mark's article reminded me of the matter in about July 2015 when our competition colleague David Waters in Melbourne was summarily dismissed from his position with Goodyear-Dunlop Australia, while assisting someone with disposal of their firearms. Police were called to the meeting of David and the owner of the guns by a third party stranger not involved in the matter. VicPol considered it did not warrant action by them and took no further interest.

Notwithstanding that, Goodyear-Dunlop decided David's involvement had reflected adversely on the company and in a high-handed manner dismissed him. I understand he subsequently won an unfair dismissal action against the company.

The matter prompted me to never buy any Goodyear-Dunlop product again. I own three vehicles, two 4x4s and a V8 wagon, none of them shod with Goodyear-Dunlop tyres nor by any firm associated with them. Plenty of competition and excellent products available from reputable suppliers.

Ray Atkin, ACT

## Wasting my breath?

I'VE RECENTLY STARTED hunting again and have access to a couple of properties where foxes are a problem. I remembered reading an article in *Australian Shooter* about a state-of-the-art fox whistle and managed to track one down at my local gun store.

Now it's been a while but I've accounted for a fox or two in the past, yet after half a dozen attempts I've been unable to whistle one up in areas I know they're present. At first I thought I must've lost my touch, then it occurred to me there are no rabbits on these properties and haven't been for a number of years thanks to the calicivirus.

As a fox whistle is meant to mimic a rabbit in distress, does the current generation of foxes actually know what an injured rabbit sounds like and is the time-honoured art of fox whistling becoming a thing of the past? I'd be interested in hearing the thoughts of our members and whether anyone else has had a similar experience.

Garry, NSW

## Licence to cull

THERE ARE AROUND 13,000 members of the SSAA in Western Australia using more than 70 clubs covering many types of rifle, shotgun and handgun competitions. There are almost 220,000 members throughout Australia, none of whom are criminals or have committed any offence or they wouldn't be holding a firearms licence.

Thousands of our members are licensed to eradicate vermin on designated rural properties not near populated areas including rabbits, foxes, feral cats, wild dogs, feral pigs, donkeys, camels and deer, much of this used for pet meat. These SSAA members are taught gun safety first and are all better-than-average shots.

I'm from WA, am 70 years old and have been shooting all my life. I have only three rifles and a shotgun in adequate calibres to cull any vermin humanely. I hope the impending new WA gun laws do not have the power to confiscate our firearms if we have all the correct documentation.

Frank T., WA



The introduction of a fox bounty program in Victoria has proved a success.

## Australian deer: Are they getting a bum rap?

A report by the University of Technology Sydney systematically reviews the ecological impact of wild deer in Australia, evaluating policy claims and scientific evidence. Amid growing concerns, it examines deer effects on native fauna, vegetation and disease transmission and analysed 27 government policies focused on the animals' management. Most advocate control or eradication due to environmental degradation, competition with native species, agricultural damage, human safety concerns (vehicle collisions) and biosecurity risks. However, these claims often rely on observational data rather than direct empirical research (experimental research = better data), while some policies also acknowledge deer as a valued hunting species.

Deer are frequently cited as competitors with native wildlife, reducing food availability and altering habitat structure, yet the review found no management plans providing empirical evidence to support this claim. Only five quantitative studies examined deer interactions with native fauna, primarily documenting dietary overlap rather than direct competition. One study found a negative correlation between deer presence and two small mammal species, though also found a similar effect between these mammals and native swamp wallabies. A meta-analysis (data from multiple studies) comparing Australian deer with native and non-native large herbivores found no significant difference in their impact on small mammal populations.

Deer are also blamed for damaging vegetation through browsing, seed dispersal, soil compaction, antler rubbing and trampling, with 19 quantitative studies investigating these effects. Clear evidence shows deer browse on plants (13 studies) and alter vegetation structure (nine studies), reducing understorey cover and increasing bare ground. However, impacts on plant diversity and mortality rates were inconsistent, with some studies finding deer increased

or had no effect on plant diversity while others reported a decrease. No evidence supports claims that deer facilitate the spread of invasive plants any more than native herbivores.

A meta-analysis found no significant difference between the impact of Australian deer and those in their native range or African herbivores. One study suggested Australian deer may have a more positive effect on grass diversity than native marsupial herbivores, though further research is needed.

Deer are often labelled a biosecurity risk due to concerns over disease transmission to livestock, wildlife and/or humans, though no policy document cited Australian empirical evidence supporting this claim. Twenty quantitative studies examined deer and disease, yet only two investigated transmission potential. A meta-analysis of disease prevalence rates found cattle and other livestock have higher infection rates for most diseases than deer. The latter did show a higher prevalence of *Capillaria* spp. (threadworm) than native Australian wildlife, though no evidence confirmed deer transmitting diseases to livestock or humans. Findings suggest livestock agriculture, not deer, should remain the primary focus of biosecurity efforts.

The report highlights the fact that many claims in Australian deer management policies lack strong empirical support, often relying on anecdotal observations or secondary sources. It emphasises an animal's nativeness doesn't necessarily determine



**Aussie deer: Should we be cutting them some slack?**

its ecological impact, as deer effects are comparable to those of other large herbivores worldwide.

While further research may uncover additional ecological consequences, current evidence doesn't strongly support labelling deer as the exceptionally damaging invasive species which some promote. The report urges policymakers to be transparent about the values and assumptions driving deer management decisions, rather than relying on unsupported ecological claims to justify control measures. The report, titled *A systematic review and meta-analysis of the ecological effects of Australian deer*, can be viewed [online](#) at the University of Technology Sydney website. ●

Send questions to:  
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## In praise of the pioneers who went wild

Wildcat cartridges represent a highly interesting subset of ammunition. Unlike commercially-made cartridges which are mass-produced and widely available, wildcats are custom-designed by firearms enthusiasts, gunsmiths and hand-loaders to meet specific shooting needs or preferences. They're often the result of experimentation, innovation or a desire to improve firearm performance for certain applications, ranging from hunting to target shooting to long-range precision.

The history of wildcat cartridges dates back to the early 20th century when firearms enthusiasts and gunsmiths began experimenting with different configurations. Most famous were Americans Charles Newton, P.O. Ackley and Harvey Donaldson, who were responsible for introducing many of the factory cartridges available today. Probably best known of these is the .22-250 Remington which started life as the 250-3000 Savage, first produced in 1915 before being necked down to .22 calibre by J.E. Gebby and J.B. Smith in 1937, who named their version the .22 Varminter. It was handloaded for years as a wildcat, before popular demand resulted in it being produced by Remington as a factory round.

Another early example of a wildcat is the .30-06 Ackley Improved, a modification of the widely used .30-06 Springfield cartridge. Pioneered by gunsmith P.O.

Ackley of Granville, New York in the 1940s, the Ackley Improved version of the .30-06 featured a sharper shoulder angle and slightly longer case, improving its performance by increasing powder capacity and giving greater velocity.

This development demonstrated how the alteration of an existing cartridge design could yield benefits in terms of performance. Ackley was an excellent gunsmith, establishing one of the largest custom gun-making shops in Trinidad, Colorado as well as being an author and columnist on the staff of the *Guns & Ammo* and *Shooting Times* magazines for many years.

Wildcat cartridges in the main are developed by either 'improving' standard cases or sizing the neck to use either smaller or larger diameter projectiles in the case. A good example is the .243 Winchester cartridge, introduced in 1955 and derived from the 7.62mm NATO or .308 Winchester, as it's better known.

Similarly in the early days after WWII when a glut of SMLE rifles came to the market in Australia, much work was done by W. Harrison and J. Black on modifications of the .303 cartridge case to accommodate .22, .25 and .27 calibre projectiles. The resultant cartridges were designated .303-22, .303-25 and so on, with the most popular ones made by simply reducing the neck diameter to the required calibre with no other changes.

In the majority of instances the design of a wildcat starts with an existing parent cartridge which serves as the base, then the shooter or gunsmith either shortens or lengthens that case. A longer case can allow more powder, leading to higher velocity, while a shorter case may result in faster and more efficient burning of powder for specific applications. The shoulder angle of the case may also be modified, which can impact case capacity and the way the cartridge feeds into the chamber.

So in summary, wildcat cartridges play an essential role in the firearms world, by allowing shooters to customise their ammunition to meet specific needs and performance goals. Whether for hunting, target shooting or competition, these custom rounds provide a unique and innovative way to enhance firearm performance. And while they sometimes come with certain challenges in terms of cost and availability, they remain a valuable aspect of the shooting sports, offering endless possibilities for firearm enthusiasts willing to experiment and push the boundaries of ballistics.



An advertisement for 'FIRST GOLD' featuring a collection of Australian coins. The coins are arranged in stacks and include designs of a kangaroo, a koala, a tiger, and a kookaburra. The 'FIRST GOLD' logo is in the top left corner. To the right of the coins is a large QR code.



image taken by remote means



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There's now a far better gender balance in competitive shooting.

**Q** How has the sport of Olympic shooting evolved over the years and what trends do you currently see?

**Scott Reid, WA**

**A** Great question Scott. Having been involved in Olympic shooting since the mid-2000s, I've witnessed the sport's significant evolution and while I could elaborate extensively, I'll focus on a few key trends which come to mind.

One major change is an increased commitment from athletes and the shift from treating it as a hobby to a job. In the late '90s many international shooters balanced their passion for the sport with full-time jobs to fund their goals. Today, enhanced investment from various countries in shooting programs allows many athletes to pursue it as a full-time career. This professionalisation has raised competition standards with average scores in World Cups, World Championships and the Olympic Games steadily increasing.

Another notable evolution is competition formats. The shift from double-barrel to single-barrel finals has intensified the challenge, raising the stakes and mental demands on athletes in a high pressure

environment. Since my involvement I've observed four different single-barrel final formats, each evolving every Olympic cycle, to enhance television and spectator appeal and forcing the athlete to never become comfortable with one finals system.

The evolution of shotgun design preferences has also been fascinating. I believe the popularity of using high ribs in Trap as opposed to flat-rib shotguns will continue trending for the simple reason of improved target visibility and sight picture. There's also been a resurgence of heavier barrels in the Olympic Trap discipline to assist with better weight balance and more controlled movement patterns to the target, which lighter barrels often struggle to provide. Technological equipment advancements have also changed the game. When I first started, shooting lenses weren't given much respect but now, high-quality lenses like those from Pillar and De.la.ro, have combated outdated notions and I see more shooters now realising the importance of optical performance and its role in contributing to target acquisition.

One notable strategic trend is the increasing popularity of counting targets. This allows shooters to calculate the direction of targets, effectively reducing the element of surprise and improving their percentage-based chance of hitting the target. Similarly, the technique of holding higher on the trap has become more common, an approach which enables less gun speed and

offers shooters reduced margin for error. I believe this technique is here to stay, as it has proven to be successful by many competitors in modern shooting.

Another trend I've witnessed during the past decade or so is the rise of ergonomic stocks, which offer a customisable experience for shooters. While I'm still 'old school' and appreciate traditional stocks, I can see the appeal and ease of adjusting pitch, cast, length and balance all with a simple tool.

Lastly, the move toward gender equality in shooting is a significant evolutionary milestone for the sport. The Paris 2024 Olympics showcased an equal number of male and female competitors and after the Rio 2016 Games, women's events were expanded from a one-day, 75-target format to a two-day, 125-target competition, aligning with the men. In my opinion this a welcome change which promotes equality and encourages more women to participate.

Although these examples only scratch the surface of the sport's evolution, I'm excited to see what new trends will arise as I continue my own journey in shooting. The harsh reality is the sport must continually adapt to stay relevant in our ever-changing world.

**Questions to:**  
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# Got a question - ask our TOP SHOTS?

John Dunn • Paul Miller • Geoff Smith • Barry Wilmot • Rod Pascoe

email: [edit@ssaa.org.au](mailto:edit@ssaa.org.au)



and think about a maximum of 45m for these type of loads.

If you're thinking of using steel shot you mustn't use more than half choke as steel is much harder than lead and can damage chokes designed for lead shot rather than steel. And while steel is harder it's not as ballistically efficient as lead, so to put the same energy on target you usually need to opt for a larger-sized shot in a greater payload to achieve similar pattern density and energy effect on target. The maximum range will be about the same given all factors being in proportion as above.

Bigger ferals like pigs require similar payloads but much larger pellets like buckshot, SGs or something along those lines. Range again is restricted not so much by the energy of these larger pellets but the fact there are very few in the pattern and the need to put as many on a pig as possible. Tighter chokes are generally the answer here. You can also use shells loaded with a single solid slug but, while energy is significant, the level of accuracy from an unrifled smoothbore barrel again restricts distance. You can hit targets at amazing distances with solid slugs, though from a humane point of view I'd say around 50-60m or so is the limit in a real-world hunting situation.

**Paul Miller**

**Q** I'm seeking information on this old revolver. On top of the barrel it says 'Wilkinson London' and '50 bore' under the barrel, then an Adams patent No. 20 171 N1315. It also has some stamps on the cylinder. Any info would be great as it's been in the family a long time.

**Andrew Cooper, via email**

**A** The gun was made by Wilkinsons (of sword fame) and was proofed in London around 1860. Robert Adams patented this design of percussion revolver

**Q** We recently had two older gentlemen come to our store to see if we could identify a cartridge one of them had in his shed. I've not seen anything like it so hopefully someone may be able to assist with this. It looks like a dummy round about .45 calibre, though beyond that I've no information. They read your magazine so hopefully you can find them an answer.

**Steve Hearn, via email**

**A** You've stumbled across a very interesting 'cartridge' and one which those growing up in the 1950s and '60s may remember. At the height of American Westerns on TV and Hollywood's epic dramas about the taming of the Wild West, almost every kid on the block (certainly in my part of the world) had a cowboy hat and, of course, a cap gun in a fancy holster.

Before plastic was a thing, diecast materials were used to make quality toys including excellent copies of the Colt Single-Action Army, the gunslinger's model of choice. Your photo shows one

of the six cap firing devices consisting of two parts, a conventional looking cartridge case and a zinc-alloy or aluminium 'bullet' for want of a better word.

A round paper percussion cap was placed inside the case and the 'bullet' inserted on top of it, pushing it down against the base

of the case. The weight of the hammer falling on the case squashed the cap against the bullet, setting it off. The bullet couldn't move forward in the chamber as a rim around its nose was held against a step in the chamber. Smoke would escape from holes in the base of the case.

I haven't been able to identify the brand of your sample or the revolver it fits, however I've included a picture of the Nichols Stallion .45 cap gun which uses similar devices to the one you provided. The Nichols version has a big advantage in that smoke escapes forward through a hole in the bullet and out the end of the barrel. A good find indeed - pity there's no gun with it!

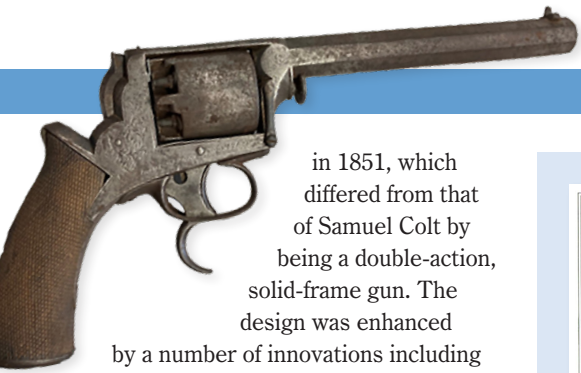
**Rod Pascoe**

**Q** Can one of your Top Shots tell me what the maximum range a shotgun can be used humanely for game and feral animals.

**Garrie, NSW**

**A** You don't say what gun and cartridges you're planning to use for shooting game and feral animals. Allowing for availability of shotshell cartridges with a decent payload in shot sizes for your purpose, I'd recommend the 12-gauge here in Australia. Smaller animals like rabbits and foxes can be handled humanely with smaller shot like 4s or 5s in a 32 to 36-gram load doing about 1350 feet per second. Use open chokes for close range and tighter for longer distances





in 1851, which differed from that of Samuel Colt by being a double-action, solid-frame gun. The design was enhanced

by a number of innovations including by Frederick Beaumont and William Tranter. Many famous brand revolvers of this period use Adams' designs and are offered at auction sites in a variety of calibres with several interesting variations.

The Wilkinson company was established by famous gunmaker Henry Nock (1741-1804) who, having no offspring of his own, left it to his adoptive son-in-law James Wilkinson. James' son Henry became famous as a gun and sword maker.

Your revolver looks to be stamped '50 bore', which equates to the diameter of a ball weighing 1/50lb, namely 0.45". It doesn't appear to have the ramming lever used to load the cylinder on the left side of the frame. The unusual double trigger is attributed to Tranter, in which the lower part cocks the hammer while the upper part within the triggerguard is what fires the gun. I hope this gives a better understanding of the gun's history.

**Geoff Smith**



THE HOPKINS & ALLEN ARMS COMPANY

### Hopkins & Allen Rifles

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No. 822  
22 calibre, 20 in. barrel, weight 4 lbs.  
Shoots 22 calibre, short and long rim-fire cartridge.  
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No. 832  
32 calibre, 20 in. barrel, weight 4 lbs.  
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Our complete guarantee for safety, accuracy, reliability and durability goes with this gun.

These rifles are a little heavier than the No. 722 and are intended for longer range shooting, and for older boys.

The lever action is quicker and insures prompt ejecting and loading. Safety device allows the hammer to rest at safety notch and eliminates danger of accidental discharge.

This rifle takes down in two parts, allowing the gun to be cleaned from the breech and to be easily carried.

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All the materials used are the best. Stock and fore end good quality walnut and barrel finely rifled with our patented increase twist, adding greatly to the accuracy and range. Hard rubber butt plate.

SHOWS RIFLE TAKEN APART. THIS FEATURE APPLIES TO ALL OUR SINGLE SHOT RIFLES.

**Q** I was reading some info on your website by John Dunn and was wondering if he'd be able to date my Hopkins and Allen 32RF rifle which belonged to my great-grandpa. I recently found some old ammo for it and was planning to fire it if John thought that would be advisable. The serial number is 7507 and the round barrel is 20<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" long.

My grandpa was born in 1890 and passed away in 1987. My second cousin has had the rifle since and sold it to me a couple of years ago. It's priceless to me but I was wondering what insurance value I should put on it just in case? Thanks in advance for any information you can give me.

**Robert Echols, Riley, Kansas**

**A** Hopkins and Allen single-shot rifles were made from 1867/68 until around 1915. The original Hopkins and Allen Manufac-

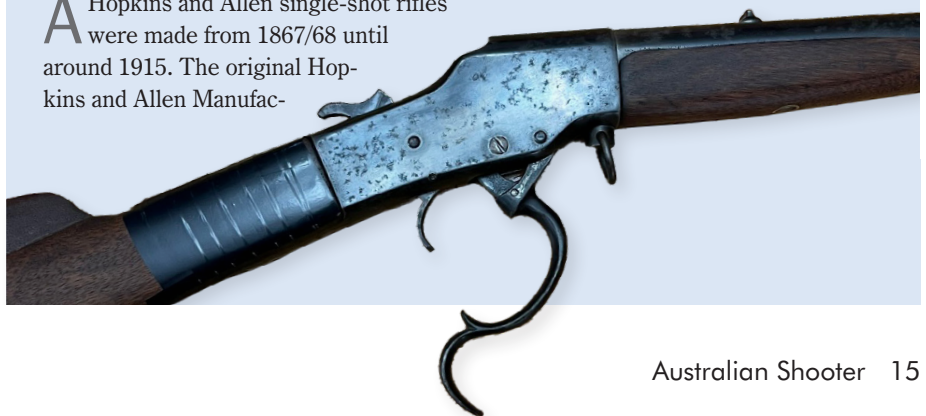
turing Company became Hopkins and Allen Arms Company in 1898, so the markings on the barrel of your rifle date it to no later than that. The company made a variety of firearms including single-shot and repeating rifles, pistols and shotguns. These were marketed by Merwin and Hulbert, as the markings on your barrel attest. Merwin and Hulbert was a New York-based firearms and sporting goods company who owned a large interest in Hopkins and Allen but never made any firearms of their own.

Your rifle is a Model 832 chambered for the .32 Short rimfire cartridge.

The same rifle in .22 calibre was the 822. It's a lever-activated rolling block action, originally made for the Boy's Rifle market which thrived at the time. As I've written before, these little single-shots don't appear to be all that common here in Australia (or in the US for that matter). Because of their low original cost and only reasonable quality, not many seem to have survived. From the photos you supplied I'd suggest your rifle is in no better than fair condition and, as such, I'd resist shooting it. It would be a pity to have it fall to pieces and the chances of being able to replace it are fairly slim.

That said, your Hopkins and Allen is a desirable little rifle to single-shot collectors. If I was still collecting I'd happily pay \$400- \$500 just to add it to my collection, as it really is quite uncommon and deserves to be treasured.

**John Dunn**



# GET THE MAX

FROM A MINI!



## Daniel O'Dea on the latest cut-down Wedgetail

Following the launch of their Wedgetail MPR, a 'Modern Sporting Rifle' (MSR) chambered in .308 Winchester I reviewed in the April 2024 edition, Australian manufacturer Wedgetail Industries have unveiled a new 'Mini' version in the country's most popular rifle calibre the .223 Remington.

To recap, the Wedgetail MPR is a unique take on the pump-action rifle, one which enjoys all the ergonomics of an MSR or AR-type self-loading platform but is manufactured specifically to comply with most Australian state firearms regulations. But it's important to note these pump-action

rifles are not and will never be semi-automatic, only sharing ergonomic layout and, to a degree, appearance.

Sadly the way it looks is enough to have the rifle restricted in both NSW and Tasmania, where they're listed as prohibited firearms due exactly to that - appearance. Laws governing appearance are completely nonsensical to me, as this in no way increases lethality or changes any police operational response in the highly unlikely event one was to be used in a crime.

Apparently there's an argument the 'appearance' of certain firearm types may cause undue distress or concern with the

general public. Yet firearms are, in the main, only used at approved ranges and/or on private properties and all states already have laws on their books for brandishing a firearm in a public place, making this whole debate moot.

So these laws effectively serve no practical purpose in states where they're imposed. That said if it's the law it's the law and must be obeyed, unless at some point in the future it's repealed or changed. For the record I live in NSW and, as with the MPR .308 I reviewed, although prohibited in my home state I'm approved and have all applicable permits and licences for



both possession and testing of such rifles, regardless of category determination.

So to the rifle itself and apologies if you experience some déjà vu on reading this article. If you saw my MPR .308 review, as mentioned what we have here is in effect a scaled-down version, so much is the same though there are differences which I'll highlight as we go.

As a split receiver design made from 7075-T6 aluminum, we have an upper group including receiver, barrel, handguard and pump assembly and a lower group incorporating the magazine housing, trigger group, grip and stock, all locked

together via two captive push pins. As with the MPR .308 upper, Wedgetail's receiver trunnion extends forward of the receiver face to accept a proprietary barrel extension and barrel nut interface. The 13" free-floating front handguard clamps over the trunnion of the receiver in a seamless fashion to create a continuous top rail for optic and accessory fitment.

Out front, slots are cut along the side and bottom facets of the handguard to create three rail slots, in which a small carriage assembly glides forward and aft on self-lubricating polymer bushes. This sits between the inner sides of the

handguard and barrel, basically encircling the free-floating hammer-forged barrel (it's connected at the top to a stainless-steel drive rod which in turn connects to the bolt carrier). On the outside of each slot and bolted through into the carriage, sit the three rail-type sections which form the pump slide. The lower panel is an actual section of Picatinny rail adorned with a silicon rail cover which can be removed to fit a vertical grip or other accessories.

The MPR Mini shares a scaled-down version of Wedgetail's proprietary bolt and carrier system, which itself mirrors some aspects of operation to other self-loading

Get the max from a Mini!

Daniel inspects the chamber while running the MPR Mini.



MSR platforms, only mechanically cycled via the pump slide and not compatible or interchangeable. Similarly, the lower receiver which may look much the same as some AR variants, again is in no way interchangeable and specifically incorporates denial features into the design to prevent fitment of self-loading upper assemblies.

On the plus side, with the trigger and several other components there is some compatibility, such as the MPR Mini using a standard Mil-spec six-position receiver extension on which to mount the stock. This provides great access to customisation via the myriad of aftermarket options available for MSR-type rifles both here and overseas.

One interesting change over its big brother is that both upper and lower receivers are now CNC-machined from receiver castings as opposed to CNC-machined from a piece of billet. The use of forged receivers is basically how it's done by all leading US manufacturers of AR and MSR-type rifles. The process

allows for increased production at a lower price point which in turn reduces the cost to consumers.

Receivers are cast in Victoria and Wedgetail may in fact be the only ones producing firearms from this method in Australia. When completed, castings are precision machined to specification before being both hard anodized and finished in Cerakote for an extremely tough and durable finish. Sticking with Australian-made components where possible, the MPR Mini's hammer forged, fluted barrel is also sourced locally and made by Lithgow.

As with all Wedgetail products I've assessed, it appears tolerances are being kept tight and with the receiver halves on the Mini there was no play whatsoever. With many such rifles, the push-pins locking the receiver halves together can be pushed out easily by hand, while play between upper and lower may not be unusual. Perhaps handy for ease of assembly and disassembly but not so



**As tested the MPR Mini was fitted with an A1-style 'birdcage' flash hider, muzzle thread 1/2 x 28 should you wish to install other such devices.**

conducive to accuracy. There are even some accessory companies, including Accu-Wedge, which sell little rubber wedges to remove such play, though no need with Wedgetail products which always seem to lock up extremely tightly.

For range testing I initially fitted the rifle with a Nightforce NXS 2.5-10x24 scope in a Nightforce mount. Based on past experience with Wedgetail I was expecting good accuracy, their WT25 I reviewed a few years ago being one of the most accurate MSR-type firearms I've ever tested. The rifle's chambered in .223 Wylde which basically means it'll accept both .223 Remington and 5.56 NATO ammunition.

I ran the rifle with various breeds of factory ammo including 60gr Hornady TAP, 55gr Winchester Super-X, 55gr Geco Express, 55gr Sierra Prairie Enemy, 55gr Highland soft-points and even some of my 'roll-your-own' using 55gr soft-point projectiles and a dose of AR2208. Most groups hovered around 1 MOA with some a little under and the worse running around 1.5-1.8 MOA, all shot from my Caldwell Lead Sled. As far as function, the gun showed no particular favourite with respect to factory ammo and all shot without fault.

All up, more than acceptable accuracy from a new gun out the box with a low round count and barely run-in. If any criticism it was possibly let down a little by the trigger, which is reasonably heavy but redeemably broke quite crisply. Heavy triggers are not uncommon with this style of firearm where they can often be the Achilles heel, being hammer-fired with a long lock time and purposely kept on the heavy side to guarantee good sear engagement.

That said, as an AR/MSR compatible trigger there are several aftermarket drop-in options available if you did want something a little better. In the field or when running the gun fast, the trigger would be just fine for most and you'd hardly give it a second thought anywhere but from slow, deliberate fire off a bench.



**The MPR Mini has a six-position collapsible stock to ease adjustment for Length of Pull (shown here at maximum and minimum extension).**

Get the max from a Mini!



LHS Receiver in close-up.

The pump slide is spring assisted and cycling the action is both smooth and rapid. The rifle will accept standard STANAG-type magazines and is supplied with one 10-round Magpul P-Mag. The bolt locks open on ejection of the last round and, unlike its .308 MPR brother, the .223 P-Mags punch free and clear of the MPR Mini as soon as the mag release is pressed.

With a fresh magazine inserted, a slap on the bolt release with your palm will have the bolt and carrier flying forward to chamber a new round and you're 'off to the races' again. Being both light and well-balanced it's a joy use and carry, and I do find having an actual pistol grip on such a rifle does aid in good directional control muzzle-wise, always a plus for safety especially if carried single-handed.

When finished on the bench I did drop the Nightforce NSX scope in favour of an Aimpoint H1 Micro red dot in a Samson quick-release riser, which worked well when pushing the rifle hard at closer ranges. Where allowed I'm sure the MPR Mini could prove popular with those competing in IPSC rifle events, though would also serve in feral animal control where swift follow-up shots are required but licence qualification may be not applicable or prove too onerous for otherwise licensed shooters. Undoubtedly it'll also greatly appeal to those wishing to experience ownership of a modern MSR rifle but in Category B specification, excluding where prohibited of course. The MPR Mini retails for around \$2950 in standard form. More at [wedgetailindustries.com](http://wedgetailindustries.com) ●

## Specifications

**Rifle:** Wedgetail MPR Mini  
**Action:** Spring-assisted pump-action  
**Trigger:** Wedgetail single-stage  
**Calibre:** .223 Rem (.223 Wylde chambering)  
**Magazine:** 10-round detectable (2x Magpul P-Mag)  
**Barrel:** Lithgow hammer-forged 16" (408mm)  
**Twist rate:** 1:9  
**Sights:** Picatinny rail  
**Upper and lower:** 7075-T6 alloy  
**Stock:** Magpul CTR  
**Pistol grip:** A2  
**Weight:** 2.8kg (6.16lb)  
**Price guide:** Around \$2950



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SCAN ME

# Bang gong!

**Chris Redlich** builds his own portable practice target

**T**hey say necessity is the mother of invention and, that being the case, desperation is the driver for 'Big Daddy' to put his thinking cap on. I'd been reviewing a few riflescopes which needed attention where targets required a cut lunch for closer inspection so, after listening to the hype surrounding gong plates, I was keen to start ringing my own.

Firstly I didn't want to be lugging pickets and a sledgehammer for the 2km round journey (target at 1000m) or I'd be needing an energy drink to go with my cut lunch, so I leant towards a portable set-up. When I say portable I'm talking about compact and lightweight and when I say compact and lightweight, I mean a gong plate hanging by

chains off a small steel bracket, supported by telescopic tent poles.

This lightbulb moment came about after finding a few bits and pieces of scrap in my shed and, after a little research and development, my plan was to become reality. As with other DIY articles I've contributed previously, the following is a basic form of instruction on the build process, so hopefully you too can be ringing gongs down range.

### Building the 'porta-gong'

- Using a piece of 100mm x 100mm x 5mm thick plate steel, I drilled four 12mm holes at each corner, suitable for pole tips to penetrate for what I'll refer to as the 'head plate'.
- I then cut a 10mm diameter piece of steel

rod for my chain bar to a length of roughly 370mm and drilled two 4mm holes at either end for hook retainers. For these I cut the bold ends off two 3" builders nails (from my nail bag) to a length of about 25mm and tack welded them to the rod holes.

- Placing the chain bar centrally and evenly across the top of the head plate (with hook retainers facing up), I welded it securely in position. Apart from a touch of spray paint, this completed the fast and simple part of the porta-gong build.

- My local camping goods store provided the four telescopic tarpaulin poles which, at \$17 each, were actually the most expensive part of the project. I bought poles which extend to a maximum of 1.8m, giving enough length for adjustment on sloping or uneven terrain. More importantly, they provide plenty of height to raise the target above the long grass commonly found on most rural property.

- I visited a hardware store for 2m of chain and two light-duty carabiners for gong plate attachment. I cut the chain in half using bolt cutters and attached a carabiner to the end of each piece. One metre was ample length of adjustment and enabled plenty of height variation should the need arise.

- Now a gong won't make a sound without a gong to ring so, last but not least, I sourced a piece of steel for a gong plate. Using a rectangular piece of 12mm mild steel plate about 300mm long x 200mm wide (lying around the shed), I welded a couple of chain links to the top



Bisalloy gong works best for high velocity cartridges.



Welding the gong.

## Bang a gong!



**Clockwise from left: Marking holes on steel head plate; Drilling holes on the head plate; Preparing to weld chain bar to head plate; Completed and assembled head plate, poles and gong chain; Pink porta-gong easily visible at 600m.**

as connection points. Despite not costing anything, I soon discovered mild steel isn't the best choice for a centrefire rifle target. Although my first few shots were at 250m, bullets left large impact wounds on the plate and the gong wasn't exactly ringing. My brother found me a piece of barbecue-size Bisalloy plate which not only handled the impact from high-powered cartridges, it had enough size for an audible target area.

- Painting a 200mm diameter white circle on the centre of each plate made for a target which not only viewed well at long range, its metric dimension enabled me to calculate scope corrections easily from points of impact.

### Range testing

As with any ad hoc creation, my success in building a portable gong set-up rested in the final assembly. I'm pleased to say the build came together well in my shed, though the proof of real performance remained afield on uneven ground. My first outing to the property provided an ideal arena for testing the porta-gong's credentials for use on sloping ground.

The simple yet effective adjustment of its telescopic poles provided all the means necessary to raise the target level and project it clear of rocks and well above grass height. At all ranges tested, including as far out as 640m (700 yards), the distinct ring of each bullet hitting the target was music to this shooter's ears.

### Conclusion

Like most 'R&D' projects there can be teething issues and, as I discovered, the four legs would sometimes twist slightly when a high velocity bullet struck the outer

edges of the gong plate. The problem lay at the pole and head-plate junction but was easily remedied by angling the holes further with a drill, thus sharpening the pitch of the poles, while planting the feet firmer in the soil reduced any slack. Once fixed I never had another issue with twisting.

The angle of the legs provided ample room for a clear fire lane but, should I be unlucky enough to damage one of the thin steel poles with a wayward bullet or fragment by ricochet, the cost of a new one would be a mere \$17. Yet the poles are deceptively strong and when a .308 bullet pierced one while shooting at 600m, I didn't even know it was hit until I inspected the target later.

I also discovered Bisalloy steel is by far the best option for a target gong when using high velocity centrefire cartridges. Mild steel on the other hand (cheaper of the two) is more than capable of handling low velocity rimfire cartridges such as the popular 22LR.

As with all my DIY projects I take great pleasure in sharing the process which any handyman reader can tackle to produce a similar creation. Costing a total of around \$90 for the portable frame, I reckon it's a project worthy of consideration and hope the steps outlined and photos provided will be of assistance.

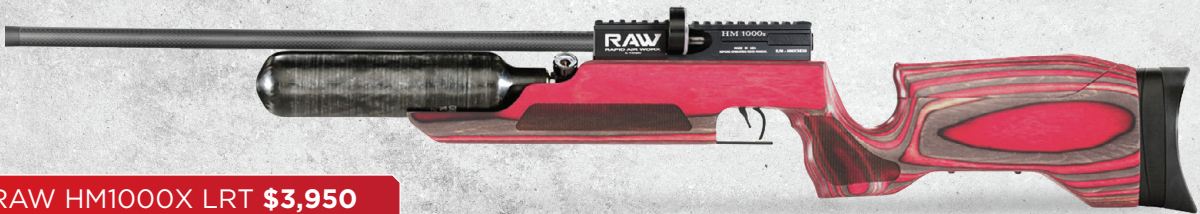
The Bisalloy pink target plate on the other hand cost me an additional \$132 but, considering its durability, you're guaranteed years of ringing gongs on all those confirmed hits. The porta-gong takes up minimal space in a ute or wagon and I can attest to it being a welcome inclusion to my camping gear for extra practice on that next hunting trip. ●



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# THE WAY WE WERE

**Joe Norris** recalls the thrill of  
'old-school' NT hunting





**A young Joe with his wide bull. Sitting on a trophy to demonstrate its size wasn't unusual in the '80s.**

**T**his is the story of the first big game hunt I ever went on in the early 1980s at the height of the brucellosis eradication program in the Northern Territory. My best mate Warwick came off a cattle station I used to muster on, to help his family but mostly to get me out of town and provide work for my horses and some sanity for me.

We'd been talking about hunting water buffalo for some time before we started contacting the people we knew 'on country' in the Territory in a bid to gain access. There were no mobile phones so we'd to go through the Darwin exchange to make contact. Most of the places were on a radio microwave phone system which wasn't much good at night, so we were limited to reaching out to people during the day but, as most property folk are working during the day, we weren't doing too well.

Warwick wasn't shy when it came to girls and it didn't take him long to chat up one on the exchange in Darwin. This was a smart move as she kept an ear out for the people we were trying to contact and, when they rang in on business calls, she let Warwick know and arranged for him to talk to them after they'd concluded their call.

In short order we were granted permission to hunt on a few properties and were also advised we could be called on to help shoot animals as part of the brucellosis



**As Warwick shoots his bull, things are about to get exciting.**

eradication scheme. The trip from central Queensland was an adventure in itself, but eventually we made it and after collecting our Territory firearm licences at Barkley police station we were good to go.

The eradication scheme involved stations mustering cattle and horses and needling the entire herd. A few days later they were run through the yards again and checked, with anything which reacted to the needle drafted off and destroyed. The only way the scheme could be successful was if all stock on the place was tested, which meant every animal had to be yarded.

That's where we came in. After the paddock was mustered we'd to shoot anything which couldn't be yarded, as the brucellosis status of that animal couldn't be determined so they had to be destroyed. The Territory had a huge population of feral donkeys and brumbies, not to mention cleanskin bulls and buffalo, though the latter weren't on all the places we were invited to, being mostly closer to the coast.

If I never have to shoot another donkey I'll die a happy man. We quickly learned donkeys aren't hard to shoot but very hard to kill. A shoulder shot with a soft-pointed 30-06 bullet which would flatten a brumby would only make a donkey sick - they'd just put their heads down and slowly walk away. It was soul destroying until we started to use only head shots which resulted in the instant death we were trying to achieve.

The first place we visited didn't have buffalo and it wasn't until we relocated to a place near Mataranka we started to see them. As I wanted to actually 'hunt' one I wasn't prepared to shoot from a vehicle so we were going on foot. I had two 30-06 rifles, one a Ruger No.1 and the other an ex-military Mauser, sporterised and fitted with a scope. I've always been a single-shot fan so I'd carry the Ruger and Warwick the Mauser.

The first day we split up with Warwick hunting along a creek system while I went to another a few kilometres away. I'd been

slowly following the chain of waterholes, all that remained of the creek in this, the latter stages of dry season. As I rounded a bend in the water course and was able to see a fair distance, I spotted buffalo wallowing in water in the shade of some overhanging trees. They were actually just lying there and not actively wallowing, most with their heads sticking out the water enjoying the cool.

As I was using a single-shot rifle I carried a bullet-belt packed with rounds. The belt was made by a place called Bennet's and had leather loops to hold rounds, though the belt itself was plastic. I was using surplus military ammo as it was all I could afford and needed the penetration provided by the solid projectiles on thick-skinned buffalo.

After inching from tree to tree I managed to close the gap to less than 60 meters. I could see a huge bull's head sticking out the water and, after looking over the mob, it was clear he was by far the oldest and



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## The way we were

largest beast in the waterhole. The problem I had was I could only see his head and part of his neck and if I stirred them, there'd be a lot of animals between me and him so I probably wouldn't have a shot at his vitals. This left two options: wait until they got up in their own time and hope they gave me a shot, or try to break his neck with a solid bullet where he lay.

The first option wasn't appealing as they could stay there all day and, when they did get up, there was no guarantee a shot would be possible due to the number of animals. This left me with the neck option so I carefully aligned the crosshairs on a spot I thought would result in the bullet hitting the spine and pressed the trigger. The rifle roared and I lost sight of the target during recoil.

I dropped the rifle from my shoulder to reload as the bull erupted from the waterhole looking for his tormentor. Clearly I'd missed my mark and he wasn't happy. As I stepped from behind the little tree I'd used

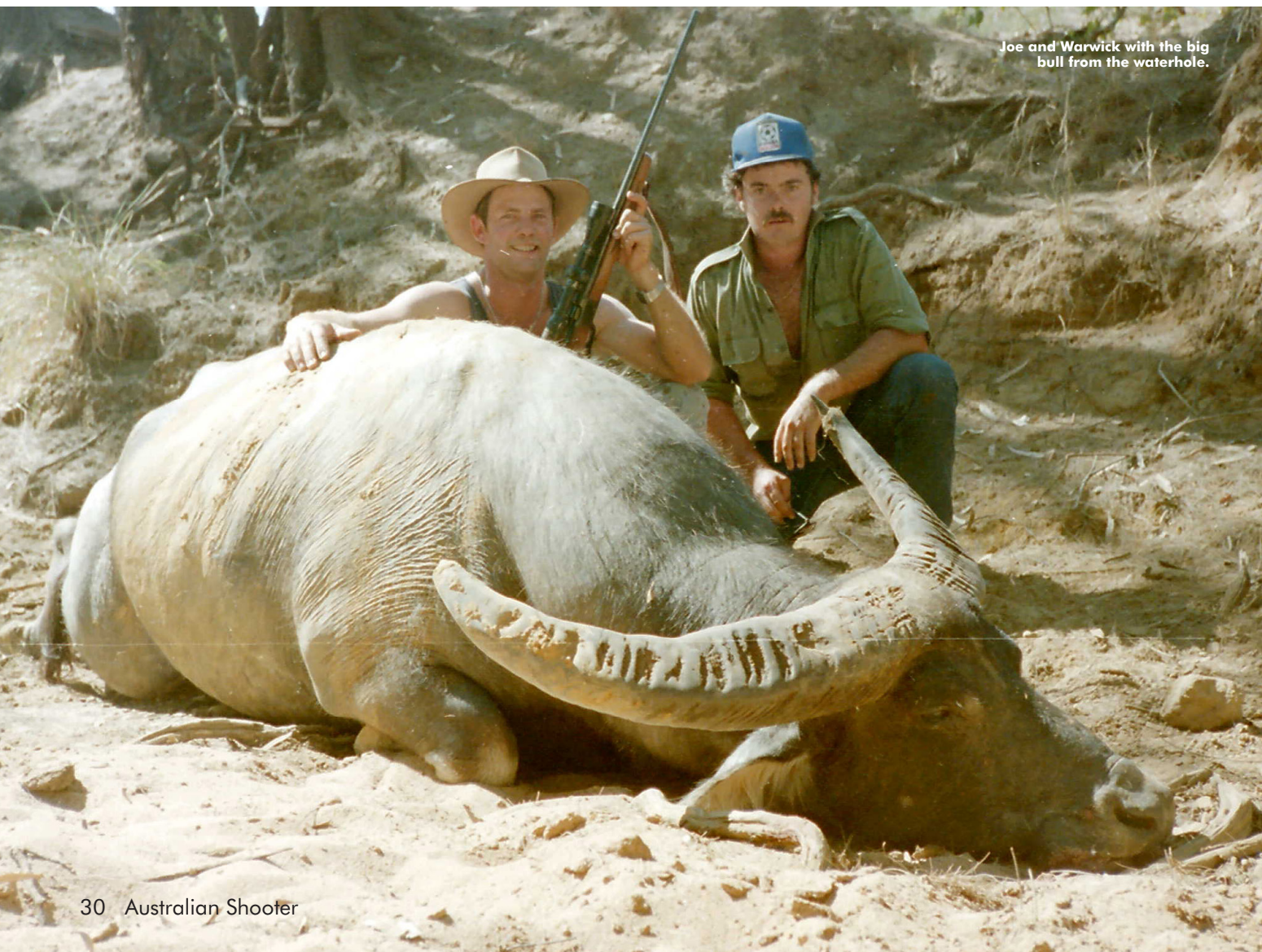
for cover the bull spotted me and decided to get acquainted. The spent round had been ejected as soon as the shot was fired but as I went to take another from the belt, the rounds were stuck in the loops by the plastic strap.

Managing to extract a second round from the belt and load the rifle, I fired at the rapidly approaching buffalo with absolutely no effect as he just kept charging. Frantically trying to pull another round out the belt I was grasping at each cartridge and, when they wouldn't budge, I'd try another.

The bull was closing by the second and I'd ripped fingernails in my attempt to grab another round, though didn't feel it at the time. Eventually I managed to free a round and chamber it. The bull by this point had lowered his head and started sweeping his horns back and forth as he closed the last few meters. I snapped shut the lever and put the rifle to my shoulder, pointing it like a shotgun without even trying to use the scope. I fired on reflex.

Thankfully this time I did hit the spine and stopped the beast in its tracks. After walking the distance between he and I, he was only six paces away when I dropped him. I smoked in those days and decided I really needed one to calm down and must've ripped six cigarette papers before I managed to roll a smoke, my hands were shaking so badly. It was a scarily close call and thereafter we decided to hunt together for safety, as having backup would've saved the day. If I'd been using the Mauser it wouldn't have been an issue.

The other thing we did back then, which today is seen as politically incorrect, is take photos sitting on the buffalo. This wasn't disrespect, we wanted to demonstrate the size of the animal in relation to the shooter and there's no way it can be claimed we sat in the background in those photos. I found out just how thick a buffalo hide is when we removed the back straps to put in our esky and it's thicker than the case on a 30-06 round.



Joe and Warwick with the big bull from the waterhole.



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Joe takes aim as he waits for the bull to turn.

The next day we hunted together, Warwick carrying the Mauser when we spotted a mob of buffalo leaving a creek and heading to a huge fig tree for shade. On reaching it they lay down as I stopped behind an ant bed to film, while Warwick stalked in hoping to take a huge pink-coloured bull. He was able to inch so close I thought he might get between them and eventually had to shout at the buffalo to make them stand up before he could fashion a shot.

All the while I was filming with my 35mm Cannon camera and, as Warwick fired at the big bull, he came at my mate who was watching him through the scope while reloading. Warwick realised the bull was on to him and started to run towards me until I yelled at him to shoot. On turning he managed to put another shot in the bull and put him down. I regret I didn't have the presence of mind to keep filming, as I'd have treasured a photo of Warwick legging it towards me with a big bull buffalo in hot pursuit.

As the eradication program hadn't been to this station yet, we were given permission to take as many buffalo as we wanted before they were shot from helicopters. I was after a set of cow horns for comparison, so later that day I harvested one and the next day we hunted together for another big bull. This time I carried the Mauser and Warwick the axe and camera.

We spotted a mob of buffalo on the open grassy plains and there looked to be a couple of big bulls in their midst, so we started to slowly walk towards them keeping trees between us as cover. Once

we closed the distance I could see a sizeable bull with exceptionally wide horns so he'd be my next target.

The herd was calmly grazing as we were on foot so they hadn't heard us and the wind was in our favour. I managed to reach a point where I was 100 meters from the bull before I ran out of trees to line up with as I approached him. He had his rump towards me and I could see plenty of horn protruding from each side, so I knew he was wide. I took a rest on the last tree I could use as cover and waited on him turning.

Then as usual Murphy's law kicked in and, when he did turn, he looked directly at me with his vitals behind a gum tree so I'd no shot. It was stalemate for a while until he decided he wanted to be somewhere else and began to exit stage right. As the beast cleared the tree I placed a round behind his shoulder and, unlike the other two we'd taken, this one took off instead of charging. I chased him for a few seconds before he slowed enough to let me place a bullet behind his ear and end his run.

This was before I'd learned taxidermy so we only cut the skull caps out with the half axe instead of taking capes, ending with 10 pairs of buffalo horns on the roof-rack. We'd wrapped the meaty bits in heavy black plastic and taped the ends securely so they wouldn't leak on the way back to Queensland. Sadly I managed to go bush and hit a tree on the Borroloola road when I blew a front tyre in the middle of the night.

The horns were a few days old now and starting to 'ripen', so when the plastic tore in the crash the juice leaked on to the sills and ran down the windscreen, making us popular with dogs we encountered but not so much at fuel stops. At the Barkley home-stead, a busload of tourists were disembarking as we were fuelling and I wasn't surprised to see them check their shoes in case they'd stepped in something!

I had to leave the horns in Mount Isa while my vehicle was repaired and a good friend stored them at his place but that's another story. All in all it was my first adventure chasing big game and while it's a totally different situation in the Territory now, that's the way it was 40-odd years ago. ●



The thickness of a buffalo hide compared to a 30-06 round.



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# A shot in the dark

Roof-mounted spotlight is Daniel O'Dea's new best pal

**T**owards the end of last year I picked up a new farm truck and when I say 'new' I don't mean as in that 'new car smell', but a 300,000km 2007 Ford Ranger. It was to replace my old Daihatsu Feroza which, made in the last century, was pretty much an old shooting buggy. The Ranger would be serving as both a shooting vehicle and something more suitable for lugging the spray unit and fencing gear around, all in more comfort.

The Ranger was relatively cheap as it was unregistered and required some mechanical

attention to make it a viable proposition and, once I had all that sorted out, one of the first things on my agenda was fitting a new spotlight. Not my first rodeo in such matters so I didn't hesitate to contact Darren Rachow at Powa Beam, a great Australian company that's been lighting up the countryside for shooters for decades.

Whether it be handheld or roof-mounted, they're hard to go past for rugged reliability and practical performance. Never standing still in development and innovation, I wasn't surprised when Darren told me about some

new products I should be considering and it wasn't long until a box arrived with everything I'd need to tackle this project.

The box contained the newest version of Powa Beam's RC500 Quick-Draw Remote Control and a PLPRO9 (9") 245mm quartz halogen 100W spotlight. The big improvement in both is they've been adapted to complement the fitment and use of thermal or night-vision equipment. With the remote, this has been done by increasing the diameter of the ball-joint tube to accommodate a third wire for constant charging to your



thermal unit. With the spotlight itself it's the inclusion of a quick-release mounting bracket to the top of the housing, incorporating a USB-C charging cable. Powa Beam will be offering the new increased diameter ball-joint assembly as an accessory if you wish to update your existing remote.

Moving to the install and, regardless of how many times you've done it, the idea of drilling a 2¼" hole in your car roof is always a little daunting. But it needn't be so, especially these days where there isn't much Google can't teach you in a few keyboard

clicks. All you need is a drill, a 2¼" hole saw, a couple of Allen keys, pliers, screwdriver and with a little mechanical nous you should get by.

Drilling the hole's the easy bit, though make sure you know what's between the head lining and outer roof skin as you need to beware of any bracing, ducting or wires which might be in the way. Next you have to work out where you're going to run your power cable, which may include having to remove and replace trims and the head lining. In my case with the Ranger, it

didn't take long to find a YouTube video of someone removing the head lining. Anyway, I thought it might be useful to outline how I went about this, so here we go.

#### **Step 1: Trim and head lining**

First step was to remove the sill trims so I could look under the head lining. In the case of my Ranger, access was easier as it's an extra cab with no B-pillar, the sill trims held by clips which you just needed to reef off. Then I'd to remove the grab handles and sun visors (there were also some coat

## A shot in the dark



Clockwise from top: Daniel ready to drill through lining and roof; Daniel turns his hand to auto electrician, wiring up the spotlight remote handle; The Quick-Draw remote handle folds away neatly when not in use; Drilling the retention holes and dropping the bolts in as you go keeps everything aligned; Daniel chose to connect the spotlight direct to the battery via an Anderson plug.

hooks and courtesy light housing to deal with). I went old school with a Phillips screwdriver but a cordless would do the job if you were born this century. To start with I did all this passenger-side only, which allowed me to drop the headliner down to have a good look underneath without removing whole thing.

### Step 2: Marking and drilling

Having established there was nothing in the way structurally I carefully measured centre, taking into account where I wanted the handle positioned fore and aft in the cab. After marking and checking twice, I popped a small hole up through the lining and roof skin. With this hole drilled, I could then double-check centre from above (outside) and it wouldn't be too late to adjust before drilling the full diameter 2 1/4" (57mm) hole if needed. Once satisfied, while holding the lining up I drilled a full diameter plug out

of the lining and starting into the skin from the inside. I then went up top and drilled from outside in to create a clean hole all the way through the roof skin.

### Step 3: Bracing

This wasn't in the instructions but with no structural bracing directly near the remote base hole, I was concerned about the roof skin flexing, especially considering the potential extra weight of the spotlight with an installed thermal unit attached. After all, most car roofs are just thin sheet metal so I decided to make a rectangular plate to reinforce the roof skin around the remote base. I made this from the flat centre of galvanized 150 C-section I had laying around. I drilled another 2 1/4" hole through it and marked and cut it to size with a grinder. This would sit between the underside of the roof skin and housing base inside the cab.

### Step 4: Remote base installation

Dropping the top housing into the main hole from above, you just arrange the housing for best orientation then, taking a 5mm drill bit, drill through the top housing holes into and through the roof skin one at a time. Dropping a bolt through each one as you go will keep proper alignment so it all lines up when you're done (I repeated this process for my reinforcing plate). Once these 5mm are holes drilled it's time for the housing assembly.

First place the rubber gasket on the top housing, position it through the hole from above, then from inside the vehicle have a mate hold the housing base in place while you screw in the retaining bolts from above. I had my home-made reinforcing plate positioned between the roof skin and housing base as well, all hidden under the headlining once in place. With all four base bolts tensioned up, you're ready to assemble the remote handle.

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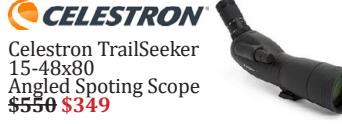
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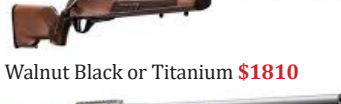
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## A shot in the dark

### Step 5: Remote handle assembly

First step here is to put your three wires through the ball joint tube. Once done, place one of the bushes on the tube from the top and one from the bottom so the ball joint's sandwiched between them, this is all then placed up through the base housing from inside the cab.

There's a lock ring which screws on to the tension ring which in turn screws into the top housing. When tightened, the tension ring squeezes the bushes either side of the ball joint to hold tension (thus position) of the main tube. Once happy with the amount of tension, the locking ring can be tightened to hold it all in place. Now all you do is attach the handle and light switch, a couple of spanners for the lock nuts on both gets this done and you're ready for wiring.



### Step 6: Light install and wiring

As the Ranger's battery is to the right of the engine bay, I ran the two-core power cable from the side of the remote housing base, under the head lining and down the windowsill moulding to under the dash. From here I picked up a gromet in the fire-wall and wired it all to an Anderson plug I'd already installed on the battery.

Back up at the handle, with the three wires through the ball joint tube the black 'negative' goes straight to the power cable negative, the red 'positive' from the spotlight to one side of the on/off switch (on the handle of the remote) and the red 'positive' from the power cable to the other side of the light switch.

The extra red 'positive' from the thermal coupling splices straight into the live 'positive' on the power cable. Bolt the light on up top and connect everything with the electrical connectors provided and you're done. I tidied up all wires with cable ties, having left enough slack so the folding handle could be folded up against the roof when not in use.

### In summary

As thermal technology becomes cheaper and more accessible to us, the ability to combine thermal use with spotlighting is a game-changer. Finding ferals at night even with a spotlight isn't always easy, so the ability to creep around using a thermal to locate targets before lighting them up with spotlights for final identification and to take



**For demonstration purposes Daniel threw a Hikmicro Cheetah NV unit on the mount. Inset: Powa Beam now offer an optional quick-release thermal mount for their spotlights.**

the shot can work well. Night-vision and thermal technology was quickly adopted by professional contract shooters, with most I know now using such equipment. This new Powa Beam spotlight mounting plate works a treat, giving you the ability to quickly clip a unit on or off, all while providing a constant power supply.

As mentioned, Powa Beam are always working to develop and improve their products and Darren has since informed me the thermal mount has already been updated, so

it may not look identical to the one shown here. It'll also be available as an accessory for updating your existing spotlight. More at [powabeam.com.au](http://powabeam.com.au)

• Note: The installation process described here is provided as example only. No liability is accepted or implied. My farm truck is unregistered and will never leave the farm gate. Please ensure you check and comply with all local laws and legal requirements before fitting any electrical device. If in doubt seek professional advice. ●



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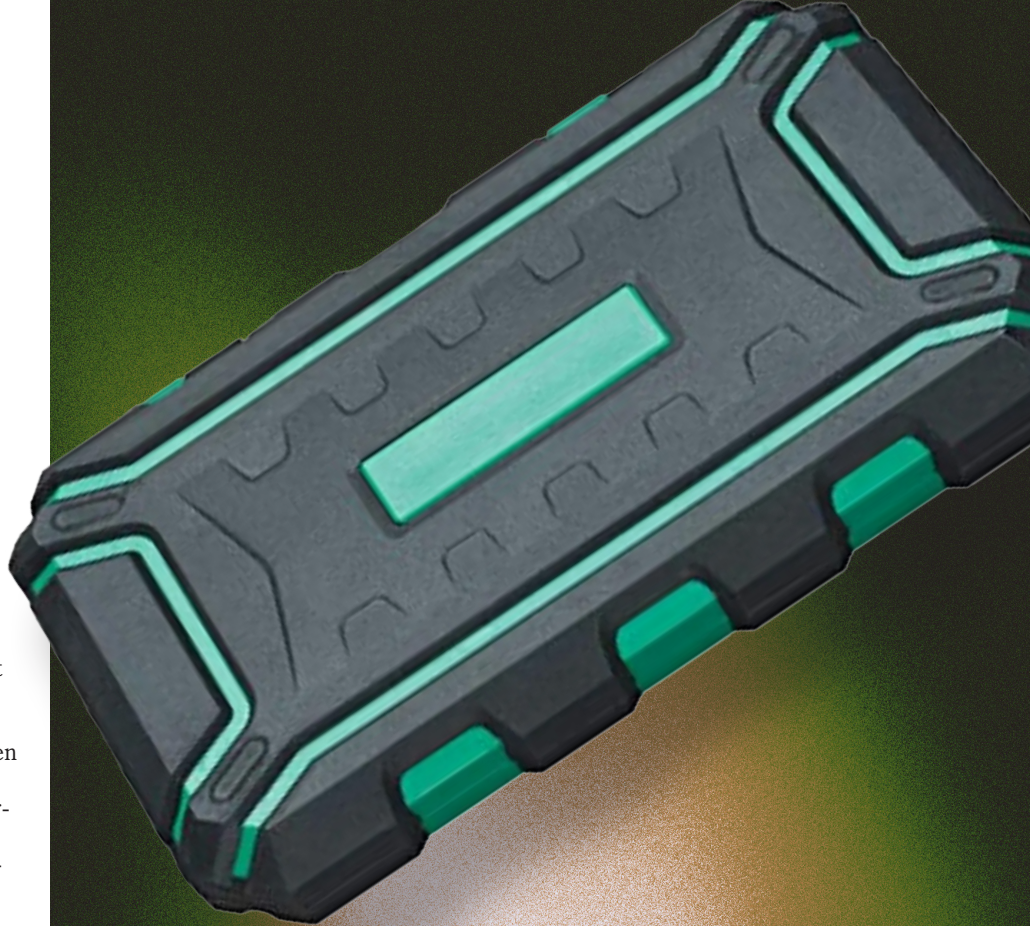
Dick Eussen

When reloading rifle and bullet shells, it's important the correct powder charge is used or bad things can happen like loss of accuracy or, in a worst-case scenario, an action blowup due to an overcharge, something which can also befall you if too-low a charge is used with slow-burning powders.

Working up loads is something I do at the range, using prepared primed cases and a Lee Handloader for seating bullets, weighing the powder charge for every single round. Balance scales are fine but windy conditions can create problems when working from the back of a tailgate or a table in the open. Electric pocket scales are better for this as they're unaffected by movements. I've added an RCBS Digital Pocket Scale to my reloading tools to replace one that simply wore out after years of service. The new scale is the typical green RCBS and will weigh up to 1500 grains, not necessary for my own needs but the option's there.

It's about mobile phone size and opens like a folding wallet. The instructions are on the inside lid and are simple to follow, though must be reset each time the scale is switched off. The digital display reads in either grains or grams, the nominated unit selected by a simple press of a control button of which there are three: Tare, On/Off and Mode. Included are a 50-gram calibration check weight and powder pan.

The unit is powered by two AAA batteries (included) and is of rugged construction with a 1500-grain capacity of 0.1-grain accuracy. In use and once calibrated, which takes a couple of minutes, the scale is simple in operation, weighing powder with rapid precision and making it ideal for measuring every powder charge if so desired on your loading bench or at the range. At time of writing the unit is priced around \$105. ●



The RCBS Digital Pocket Scale is ideal for checking powder weights on the move.

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ISSUE 23

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# LEADING EDGE

**Chris Redlich** had the upper hand with a thermal monocular

**T**he perfect partner for hunters is a good pair of binoculars as, apart from the capability of a compact rangefinder, the appeal of a standalone monocular would never enjoy any such popularity. A thermal imaging monocular on the other hand is a luxury worthy of precious space in the hunter's pack or pocket, while the perfect complement to my recently-reviewed LRF XG50 thermal imaging rifle scope is the Pulsar Thermion Telos XG50 thermal imaging monocular.

With ongoing advancements in technology it's hard to keep up with what's new and what's improved, and while thermal image capturing is advanced it's certainly not 'new'. In fact I was first exposed to it 17 years ago, though back then I don't remember image clarity being all that great. After reviewing more 'civilian' thermals recently, it's clear the technology behind image capturing is on the rise.

Firstly I must reinforce the message that thermal imaging is not to be confused with night-vision equipment. For ease of understanding, night-vision devices use any available ambient light to enhance a complete image in darkness, while thermal imaging optics identify a subject and surroundings by detecting and processing

a heat signature regardless of night or day. I'll leave the technology theory behind the gadgetry for another time so, rather than playing science teacher, I assessed the Telos XG-50 monocular from a practical hunter's point of view.

While fairly new to me, Pulsar is a respected optics firm specialising in thermal imaging which caters to military, hunting and law enforcement. Using Germanic lenses and based in Lithuania, they produce the high-quality optical equipment we've come to expect from European manufacturers. Recent exposure to their LRF XG-50 thermal scope left me impressed with its optical clarity and performance, so I expected likewise with the Telos XG-50 monocular sharing the same objective lens.

It came supplied with a sturdy padded carry pouch, shoulder sling, quick-start guide, lens cleaning cloth, battery pack and charging cable. Weighing 670g and measuring just 238mm, the monocular was compact enough to tuck in my jacket pocket and became my premier detection device when shooting with the XG-50 scope.

The Telos has a strong padded hand-strap which, coupled with the durable black rubber armour, provides a secure grip when viewing, while all electronic touchpad functions are within easy reach. Starting at the top is the 'power on' button. One touch opens the scope for thermal use and a quick flick of the lens cover will reveal your

**Carl uses the Telos on a pre-dawn hunt.**

## Leading edge

imagery. I mention this because yours truly was caught out a couple of times searching for an elusive thermal image, before realising the lens cover was still on!

Behind the power button is a separate bank of three, with the clearly-marked menu (centre) supported front and rear by the up and down buttons. A long press of the menu button opens a wealth of functions including colour mode, wi-fi settings, amplification level, calibration, user modes, display settings and film/photo mode. Scrolling through the modes is as easy as pressing the up or down button.

On reaching the desired setting, briefly press menu again to retain your selection while pressing power on for three seconds will turn off the device. For those who find technology a little intimidating, there's no need to panic here. I thought I'd struggle at first but, after reading the quick-start guide, found the process easy and commend Pulsar for a superb job in relaying simplified product information to the novice.

Before hunting I familiarised at home to avoid any headaches later, which paid dividends as the Telos was a breeze to use in the dark on my first outing. Of the eight colour modes available, three took my fancy including Rainbow, Red Monochrome and my favourite White Hot. The thermal image pauses by default to recalibrate every so often, a vital process in order for the microbolometer to provide a clear image. The Telos monocular shares the same high resolution 640 x 480 pixels as the XG-50 scope so, when looking through one then the other, both images appeared identically defined.

Alternatively the device can be selected to manual calibration if required but I was happy for the Telos to take care of itself. The zoom adjustment of 3.5-14x magnification is easily dialled via the second ring back from the objective and, to sharpen the image further, simply rotate the front focus ring. Like all scopes, the ocular ring

adjusts for dioptré further by customising the device to the user's eyes, while a rubber flap blocks out any glare which may impede viewing.

The battery pack provides around 8½ hours of use but can vary greatly depending on video recording, amplification level, colour brightness or amount of 'standby' use. The supplied USB charging cable was

for years. The Telos can be used instead of a traditional spotlight by mounting to a hand control on the roof. Furthermore, downloading the Pulsar 'Vision Stream 2' app to a smart phone or tablet and syncing the device, allows the thermal view to be displayed alternatively via your screens in the vehicle.

This ability is what sets thermals apart from standard optics, enabling the shooter to sneak around paddocks under complete cover of darkness, detecting nocturnal ferals and despatching them using the thermal scope. While I trialed and exploited the advantages of live streaming images from both the monocular and XG-50 scope to my phone, I didn't have the means for vehicle mounting but nonetheless made good use on foot.

Like its companion XG-50 the Telos has a massive thermal detection range of 2300m on deer-sized animals, with an on-screen display providing optimum detection guides for varying sizes of game. A generous 6.6m span on 14x zoom provides ample field of view way out yonder, though at that range you'd need a good tripod to tame vibration. When using hands-free I preferred to leave it on lowest zoom to avoid fuzzy images.

I've made plenty reference to night-time shooting but put both thermal devices to work equally in daylight. Early morning hunts with my son resulted in arriving at the property before first light where on one occasion three wild dogs ran across a ridge at 600m. Although we were unable to cut them off on foot, I was impressed by how clearly identifiable they were as were cattle, hares and wallabies which littered

the foreground. Later that morning the monocular was used repeatedly for target identification well after sunrise, reinforcing its credentials for thermal use in all types of light (or lack of).

Taking full advantage of this new thermal gear meant I'd a dream period of field testing to enjoy. We wasted no time hunting with the Telos and XG-50 scope combo



**Video footage of Rachel using the XG50 scope showing Rainbow colour mode. Note range/guide on the screen display; Video footage of a hare during a night hunt just seconds before its demise. Showing Red Monochrome colour.**

compatible with my android phone and could be plugged into either a 240v wall point or USB port in my vehicle, making it handy for charging on the run.

The integral camera-style base thread ensures secure fixture to a tripod or vehicle mounting and while a novel concept to me, many pest controllers in our area have been vehicle-mounting thermal monoculars



The Vision Stream app shown in use with the Telos and smartphone during daytime clarity.

## Leading edge

Rachel used the Telos to great advantage while night hunting.



which became a family affair with myself, daughter Rachel and son Carl accounting for numerous feral pigs and critters. The still shots and video recording functions of the monocular captured the moments and hopefully my photos attest to our success.

### And finally

My experience with the Pulsar Telos monocular left me impressed and removed any prejudice I had towards thermal equipment. Pulsar have done a great job in making the Telos a breeze to use and I've spared you the boredom of explaining every detail to focus on what appealed most to me as a hunter.

New generation thermals like Pulsar models are setting the standard for thermal imaging excellence but naturally come at a price. But can you put a price on capability and convenience for pest control? Check your local retailer and I'll let you be the judge. I believe they're competitively priced, considering the advantages of early detection and filming of feral animal heat signatures by stealth. Sold across Australia and proudly backed by distributor TSA Outdoors, Pulsar products come with a three-year manufacturing warranty. More at [tsaoutdoors.com.au](http://tsaoutdoors.com.au)



Above: Standard camera thread makes for versatile tripod or vehicle mounting.  
Below: The Pulsar thermal duo.





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Thermal Imaging Monocular

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SCAN ME

# A BLADE

*for the ages*

Senior Correspondent **John Dunn**  
on the 'other' American classic

JOHND

A recent Nessmuk with 125mm blades. This style has been field tested in the NT on buffalo and banteng with great success.

JOHND

Smaller Nessmuks with shorter 90mm blades are useful for fish and small game, as well as animals up to the size of goats.

A close to original copy of the first Nessmuk, thought to have been designed by George Washington Sears around 1884.

JOHND

**T**hough I've owned, used and lost plenty of different knives over the past 60-odd years of hunting and fishing, I must admit I'd never heard of a Nessmuk until recently, when I saw one in a book by US knifemaking guru Wayne Goddard. I liked what I saw and subsequently found myself researching the style, looking to close out what was obviously a gap in my bladewear education.

#### What is a Nessmuk?

It's a design generally attributed to George Washington Sears (1821-1890) a hunter, outdoorsman and early conservationist who wrote for the US *Forest and Stream* magazine in the 1880s. His pen-name was Nessmuk, a childhood Indian friend who taught him about hunting, fishing, campcraft and the outdoors, interests he pursued his entire life. By all accounts Sears was a small man, rather frail and not too strong and, as such, liked all his gear to be as light as possible. In his writings he promoted back country hunting in the Adirondack mountains and self-guided tours of the New York State lakes in small, open canoes.

During those wanderings Sears carried what he called his trilogy of cutting tools: a fixed blade knife that was to become the Nessmuk, twin-bladed folding knife and small double-bitted axe he had made to his specifications. Drawings of all three appear in his book *Woodcraft and Camping*, published in 1884 and still being reprinted today, his depiction of the fixed-blade knife being the only known illustration of the style. Additionally, no certifiably historic examples of the Nessmuk appear to be known, which begs the question: Why did it become so well accepted? Through its association with Sears and the lifestyle he espoused perhaps, though at the end of the day I don't think anyone really knows.

Sears described his knife as "thin in the blade and handy for skinning, cutting meat or eating". It was undoubtedly better suited to his requirements for lightweight camping and exploring than the more popular Bowie-style which Sears scorned, describing it as a "thick, clumsy affair with a sort of ridge along the middle of the blade, murderous looking but of little use, rather fitted to adorn a dime novel or the belt of Billy the Kid than the outfit of the hunter".

#### The Nessmuk style

There are several obvious characteristics which define this. The first is its overall shape, an elongated and flattened 'S' with a broad, upswept blade and ergonomic down-swept handle. The long cutting edge and depth of blade are well suited to skinning,

breaking down meat or as a slicing tool in the camp or kitchen. The second most obvious feature is the hump on the spine. Set right forward it gives the knife a bull-nosed appearance, characteristic of a skinning knife, while supporting the point and lending a weight-forward heft.

If the knifemaker moves the hump back along the spine towards the handle, the point becomes finer and more useful for making the preliminary cuts needed for skinning. When dressing game, the hump pushes the viscera down and away from the point to avoid messy snagging. If used for scraping it provides a secondary grip point for better control of the blade, while at a pinch it can also be used as a flattened spoon for eating, sharp edge away from the mouth of course.

#### Making a modern Nessmuk

Curious to know how the original pattern handled, I made one with a 125mm blade and 100mm handle, profiled as true to Sears' original drawing as I could. Instead of a one-piece antler handle, I fitted walnut scales to the full tang and secured them with Corby bolts. The finished article looked good and hefted well. It cut and sliced effortlessly, though the lack of a choil to stop a thumb or finger sliding forward on to the blade was a little disconcerting. I wouldn't like to have pushed it too hard with the cutting edge up, as having come this far with my fingers and thumbs scarred but intact, I'd like to keep it that way.

To overcome that shortfall I filed a serrated thumb or finger-rest into the lower edge of the handle directly behind the plunge line, not really a choil but a simple fix which made the knife more secure in the hand. While I enjoyed making it, results convinced me that modern variations were perhaps more practical in terms of field safety, given most have a choil incorporated into their profile. That's the way I decided to make any other interpretations of the style.

To date, all have been made from 3.2mm 1084 or 15N20 high-carbon steel. Blades are either 125 or 90mm long and scales either wood or antler, glued and pinned or Corby-bolted to the tang. Some have been made with serrations on the spine just forward of the scales or in the choil to provide a non-slip grip when pushing the blade.

The 125mm prototype went into my reference collection and the second

to the Territory with Rob Tritten from R & R outfitters for the 2024 buffalo season. He likes it and has refused to give it back and apparently intends to wear it out. His only criticism has been the wooden scales are too smooth and hard to grip with wet or bloody hands, something easily remedied.

The knives with 90mm blades have also created a lot of interest and while made from the same template, all have slightly different blades which vary in depth. Some have a bright finish while others have been stone-washed, though all have proved useful on a variety of game including fish, rabbits and goats. In keeping with Sears' original multi-purpose concept, they're also useful in the kitchen as they would be in camping kit.

#### Overview

Like the Bowie knife before it, the Nessmuk has become a style in its own right, even if some current commercial variations do stretch their historic connections to the limit. *Blade* magazine once described the Nessmuk as the 'all-American outdoor knife' that was a crucial part of US cutlery history. That may well be but, 140 years down the track, many modern iterations are substantially different to the simple knife Sears originally envisaged and drew in his book.

Yet for all that it survived and is still touted as a useful hunting, skinning, camping, woodcraft, tactical or survival knife, depending on who's doing the spruiking. It can be used for all those applications and continues to win new followers, a reality which doesn't surprise me in the least. All knifemakers, owners and users are independent thinkers who know what works for them. We know what we like and, in some circles, the Nessmuk is right up there with the best. Little wonder it has become what many regard as 'different' while at the same time becoming that 'other' American classic. ●



The L.T. Wright Camp Muk is a modern take on a very old design.

# ACTION S



Con Kapralos gets behind a Zastava with a nod to history

**T**he history of the Mauser M98, developed by German rifle designer Paul Mauser and patented in 1898, has been well documented during the past 125 years. Many rifles have the original M98 action still in service and it's also the basis of many fine custom builds, with one of the most popular M98 commercially made actions coming from Zastava in Serbia.

With its roots traced back to 1853, the company has been making M98 actions since 1924 and modern sporting rifles such as the Remington 798, Charles Daly, Whitworth Mark X have used that action as their basis. It has only been in the past 30 years or so Zastava began to seriously market their sporting rifles using the M98

and, in Australia, they were imported by a major firearms player before they dropped it from their catalogue.

Thankfully Queensland-based Pro-Tactical are now importing and distributing Zastava sporting rifles, in particular the LK M70 model. Managing Director Tom Auger sent *Australian Shooter* one of them chambered in the venerable .270 Winchester, mated to a Pecar Optics (Australia) Black Carbon rifle scope in 2.5-10x50. Pro-Tactical offer the LK M70 in a variety of calibres with a walnut stock option. The rifle's offered as a bare unit or as a great package deal with the Black Carbon optic complete with scope-mounting hardware, plastic hard case and leather gun sling.

## **LK M70 at a glance**

The rifle arrived in a cardboard carton and was of the walnut stock models with deeply blued metalwork. The gun is 1140mm long and weighs 3.53kg with the 24" barrel sporting iron sights in the form of a foldable rear leaf-style and matching front hood. The receiver is drilled and tapped for scope-mounting.

## **Barrelled action**

Steel, steel and more steel. The Zastava M98 barrelled action is externally finished to an excellent deep gloss blue, though final finishing and fitment of the bolt to the action is best described as average. Some research reveals that's a well-known shortcoming of the Serbian M98 action

# TATIONS!



but, with a little gunsmithing, things can be put right.

The LK M70 action is of a Control Round Feed (CRF) design. The receiver body is made from a single piece of steel with substantial front and rear receiver rings with a flat underside, a rectangular recoil lug being integral to the receiver forging. Top of the receiver is drilled and tapped for scope-mounting. The bolt itself is pure Mauser M98, consisting of the traditional three-lug design, two up front and one at the rear near the bolt handle. A massive claw-type extractor ejects cases via a fixed blade in the raceway of the action.

As the CRF designation implies, rounds must be loaded into the internal box magazine and on pushing the bolt forward, the



**Heart of the Zastava LK M70 action with the M98 design features.**

## Action stations!



rim of the exposed round slips under the extractor at the front of the bolt and is guided into the chamber. Rounds can't be dropped into the top of the action and chambered as per 'push-feed' actions.

Whether CRF or push-feed actions are superior or inferior has been debated but both work well, though the former have their nuances which users need to know about. Bolt removal is done by drawing it to the rear and pressing the large release tab on the rear-left of the receiver body. Inserting the bolt is also straightforward.

The barrel on the review rifle is chambered in .270 Winchester and of a sporter profile, made from chrome-vanadium steel using the cold-hammer forging process. As mentioned, there are iron sights and while these may have some applications on certain calibres, on flat-shooting options such as the .270 Winchester they're not required. The LK M70 is made with some models having a clean barrel profile (no iron sights) which would be preferable in the Australian market.

### Magazine, trigger and safety

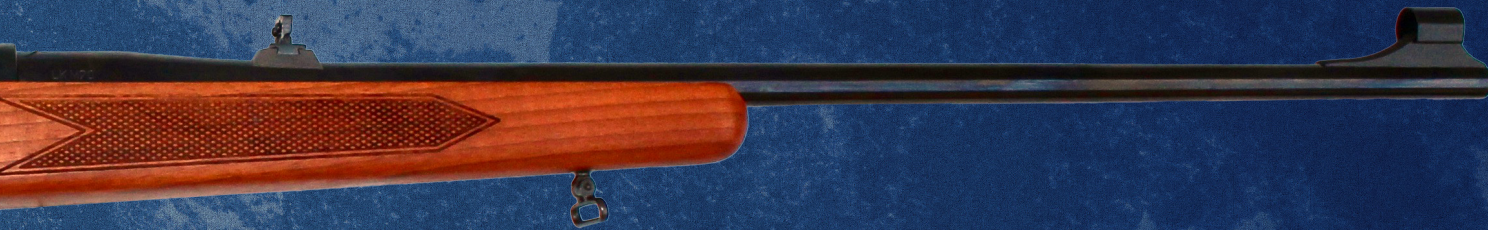
The magazine assembly is an internal box design with a hinged steel floor-plate and steel spring and follower (more steel). The

trigger guard is also part of the bottom floor metal and everything is finished in the same deep blue as the barrelled action. The magazine floor-plate is opened by pressing a small button in front of the trigger guard frame (for .270 Winchester it comfortably holds five rounds). All rounds loaded chambered without fault by the CRF bolt and never presented any issues.

The trigger is a single-stage design and adjustable. My trigger gauge showed a break of 4lbs which is very heavy, though it can be adjusted to a more serviceable 3lbs, something I recommend a gunsmith attend to. Many owners would probably look at after-market triggers of which there are plenty to choose from.

**The fold-down rear left sight (together with front hooded sight) is unnecessary for the flat-shooting .270 Winchester calibre.**





Zastava LK M70 in .270 Winchester as reviewed. The 24" barrel on the review rifle was well finished with a gloss deep bluing.

The safety system is a deviation from the original Mauser M98 which has a three-position wing-safety on the rear of the bolt. Zastava have chosen to fit a two-position linear sliding option which is part of the trigger mechanism and, when active, blocks the trigger directly. It sits neatly behind the bolt handle notch and is easy to operate without being noisy or obtrusive.

#### Stock

This is walnut with a Monte Carlo profile and cheek-piece on the left of the butt-stock (for right-handed shooters). The walnut did have some figure to it but final profiling of the stock and oil finish from the factory was disappointing. Checkering on the pistol grip

and fore-end, again, was quite poor, being impressed as opposed to laser or hand-cut. Why Zastava couldn't pay a little more attention to this is a mystery? A stock that's properly profiled, checkered and oil finished wouldn't cost that much more and would make the rifle so much better.

The stock has a rubber recoil pad which did absorb kickback of the .270 Winchester to some degree, though a Sorbothane pad would have been preferred. The inclusion of sling-swivel loops rather than QD sling-swivel studs is another oversight by Zastava and I'm sure many will discard these and fit the latter.

Inletting of the stock, again, was disappointing. Areas where the action will bear




Left-side of the walnut butt-stock showing the pancake-profiled Monte Carlo cheek-piece.

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## Action stations!



Zastava LK M70 in component form.



Magazine floor-plate in open position with follower and spring evident.

directly upon were roughly finished without sealing the walnut. The rear action screw hole did have a thin steel pillar in it, more to prevent it collapsing rather than provide bedding support. If this stock was mine it would be epoxy bedded as an absolute minimum and the barrel free-floated. It's puzzling why Zastava have taken so many shortcuts with this walnut stock, as a little more thought would've resulted in a much better outcome.

### At the range

The Zastava LK M70 in .270 Winchester was fitted with a Pecar Optics Black Carbon scope in 2.5-10x50 with illumination and German No.4 reticle. Weight of the rifle with optic fitted was 4.2kg, not lightweight but perfectly workable as a hunting option. The rifle was given a thorough clean before testing to remove factory preservatives both inside the bore and all exterior surfaces.

Once bore-sighted and 'on paper' at 100m, testing with three loads which are mainstays in my own Sako 85 Finnlight in .270 Winchester were put through the Zastava, those being Federal Power Shok 130gr SP, Federal Fusion 130gr bonded and a handload with 130gr Sierra Game King.

The first dozen shots gave questionable accuracy but, after a thorough clean, the barrel settled down and accuracy was as I'd expect from a Zastava. Three-shot groups from all test loads averaged around 1-MOA with none over 1.25 and some handload groups nudging 0.75 which indicates a quality barrel.

### Who's the LK M70 for?

This one's aimed squarely at the rifle purist who's a fan of the Mauser 98 action and Control Round Feed it embraces. I'm sure many are bought new as the basis for a custom build and I've seen some very fine custom rifles use commercial Zastava M98 actions. But for a shooter or hunter who prefers the walnut and 'all-steel' design of the LK M70, the rifle does represent a good buy providing some work's done on the bolt travel, stock finish and bedding.

The Zastava LK M70 retails as a bare rifle in most popular calibres for around \$1595 (heavy magnum calibres \$1799) or as a package deal including rifle, Pecar Optics Black Carbon scope, rings, bases, a neat Max Guard hard plastic gun case and Max Guard PU leather sling for about \$1990. More at [protactical.com.au](http://protactical.com.au) ●

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# Cops ‘getting better’ at tracking 3D-printed guns

**John Maxwell**

In its 2016 Illicit Firearms in Australia report, the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC) assessed the threat of 3D printing of firearms as ‘low’. Guns manufactured illicitly using conventional technology posed a greater risk but were far outnumbered by factory-made ones in criminal hands. In the ensuing nine years much has changed.

Late last year state, territory and Commonwealth law enforcement agencies formed a cooperative national initiative targeting the manufacture, trafficking and use of illegal firearms throughout Australia. It’s called Operation ATHENA. Criminals have long used homemade guns but it’s 3D-printed guns which have attracted media attention.

“Over the past three or four years, with advance of technology the quality of parts and materials have changed,” NSW Police Detective Superintendent John Watson, chairman of Operation ATHENA, told *Australian Shooter*. “Five years ago, privately-made firearms were single-shot, low-powered weapons. What we’re seeing now is the other end of the scale - high-powered semi-automatic weapons and really only limited by people’s imagination. Organised crime is certainly an element that’s involved with these.”

The growing risk has been highlighted by a succession of busts so here are a few. Last October, a 36-year-old was charged with multiple offences after investigators seized 21 3D-printed firearms, printers and gun components, along with methylamphetamine and \$72,500 cash, during a raid on his home in Perth’s northern suburbs.

In July the ABC reported that a man who bought a 3D printer to help his autistic son with school work, pleaded guilty of attempting to manufacture firearms. Police discovered a dismantled 3D-printed firearm and seven boxes of manufactured firearm magazines in his home on the New South Wales mid-north coast.



Illegal guns come in all shapes and sizes.

In June 2022 an 18-year-old Western Australia man was arrested after a raid by the Drug and Firearm Squad which found a fully-functional 3D-printed semi-automatic firearm along with other illegal weapons. Then in August, Victorian police found 3D-printed guns along with a large scale hydroponic cannabis operation.

Yet law enforcement isn’t wholly worried about 3D-printed guns, with its concerns directed more broadly at what are now referred to as privately manufactured firearms (PMFs). These include 3D-printed guns, those made by home manufacture using conventional steel and other components and commercially sourced parts, or any combination thereof.

And this isn’t being done solely by criminals. DS Watson said police have encountered a wide range of individuals engaged in private manufacture of firearms.

“It may well be people have an interest in technology, so not necessarily firearms themselves. They may not necessarily be licensed shooters, because technology is shifting and the ease with which people can do it has moved,” he said.

“Then you have those with the express intent to make firearm parts, people acting outside the law, the criminally minded, ones who want to make a profit and those who want to go under the radar,” he added. “Then there’s another side of the spectrum with fixated people, those involved in organised crime and, sadly, people with mental health issues.”

In all of this what hasn’t changed is the law. Making your own guns this way is illegal and most always has been. In some jurisdictions it’s also illegal to possess the computer files used for 3D-printing of guns, though DS Watson stressed



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Home-made and 3D-printed guns are becoming more prevalent.

*In one case a 13-year-old boy was manufacturing and selling ghost guns to local criminals... In the ensuing shootout the teen inadvertently shot dead his 14-year-old sister. Clearly the appeal of illicitly-made firearms... is they're available to those who can't legally acquire guns.*

"If you're a licensed shooter and have registered firearms, you're lawfully allowed to make certain parts and modifications and arrange yourself through dealers to do those things," DS Watson said. "The law hasn't changed. As long as they know the law and their guns are registered, they're entitled to do what they've always done."

The problem with PMFs was highlighted globally after the murder of US health insurance chief executive Brian Thompson in New York on December 4. The killer was armed with a handgun which included some 3D-printed components including a suppressor. In US parlance this was a 'ghost gun', a term not applicable in Australia where gun laws are quite different.

Ghost guns feature a frame with no serial number and of which there's no record, making the firearm untraceable (in theory). It's entirely feasible to 3D-print the frame for a Glock or

AR-15, then complete the job with unregulated components bought over-the-counter or online. It's actually legal for an individual in the US to make a gun in this manner though it becomes highly illegal when that gun is sold. They especially appeal to felons who, under US laws, are barred from acquiring regular firearms through conventional channels.

Ghost guns have increasingly featured in US school and other shootings. In one case a 13-year-old boy was manufacturing and selling ghost guns to local criminals,

one of whom sought to avoid paying. In the ensuing shootout the teen inadvertently shot dead his 14-year-old sister. Clearly the appeal of illicitly-made firearms whether in the US, Australia or anywhere else, is they're available to those who can't legally acquire guns and can't be readily traced.

"What makes 3D printing and illicit parts so dangerous is we can't track them, we can't track the modifications, we can't track the firearms in the conventional ways licensed dealers know and understand," said DS Watson.

What particularly concerns him and others in Australian law enforcement is one specific 3D-printed design. "If there's one weapon that's of serious concern it's something called the FGC-9. It's a semi-automatic weapon, high-powered with potential for multiple rounds in short bursts. They're a concern and we want to make sure people are aware they can't manufacture these guns," he said. "They're highly illegal, it's a criminal act and we in law enforcement are getting better at tracking people engaged in this activity."

FGC-9 is a 9mm semi-automatic carbine with high magazine capacity. Most components can be 3D-printed and these often seem to be encountered in a range of vibrant colours, creating resemblance to a harmless toy Nerf gun which they most assuredly are not. This is a notable advance on the first 3D-printed gun, the 2013 Liberator single-shot .22 pistol and the design which launched the furore over 3D-printed firearms. Liberator was nearly all plastic and many were made, including by law enforcement to assess how well

Operation ATHENA wasn't directed at licensed shooters.

As most of us well know, the shooting fraternity includes numerous inveterate tinkerers. For some that's the process of repairing or improving their guns through addition of parts and accessories, for others it's the creation of a custom hunting or target rifle. I myself assembled a number of .303 rifles from parts, while my ongoing project is the creation of a custom sporter in 7mm Mauser. In each case the basis was a registered legal receiver.

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## Cops 'getting better' at tracking 3D printed guns



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Becoming increasingly accessible, this 3D printer retails for \$359.

they worked. The verdict? Not very well as if it didn't blow up on first shot, it would soon after.

The reality is 3D-printed plastic won't work for barrels and there's really no substitute for steel in certain components such as pins and springs. The FGC-9, which has passed through various iterations, draws much of its design from the Shutty AP9, itself inspired by the Luty all-metal sub-machinegun designed by UK gun rights activist Philip Luty in the 1990s. His designs used a smoothbore barrel and parts modified from common hardware store items and have turned up all over the world in the hands of criminals, insurgents, extremists and obsessed loners.

FGC-9 means F\*\*k Gun Control 9mm, with the design developed in Europe and intended to circumvent gun laws there through use of non-regulated parts. That's less of an issue in the US, where components such as barrels and AR-15 fire control groups are readily available, though it's not the case in Australia where many components are unavailable, even to licensed shooters.

But there is the vast US market and allure of the internet. Australian Border

Force has busted people seeking to import firearms components by mail and freight, presumably on the assumption their items won't be noticed amidst all those parcels from Amazon.

DS Watson said law enforcement is becoming better at tracking people seeking to make their own guns, whether by 3D printing or importing components. How are they doing this? "That's a matter I won't discuss," he said. "Every law enforcement agency contributes and our forensic and ballistic intelligence capabilities are second to none."

Anyone trying this faces severe penalties, including jail time, while for licensed shooters the consequences could be loss of licence and guns, with a potentially lengthy prohibition on regaining a licence, if ever. DS Watson again stressed police aren't out to target licensed shooters. "It's about those who step outside the law," he said. "More importantly it's about leveraging the licensed shooter community. If they know anyone who's doing it, ask them to stop or report it to Crimestoppers. It just puts other licensed shooters in the spotlight." ●



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# SOLID AS A ROCK

## Matthew Godson on a portable maintenance option

**T**he Go-Vice from Pro-Tactical is an ideal device for those looking for something neat and simple to hold firearms on their workbench, kitchen table or at the range. It has a compact, collapsible and portable design which extends lengthwise to match-up well with most firearms and provides a stable platform to enable users to carry out gun care on the go or at home. The folding design of the Go-Vice allows it to fit easily into your range bag or box, so it can travel with you in case some field or range maintenance or cleaning is required. It takes just a few seconds to fold out ready for use.

Its features include two non-marring rubber holding forks to protect your firearm, two small built-in accessory trays for loose screws or parts, six rubber non-skid feet to hold the Go-Vice in position and a pullout expandable design with a length range from 285-450mm to suit most firearms. The holding forks conveniently fold down to make it a compact size for storage (285 x 60 x 135mm) and the polymer and nylon construction is solvent and oil-resistant. It weighs a mere 600g and, when unfolded and ready to use, its full extended length is around 450 x 190 x 135mm.

I took it to the SSAA Para range while conducting some load development and used it to hold my firearms when not in use. It's certainly a better option than leaving them on top of a front rest and bag which at times in the past allowed the gun to slip from an upright position. Once in the Go-Vice a rifle's going nowhere as it's locked tight in the holding forks.

Away from the range when it was time to clean my firearms, I used the Go-Vice to hold them while undertaking general maintenance. At no time did my firearms slip or become unstable while pushing patches down the barrel or wiping down the surfaces. This was a huge improvement on my other holder, which allowed guns to move around to the point where I'd have to physically hold them in place.

I found the Go-Vice an extremely useful piece of kit. For those who favour compact equipment that won't take up lots of room on the workbench, gun box or bag, this is for you. It provides rock-solid stability during cleaning and maintenance of your firearms and, being lightweight, compact and portable, these are certainly features many will appreciate. The Go-Vice RRP is around \$99. More at [protactical.com.au](http://protactical.com.au) ●

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PRICES SUBJECT TO CHANGE



# Facing a brutal reality

If you're shooting outdoors  
you're at risk of skin cancer,  
warns **Derek Nugent**

**M**ost Australians are fully aware of the potential pitfalls of time spent in the great outdoors and plan accordingly. We carry snakebite kits hoping never to have to use them. An assortment of first aid kits slip into backpacks or bounce around in vehicles and boats as part of our preparation for venturing afield. We traverse the terrain with care, knowing the potential disaster that can come of a fall due to a seemingly stable log or rock suddenly giving way. And being aware of the effects of dehydration and heat exhaustion, we habitually carry adequate supplies of both food and water.

However, the facts show that many of us, young and old, continue to be quite dismissive of the most constant threat surrounding us when we venture forth, namely the sun and, in particular, its influence on the health of our skin. In this respect I am of course speaking of skin cancer and its impact on the lives of many, many thousands of Australians annually. An awareness of this insidious disease should be front and centre in the minds of all who habitually spend a lot of time outdoors, hunters included.

#### **A most remarkable thing**

If you're anything like me you take your skin somewhat for granted, yet what a remarkable thing it is. The skin, which carries an amazing 17km of blood vessels, is made up of two layers - the epidermis or top layer and dermis the layer below it. The former is made up of basal and squamous cells (keratinocyte cells) and melanocytes, while the dermis consists of fibrous tissues, hair follicles, sweat glands, blood vessels, lymph vessels and nerves.

The skin is the largest organ in your body and accounts for 10-15 per cent of your weight, the average person having 300 million skin cells and shedding 30,000

a minute. It's a self-healing, waterproof layer which protects us from all manner of incursions, infections and environmental threats and has the ability to both warm and cool our bodies. Although an inherently resilient organ, statistics show we need to do a lot more to protect our skin from the sun.

#### **Grim reality**

Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world, two to three times greater than countries like Canada, the US and UK, the average Aussie having a two-in-three chance of developing a skin cancer in their lifetime. The cancer itself is a manifestation of sun exposure and damage, not a function of temperature but rather UV radiation levels. This means it's a year-round issue in this country, particularly when the UV index is moderate (3) or higher.

Unfortunately you can't feel or see UV radiation but can be at risk in as little as 11 minutes in the height of summer. Anyone can be affected by skin cancer but people most at risk are those with fair or freckled skin and regular sun exposure (annually some 80 per cent of all newly-diagnosed cancers are skin). There are more than 100 treatments for skin cancer in this country every hour and, sadly, around 2000 deaths a year, and while that death rate is actually in decline, it still sits at 4.9 people per 100,000.

Skin cancer is the abnormal growth of UV-damaged cells and has a variety of presentations depending on its type. These range from flaky, non-healing sores to small red, pale or pearly lumps or spots, moles and freckles changing colour, thickness or shape in a short timeframe. There are three common types: Basal cell carcinoma (BCC) which account for roughly 66 per cent of diagnoses, squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) which account for about 33 per cent, with melanoma making up the remaining 1-2 per cent.

Collectively BCC and SCC are known as non-melanoma cancers and are least invasive and dangerous of the three. Melanomas

themselves are the deadliest form of skin cancer but with early intervention life-saving outcomes can be had, yet without appropriate treatment all three can pose a very serious risk to life and limb.

#### **BCC and SCC**

Basal cell carcinomas are the most common skin cancer in Australia, accounting for two of every three new diagnoses. They mostly appear in people over 40 and develop in the lower layer of the epidermis. They can appear anywhere on the body but most typically on those areas with high sun exposure including the head, face, neck, shoulders and back. The usual presentation is that of a pearly lump or a scaly dry area of skin. They're very slow growing and rarely spread to other parts of the body, though if left untreated can cause complications and treatment can result in disfigurement.

Squamous cell carcinomas are less common but still prevalent and responsible for about one-third of all diagnoses. They mostly effect people over 50 and form in the upper layer of the epidermis, again in areas of frequent sun exposure like the head, hands, neck, arms and legs. They tend to be quick growing, often over a period of weeks or a few months and are characterised by a thickened, red scaly spot which looks like an unhealed sore and can be tender to the touch.

An SCC isn't usually life-threatening but if left untreated an advanced one can spread (metastasize) beyond the skin to lymph nodes and other tissues and organs. In this instance it can become as deadly as a melanoma. Treatment options for both BCCs and SCCs are basically the same and include biopsy, surgery, chemotherapy via cream or ointment, radiation or cryotherapy (freezing). The prognosis for both after treatment is usually very good.

#### **Melanoma**

Without doubt this is the diagnosis you do not want to hear from your doctor. Melanomas are the most dangerous form of skin cancer as they're most likely to



Slip, slop, slap, slide and seek - bare essentials for the outdoors.

*Slip, Slop, Slap, Slide and Seek. In the context of the outdoors person in general and hunter in particular, the advice is to 'slip' on UV-rated longs (shirt and trousers), 'slop' on 50+ sunscreen and reapply regularly, 'slap' on a broad-brimmed hat, 'slide' on some sunnies and 'seek' shade.*

metastasize and spread throughout the body. But having said that, if caught early, treatments are increasingly more effective and result in enhanced survival rates.

Unfortunately Australia has the highest rate of melanoma in the world, being the second most common cancer in men and third in women. It's also the most common cancer for Australians aged 20 to 39. In fact 11 per cent of all new cancer diagnosis are melanoma and each of us has a one-in-17 chance of being diagnosed with one by age 85. Each year 27,500 people are diagnosed with a non-invasive (in situ) melanoma, meaning one confined to the epidermis and 17,800 with an invasive one which has spread into the dermis if not beyond.

The annual death toll from melanoma is around 1300, more than two-thirds of whom are men. A melanoma can grow anywhere on the body including areas rarely exposed to the sun, like the soles of the feet. Medically speaking, those most at risk are fair or red-haired with blue or green eyes and a propensity for moles and freckles. Having a family history of melanoma or previous skin cancer of any sort are also high risk factors and, if you've had a previous melanoma, you're five times more likely to get another.

Melanoma is characterised by moles, spots and freckles which are new, different, raised, firm or fast-growing. In fact any instances where there are rapid changes in the shape, size or colour of a bodily lesion should be deemed suspicious and immediately investigated. There are five main subtypes: Superficial spreading melanoma,

nodular, lentigo maligna, acral lentiginous and desmoplastic. Each has its own characteristics and peculiarities which I have no intention of trying to explain, though my understanding is all can be deadly. Treatment for early-stage melanoma is surgery while advanced melanoma is treated by a variety of means including surgery, immunotherapy, targeted therapy and radiation therapy. The five-year survival rate is around 94 per cent.

#### **Prevention better than cure**

Avoiding skin cancer is much better than dealing with it and is also very simple. For years the Cancer Council has regaled us with their preventative formula: Slip, Slop, Slap, Slide and Seek. In the context of the outdoors person in general and hunter in particular, the advice is to 'slip' on UV-rated longs (shirt and trousers), 'slop' on 50+ sunscreen and reapply regularly, 'slap' on a broad-brimmed hat, 'slide' on some sunnies and 'seek' shade whenever possible - it's not rocket science!

Beyond this is the practical proactive step of annual full-body skin checks with your GP or skin specialist. Furthermore, the habit of immediately seeking medical advice in response to any possible skin issue is equally appropriate and effective. It's a fact that if caught in its early stages skin cancer, regardless of type, is highly treatable with excellent prospects for positive outcomes. Sadly, the opposite is also true. The adoption of the blinkered 'she'll be right' attitude, particularly among men, is a harbinger of disaster and regret.

Being in my sixties I'm now seeing the effects of over-exposure to the sun, having recently had a large SCC removed from my arm. These days I'm acutely sun-safe and have been for decades, yet as a youth growing up in far north Queensland had my fair share of the rays and more. I'm paying for that now, as are several of my hunting companions, and while we jokingly refer to skin cancer treatments as 'having some rust cut out', it's far from a laughing matter.

Thus if this article prompts even one reader to have that nasty-looking mole checked out, it'll have more than served its purpose. It's a case of learning from the experience of others and putting that into potentially lifesaving action. For more detailed information and advice see one of the many online sites available, particularly the Cancer Council or your family doctor. Please consider - it might just save your life.

• Statistical data and factual material for this piece was garnered, summarized and synthesized into an original article from a variety of publicly available sources. ●



Suitably sun-safe when afield.

# THE GOOD AND BAD OF BULLETS

Hunter **Thomas Tabor** on the importance of getting it right



If you're the type of shooter who likes to punch holes in paper targets or chip the paint on silhouettes, your main goal is probably finding a bullet which simply shoots accurately. But if you're a hunter, accuracy is no more important than how your bullet performs on reaching its target. In this case all hunters should be seeking a design which functions consistently, produces good frontal expansion, retains a high degree of its original weight and penetrates deep enough to reach the vital organs. Yet designing and producing such a bullet is both difficult and expensive. As such, there are many bullets on the market today which manufacturers profess to be great hunting bullets though frequently fail in that endeavour.

## First true hunting bullet

William (Bill) Dean Steigers, founder and owner of the historic Bitterroot Bullet Company, has often been credited with creating the first genuine hunting bullet. That company began in 1964 and was responsible for developing a unique

core bonding process, which actually did provide a degree of success when coupled with the bullet's other superior design characteristics.



**Bill Steigers, owner of the Bitterroot Bullet Company, has been justifiably credited for creating the first true hunting bullet.**

Unfortunately Steigers is no longer with us but his early work in this area eventually led to a whole new generation of better and more reliable hunting bullets. While I believe he was responsible for moving the needle a long way forward towards quality hunting bullets, to my mind no bonding process is truly effective just by itself, it needs other factors to make it completely successful.

## Self-inflicted fiasco

As a gun writer I'm often given the responsibility of using and evaluating different products, though on occasion that's led to unsuspected consequences as was the case a couple of years ago. Rather than taking my normally reliable 6.5 Creedmoor handloads on a deer hunt, I decided to try some of Hornady's new factory ammo loaded with GMX plastic-tipped bullets.

Being an all-copper design I mistakenly assumed the GMX would likely be on par with one of my favourite hunting bullets, the Barnes TTSX. Being the GMX was rated by the company for use on medium to large-sized game, I didn't see a problem using it



There are lots of options advertised as hunting bullets - the challenge is to find those capable of producing consistently high results.

on my upcoming deer hunt where a nice buck presented itself at about 40-50 meters.

As always, I strive for an instant one-shot kill yet even at that close range it took more than one shot to finally kill that deer. I'd never experienced that before and it wasn't until I skinned the carcass I discovered what had actually happened. Amazingly I found the bullets hadn't penetrated much beyond the inside of the hide. There was considerable blood shot and tissue damage just under the hide, yet the bullets hadn't penetrated much deeper than that (even the ribs were intact).

I assume others eventually identified this problem as the company website now only lists the GMX being available in a 70-grain .22 calibre bullet, yet even this one's recommended by the factory as acceptable for use on medium-sized game. So as a result of this admittedly personal fiasco I came away realising two things: Just because a bullet comprises all copper alloy doesn't mean it won't self-destruct on impact, and no-one should take a manufacturer's recommendations as gospel.



Tom used Barnes Triple Shock X handloads on an NT buffalo hunt. These came from two buffaloes taken with his custom .500 Jeffery calibre rifle.

## The good and bad of bullets



**Top:** The all-copper alloy Barnes Triple Shock X was a new way of thinking about hunting bullets. **Above:** After the Barnes Triple Shock X came a plastic-tipped version called the Tipped Triple Shock X (TTSX) which typically carries a higher ballistic coefficient value.

Hornady still offer an all-copper alloy bullet which they call their CX (Copper alloy eXpanding), though I've never had the urge to try one, while Nosler also played around with the idea of non-lead bullets as did a few lesser-known manufacturers. Yet for all practical purposes at least for now, Barnes has pretty much cornered the market for non-lead bullets. I've used their all-coppers on everything from deer-sized game all the way up to Asian water buffalo and couldn't be happier with the results. They always seem to produce deep penetration, great frontal expansion and almost 100 per cent retained weight.

### Lead-free options

Credit for the first commercially available lead-free projectiles goes to Randy Brooks of Barnes Bullets. After buying a small non-descript manufacturing operation owned and operated by Fred Barnes in 1974, Brooks became disillusioned with essentially all available lead core-based bullets and began experimenting with different designs, leading to the company developing the copper alloy X-Bullet in 1989.

Back then like many shooters I was initially sceptical of the idea of an all-copper bullet, though after hunting with

the X-Bullet (TSX and TTSX) for many years, and having used them in a wide variety of different calibres, I became a devoted fan. Obviously copper weighs less than lead which means a copper-alloy bullet will be longer compared to the usual lead core bullet of the same weight. While longer bullets generally results in elevating their ballistic coefficient, it often requires them to be seated a little deeper into the cartridge case.

### Partition bullets

The basic concept behind the partition design is to have two inner lead core compartments separated by a heavy copper alloy partition. This barrier is intended to act as a means of preventing the lead base section of the bullet from fragmenting and coming apart on impact, which typically results in more than 60 per cent of original weight being retained.

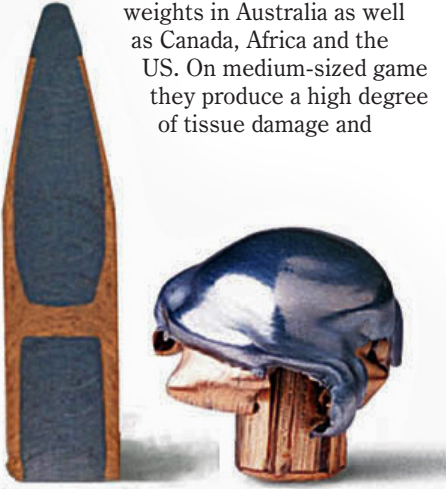
John A. Nosler was first to develop the concept of a two partition-style hunting bullet. As a result of failing to bring down a particularly stubborn mud-caked Canadian bull moose in 1946 with his .300 H&H Magnum rifle, Nosler and friend Clarence Purdie decided it was time for a better hunting bullet and, in 1948, the Nosler



**Tom** took this NT feral donkey using a 7mm WSM rifle loaded with Barnes Triple Shock X handloads.

Partition made its debut. While some other manufacturers have produced their own partition-style designs, Nosler is the best-known and most popular today.

Over many decades of hunting I've taken more big and medium-size game animals using Nosler Partitions than any other bullet. That has included a wide variety of cartridge calibres and animals of various sizes and weights in Australia as well as Canada, Africa and the US. On medium-sized game they produce a high degree of tissue damage and



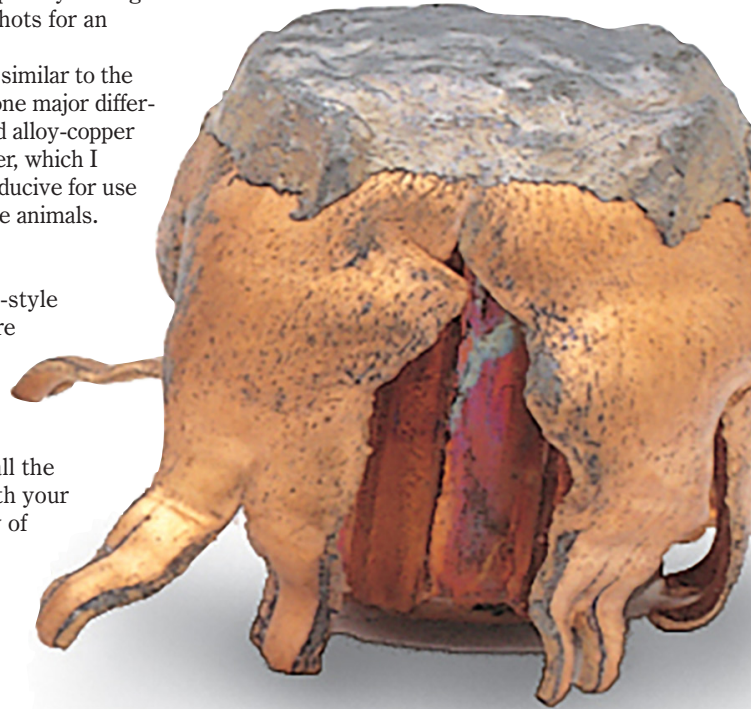
Nosler Partitions performs well on medium and large game animals.

frequently penetrate completely through the animal on broadside shots for an instant kill.

Swift also make a bullet similar to the Nosler Partition but with one major difference. Both its partition and alloy-copper jacket is thicker and heavier, which I believe makes it more conducive for use on larger and tougher game animals.

**The way I see it**

True high-quality hunting-style bullets will always be more expensive than the all lead-core designs, yet the costs incurred in hunting ammo frequently pales when compared to all the other costs associated with your adventures. So to my way of thinking those few extra dollars you spend on a reliable bullet, whether handloads or factory-loaded, is a small price to pay for success in the field. And every hunter should be striving for instant kills, not just for their own benefit but for the treatment of the animals they hunt. ●



One of the early high-quality hunting bullets is Speer's Grand Slam.



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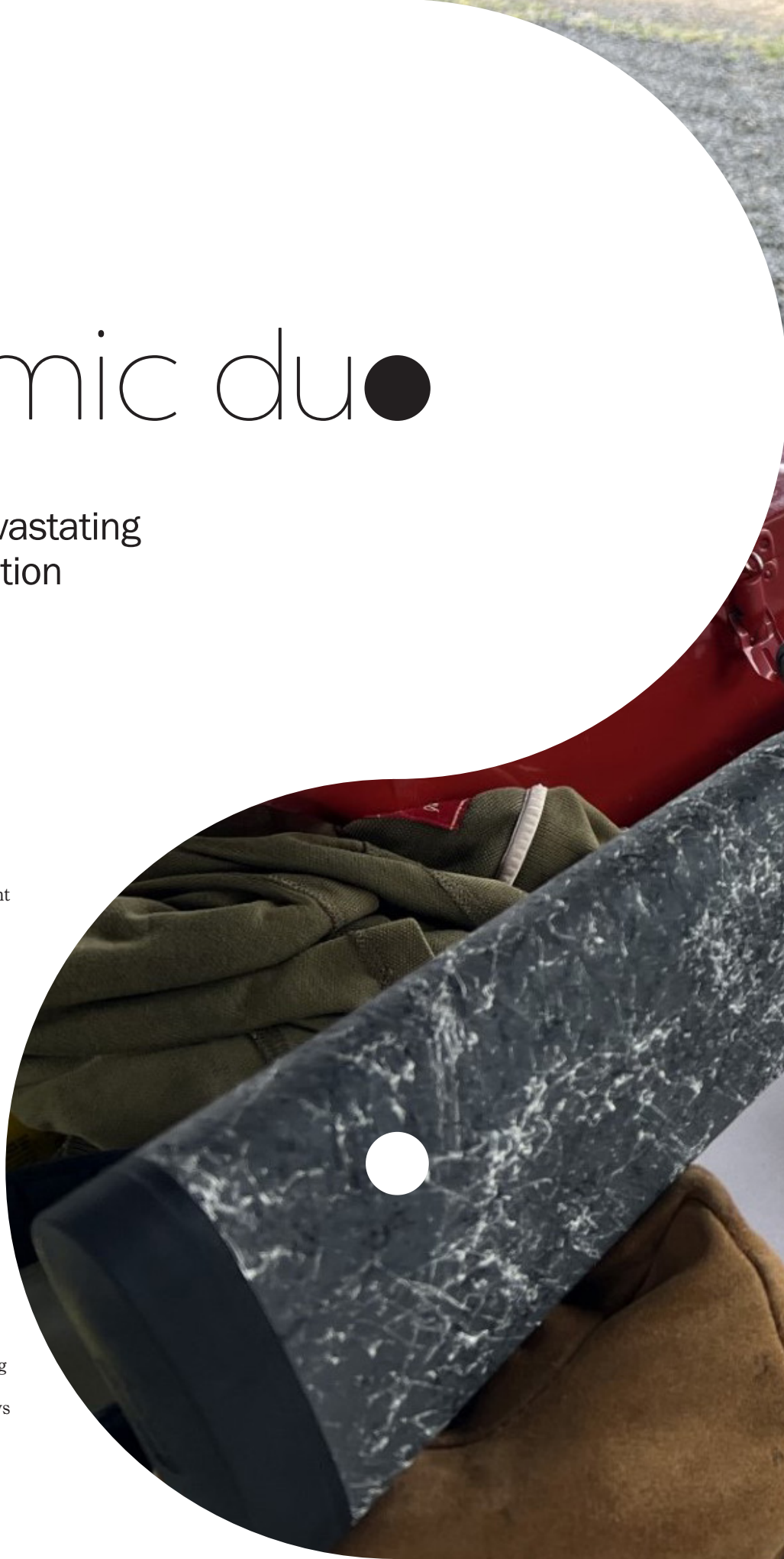
# Dynamic duo ●

## Paul Miller on a devastating long-range combination

**W**hen it comes to accuracy and reliability the Remington 700 series rifles are one of America's most famous factory offerings of all time, introduced to the market in 1962 and becoming an instant hit. Countless trees have been sacrificed to print magazine articles about this bolt-action legend and here am I adding to that pile. I should also say I'm slightly biased, having owned three Remington 700s with two of those in my safe. What was I thinking when I sold the other one?

The review rifle was delivered in a magnificent Pelican 'Vault' double gun case, the best and most secure example I've seen to date (it'll be reviewed later). On opening the Vault I was greeted by a substantial-looking firearm and scope combination with the rifle designated Remington Model 700 Long Range HS.

Importers are Nioa of Queensland and their 2024-25 catalogue says this model is threaded ( $\frac{5}{8}$ " x 24) at the muzzle, though the test rifle is not. A muzzle brake would be handy in this instance to reduce recoil from some of the high-performance cartridges available (including test rifle in 7mm Rem mag). Less recoil, irrespective of cartridge recoil level, always contributes to better accuracy when the operator can concentrate on the job and shoot as comfortably as possible.





The Remington's performance and accuracy was phenomenal and genuinely eye-opening.



*To say the gun shot well would be a major understatement*

The substantial yet lightweight Leupold VX-5HD 4-20x52 CDS certainly helped bring out the best in this rifle-scope combo.

The Leupold scope mounted on the rifle is also imported by Nioa and is the high-end VX5 HD 4-20x52 with Zero Lock 2 and CDS dial. It would be hard to imagine a better-balanced scope of this size, quality and versatile magnification range. I was itching to see how the combination would come together and if the rifle's potential would be realised with Leupold's Compact Dial System tuned in to the factory load provided.

#### Action

The famous Remington 700 action clearly needs no introduction, being one of the world's most famous bolt-actions in terms of reliability, strength and accuracy. It's been widely copied and is always in demand for aftermarket custom rifles for target or game hunting where pinpoint accuracy is vital. Not being overly mechanical, I'm more interested in how the rifle shoots and looks (which makes me sound a bit shallow), as we often judge a book by its cover and the Remington 700 is a very smart, sweptback bolt design.

The receiver is of solid steel bar stock which has always been said to be a contributor to strength and overall accuracy. This rifle sports a Timney trigger which let off very crisply at 3lbs and was a pleasure to shoot because of its consistency, which contributed enormously to the remarkable results achieved.

#### Stock

First thing I noticed on opening the Pelican 'Vault' was the rifle's purposeful-looking stock. Made by US firm H-S Precision, it's state of the art with a moulded-in aluminium bedding block (H-S were among the first to offer synthetic stocks). I believe they were also first to incorporate a full-length bedding block which has certainly proved to enhance accuracy. You can take the action out the stock and replace it to find there's no change in point of impact - very impressive.

I managed to find an immaculate second-hand short-action left-handed H-S Precision stock for my 17 Remington a few years ago in Canberra and couldn't wipe the smile off my dial for about two weeks. Both stocks provide full floating and ample clearance for both barrels on these two 700-actioned rifles.

With all the bells and whistles available on rifles today - adjustable combs, replaceable pistol grips and fore-ends - I was pleasantly surprised to see this one had a simple but substantially high stock (drop at comb 1¼" and 1½" at heel) with a particularly comfortable and steeply shaped pistol grip. The grip was the same both sides with effectively two light palm swells which felt equally comfortable left or right-handed. The fore-end was wide and spiderweb white and grey colour scheme and substantial feel won me over immediately (there are two swivel studs on the fore-end).

This is a very cleverly designed and super-strong stock which greatly enhanced 'shootability' as we'll see. It was also

somehow reducing recoil, something I experienced with my old 700 BDL timber-stocked 30-06 that was much more pleasant to shoot when I fitted a Bell and Carlson synthetic stock many years ago.

#### Barrel

The 700 Long Range has a substantial carbon steel 5R barrel made for enhanced accuracy, hammer forged, 26" long and tapering to 21mm (.820") at the muzzle. It has a concave crown and the test rifle is chambered in 7mm Rem Mag, a serious package for the long-range hunter or target shooter.

The rifling twist rate has been increased to 1:8" from the more standard 1:9 or 1:10 we've traditionally seen in 7mm (.284) cartridges. This faster twist is necessary to stabilise the longest 7mm projectiles available in the 180gn range, like Hornady's ELD-X match which is essentially a target-grade hunting bullet.

#### Scope and mounts

The rifle was supplied with a Leupold VX-5HD 4-20x52 scope with 34mm tube. The reticle was a simple unadorned fine duplex and optical clarity and accuracy of adjustments were perfection (the scope was already seated in Leupold mounts on a Leupold Picatinny rail). The rifle had been sighted-in and accuracy tested by Nioa technicians, a CDS dial calibrated to the height the scope was mounted above the centre line of the barrel's bore with the Remington Premium hunting ammunition supplied.



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who know



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## Dynamic duo!



The 6" steel plate at 500m - this group is less than 2.5"

### Performance

To say the gun shot well would be a major understatement. Everything about this package came together to give me a shooting experience off the bench that was frankly awesome. At 100m the rifle easily shot sub half-minute of angle which confirmed the test target. It maintained this level of accuracy all the way out to 500m and I managed the best groups I've ever shot at that range (three-shot groups averaged just under 2.5").

I was using Remington 150gn Core-Lokt tipped factory premium hunting ammo which the rifle clearly loved and it's hard to imagine improving on this with handloads. Sometimes the stars align with factory loads and this is a fine example. As much as I love reloading and fine-tuning a special one for my rifles, I think these loads would still hold their own, testament to the quality of US-loaded Remington cartridges.

The Leupold scope with its fine reticle was perfect for precision shot placement and the CDS dial adjustments were spot-on out to 500m. At 20-power I could easily see bullet impacts on the 6" steel plate. I hoped to head out for some longer range testing as the dial was set up to 1050m but weather and time constraints thwarted that plan. I've no doubt that, judging by the performance to 500m, this package would still be spot-on to around 1000m and probably holding half minute of angle groups subject to wind conditions.

This exceptional and repeatable accuracy raises the question of ethical hunting with a rifle like this, which is clearly designed and highly capable of long-range shooting. From a target shooting point of view it doesn't matter but where you're engaging live



Last two shots at 500m and still less than half minute of angle, testament to the combination and premium hunting ammo.

targets, whether game or feral animals, you must consider your skill level and ability to shoot accurately in the field. It's one thing to have the amazing experience I had shooting this rifle at the range, but another altogether when you're in the field with much less stability and possibility of a bit of 'buck fever' (every animal deserves a clean and immediate kill).

If I owned this rifle I'd fit a more recoil-absorbing pad and, where possible, use different Leupold 34mm mounts direct to bases on the action to bring the scope closer to the bore for an even better cheek weld on this excellent stock.

This rifle opened my mind to the ability to expand my own hunting limits from 300m to say 500m. It would require a lot of practice to achieve this to my satisfaction but the rifle would certainly make it a reality. More skillful shots than me would doubtless be able to stretch that ethical hunting envelope even further, while long-distance target shooters and hunters will love it. I can truly say I was sorry to send this rifle-scope combination back, so thanks to Brad Johnson and Greg Stevens for making them available and answering my technical questions so promptly. More at [nioa.com.au](http://nioa.com.au) ●

## Specifications

**Maker:** Remington US.  
**Action:** Bolt-action, 700BDL  
**Calibre:** 7mm Rem Mag (tested) also 6.5Cr, 30-06, 308, 6.5PRC in future  
**Magazine:** Three cartridges in magnum, four in standard  
**Finish:** Blued matt  
**Safety:** Remington standard  
**Stock:** HS Precision receiver-length aluminium bedding block  
**Trigger:** Timney single-stage 13½" length of pull  
**Sights:** None  
**Weight:** Bare 8.5lbs, as tested with scope and mounts 11.2lbs (5.1kg)  
**Barrel length:** 26" 1:8 twist, heavy profile, concave crown, not threaded  
**Overall length:** 46.5"  
**Scope mounts:** Leupold 34mm on Leupold Picatinny rail  
**Scope:** Leupold VX-5HD 4-20x52, 34mm tube  
**Ammunition:** Remington factory 150gn Core-Lokt tipped  
**Importer:** Nioa Group  
**Warranty:** Lifetime defect  
**Price:** Rifle \$2500, scope \$3300, mounts and rings \$500 (all approx.)



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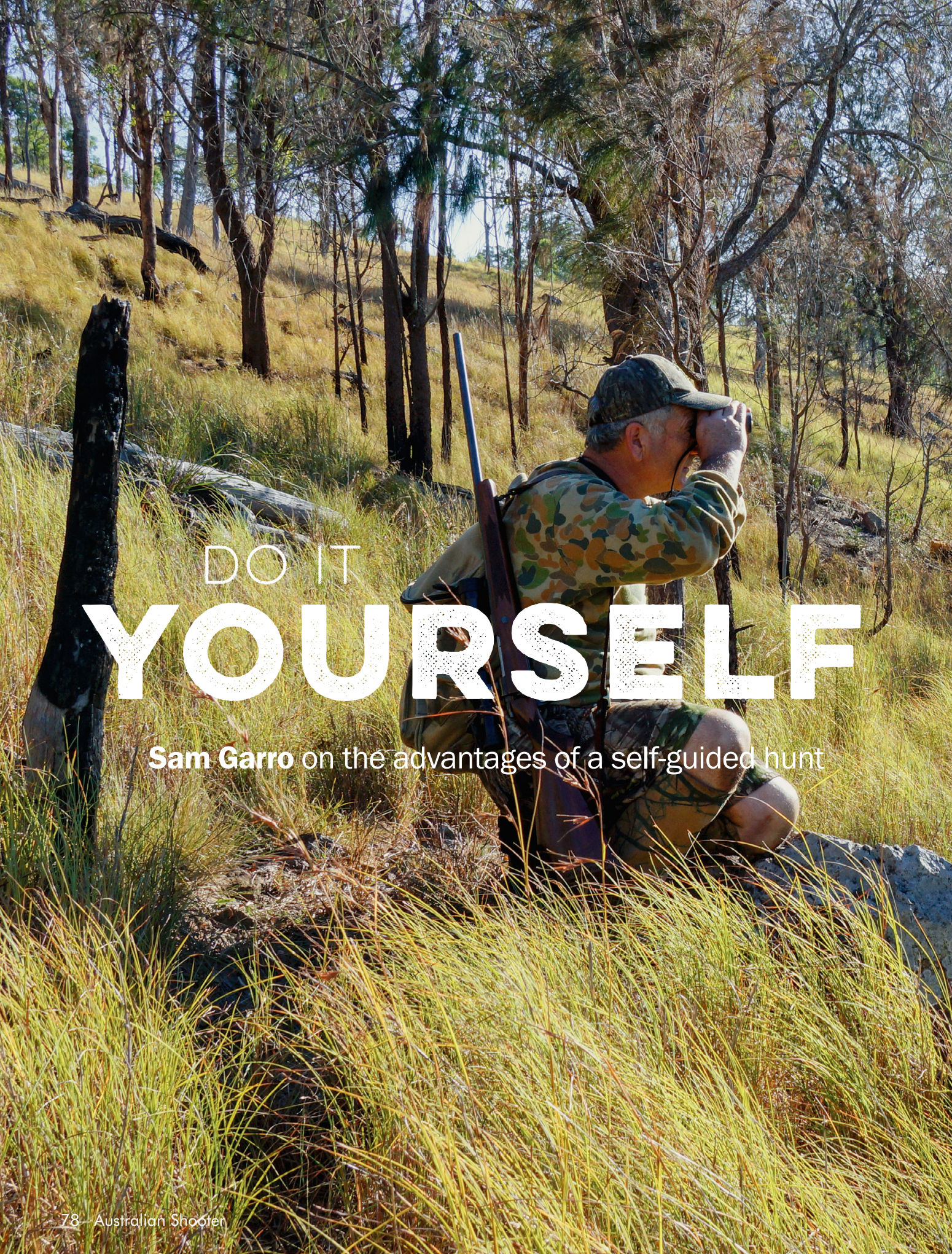
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DO IT  
**YOURSELF**

**Sam Garro** on the advantages of a self-guided hunt



**M**y first successful and memorable guided red deer hunts in Queensland's Brisbane Valley eventually gave me the confidence to undertake a self-guided outing which cost less and was hugely rewarding in different ways. To be led by an experienced outfitter in prime deer country for the first time is an enlightening experience in itself. Yet to be able to do it on your own or with a mate, testing your hunting skills against elusive deer or similar game in their territory, takes the sense of achievement and elation to another level.

For years I wanted to hunt deer in the Victorian High Country but for one reason or another, mostly due to the inability to access property or lack of confidence to venture into state forests on my own, it never happened. By chance, someone recommended a cattle farmer in the Brisbane Valley, who was also an avid deer hunter and guide during the March-April 'rut'. With the promise of scoring our first trophy stag, we booked and were fortunate to be slotted in for the upcoming season - it was all that was promised and more.

#### **Self-guided experience**

After booking again the following year with similarly pleasing results the owner, feeling more than comfortable with our ethical

approach and appreciative nature, offered us a self-guided hunt on the property we'd become familiar with. The old maintained homestead, separate to where he lived, would be our accommodation and as we were flying from Melbourne, a farm ute was made available to get around and buy supplies if needed.

Through our prior extensive stalking over the hills and valleys of the 10,000-acre property, we'd gained a good sense of direction. This was supplemented by the local features, landmarks, boundary roads and naturally the GPS back-trackers which accompanied us everywhere, so we felt confident on our own. What also helped in locating deer was noting the guide's steady and methodical stalking approach on previous hunts. We learned from how he focused on giveaway signs like a flicking tail or twitching ear in the undergrowth, or a stag's stick-like antler tips protruding above tall grass.

Just roaming the ranges and fog-shrouded valleys at first light, inhaling mountain air and absorbing the unique scenery, is liberating in itself and hugely rewarding. And when you successfully stalk a stag the elation is huge, knowing you succeeded through your own efforts. Then you take time to savour the moment, take photos and appreciate the animal for providing the opportunity.

## Do it yourself

Similar experiences were shared with mates a few years back on a self-guided pig and wild boar hunt on an expansive cattle and sheep property in western NSW. Camp was set up next to the Lachlan River where we had clear ground, access to water, good tree cover and a spot to fish. To improve our chances of success the farmer drew a rough map in the dirt, pointing out likely places including dams and paddocks frequented. During our stay he periodically called into camp to check on us.

Even though our success was mixed from one season to another, especially in times of drought or flood when animals were absent or dispersed, the trips were memorable and our bond with the owner strengthened. Over the years I've participated in guided and self-guided hunts, depending on the particular game and affordability, each time coming away better informed and prepared for the next.

### Booking a self-guided hunt

For many of us, access to such game can prove difficult or nigh impossible, unless through a reputable outfitter with access to properties or via a farmer or landowner who caters to self-guided hunts as outlined. Online and in other advertising avenues are any number of guided, semi-guided and self-guided hunts for different species, through outfitters and property owners who at the same time benefit from removal of invasive and destructive animals. In the latter, shearers' quarters, a rustic shed or some form of building shelter is usually provided for accommodation or establishing camp.

The challenge initially is to verify an outfitter's credentials and ability to deliver to avoid possible disappointment. With property owners it's in their interest to be transparent with regards to game expectations and conditions for repeat business. Either way, recommendation from a fellow hunter or testimonial is always best and reassuring.

### Travel mode

Considering the price of fuel, interstate travel can prove cheaper and timesaving depending on your destination, though check with your airline carrier regarding transport of firearms and ammunition as not all are receptive. Obviously air travel does have its limitations with respect to the amount of gear you can take compared to a vehicle and trailer.

On a previous trip from Melbourne to a cattle station in Cape York, a journey of more than 3000km, it would've taken a good week of exhaustive driving. Compare that to flying to Cairns with a connecting flight on a mail plane or hiring a 4x4 vehicle to reach the property in one day. While each option has its pros and cons, ultimately it comes down to choice, budget and what suits best.

### Logistics

Apart from the usual provisioning for an extended hunting trip, particularly in remote locations where phone reception is poor or non-existent, a satellite phone for communication is invaluable, as is a GPS



**Old homestead and rooms provided basic accommodation and amenities; Sam with a spiker meat animal.**

back-tracker and personal locator beacon. Often a station owner will maintain an open channel through your UHF radio. Checking Google Maps before a trip can also assist in better understanding the lay of the land and how to navigate it, something which proved invaluable when hunting deer in the Brisbane Valley.

Often forgotten or not considered essential until there's a close encounter are snake-proof gaiters, an extra pair of sturdy boots if hunting in muddy conditions and a well-equipped medical kit. With respect to transporting game meat on a plane, so

long as it's properly packed and sealed, for example in a sturdy Styrofoam box or esky with gel ice packs, the contents should remain preserved until you're home.

### Respecting guidelines

Understanding and adhering to certain guidelines and restrictions, particularly where property and stock are concerned, is paramount in demonstrating hunter reliability and establishing a rapport. It's important campfires are completely extinguished to prevent escaping embers starting a grassfire, while rubbish should be properly disposed of to leave the site clean for others. And if water is scarce, take plenty in containers to show consideration.

These requirements are all part of any planned self-guided hunt, where provisioning may be more or less depending on circumstances and the type of hunt planned. How many trophy, cull or meat animals or combination thereof can be harvested, can be reliant on seasonal conditions affecting their numbers, how they're dispersed and managed for ongoing sustainability.

### Locating game

While directions may be provided with the location of landmarks and probable game areas, early morning and late evening around dams, channels and isolated pockets of water are usually most productive. This is particularly true in summer months when conditions are hot and animals need to drink at least once a day. In cooler months, most game can often be found moving about throughout the day.

Possessing a little knowledge of game behaviour and habits can be beneficial. Roaring or croaking stages during the rut, fully engrossed in locking antlers for dominance, lose all sense of awareness and can be stalked closer than normal. Reliance and confidence in your own hunting ability, knowledge and instincts will also go a long way to locating game.

### Conclusion

A self-guided hunt can be as hard or as easy as you make it, depending on your needs and what you want to achieve. The beauty of it is time is on your side with no fixed schedule, you're applying your hunting skills in pursuit of game in a free-range environment and when you do succeed, the gratification and elation of your achievement is hard to beat. ●



**Prime red deer country in the Brisbane Valley; Glassing valley with a mature stag on the left and youngster on the right.**

# WALK BEFORE YOU RUN

Novice **Matthew Godson's**  
on a reloading journey



It all began when the factory ammunition my 22-250 Ruger M77 loved was no longer in production. After attempting (and failing) to find another brand I was happy with, it was time to start the journey to replicate what had worked best for me. I knew the projectile type used in the best-performing factory round but that was it, so time for some trial and error by dipping a toe into the whirlpool of reloading.

Buying a box of Speer 52gr HPs was the first step, followed by ADI AR2208 powder and a bunch of large rifle primers. Sounds simple enough, right? Yes and no. As most reloaders will know, primer stocks (as well as other things) have been in short supply recently, so there was a fair bit of scouting around to track down primers. I'd plenty of brass collected from years of factory-round shooting, so no problem in that department.

When it comes to reloading, you should educate yourself in regard to the processes involved. Brass preparation, working out maximum and minimum powder/charge weights and the operation of presses and dies etc. In these modern times you can find more than enough information and videos online to learn what you need. There are also plenty of good old-fashioned reloading manuals out there and it also pays to tap into the knowledge of fellow shooters.

As I was using an ADI World Class powder, I checked their website tools to determine my start and end load weight which came in at 34.0-36.0 grains. To make sure I recorded everything I did during the entire process, I created a specific '22-250 reloading notes' document in Word and saved it to my Google drive so I could access it on both computer and mobile devices.

Firstly I created a table which included a 'load identification number', 'load grains weight' and 'cc value' (powder volume measurement) as section headers. I also

**Final four loads ready to go**

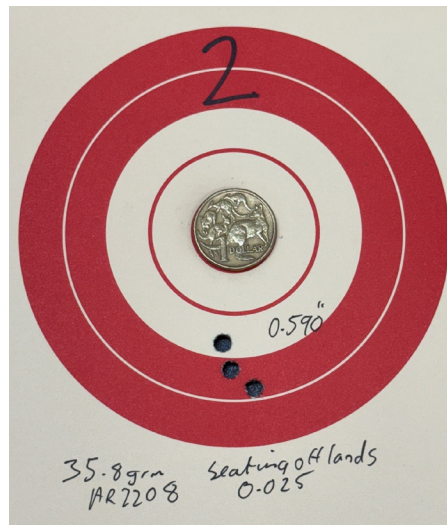


**Ready to start putting rounds down range; That'll do nicely.**

added notes which included powder name and primers used, projectile type and starting seating depth which was 0.020" off the lands. I began by entering the start weight of 34.0 grains and worked my way down the table at one per cent increments, equivalent to an increase of 0.3 grains of powder for each load until the end one.

With powder weights determined on paper it was time to roll the up sleeves and go to work. First job was to pull out the OAL gauge to determine when the projectile first touches the lands, then establish a projectile seating depth 0.020" back from it. I measured this 10 times and noted the average.

Next step was to inspect all used cases prior to de-capping and resizing in the Lee press, as there's no point wasting time working cases which are damaged in any way. Throw them away because safety comes first. Most presses use the same process: check cases, lube cases, de-cap, resize then prime. That last step can sometimes be done during the de-capping and resizing



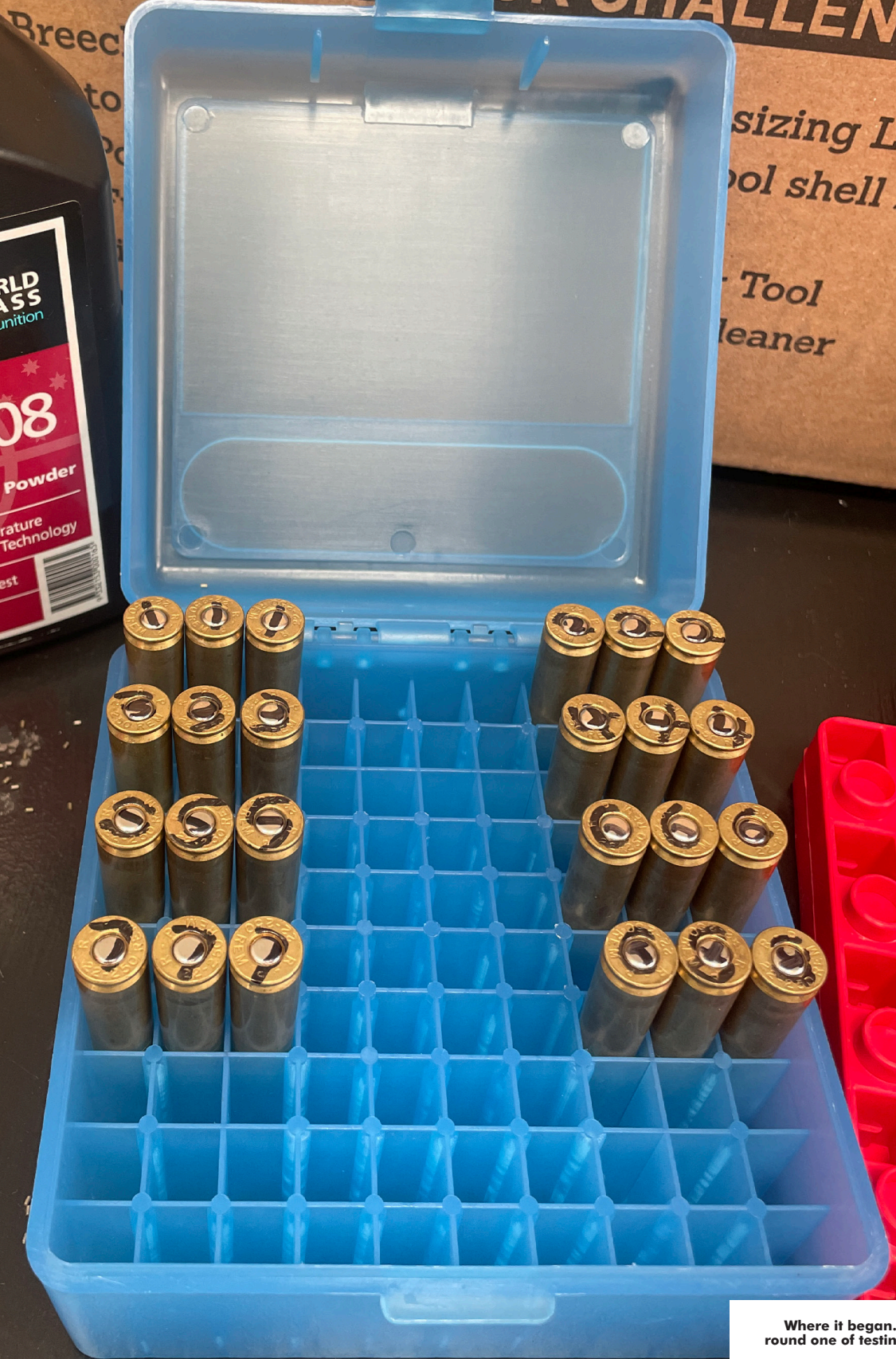
process or after using a separate priming tool. Once you have a resized and primed a case it's time to measure it to ensure it's not over the maximum length. If longer than the maximum it needs to be trimmed then deburred before it's ready for charging.

Following my notes I charged three cases with the starting powder weight which I subsequently identified as 'Load No.1'. The following three were charged with the next increment and labelled Load No.2, this process continuing until I finally had three

Walk before you can run



BREECH LOCK CHALLENGE



sizing Lub  
ool shell ho  
Tool  
leaner

Where it began...  
round one of testing



Best results corresponded with a node in velocity.

cases of each charge with the last one being the maximum charge labelled Load No.8.

Having a batch of cases loaded with powder it was time to seat projectiles/bullets into the case. This involved operating the press multiple times to slowly insert the projectile into the first case, until it finally reached the seating depth I determined was 0.020" off the lands. Once that depth was reached and set the process certainly sped up. It pays to measure each round before putting it away to ensure consistent seating depth is achieved, especially in the development phase.

With targets and chronograph packed it was time for a session at the SSAA (SA) Para range. The idea was to fire at two-minute intervals, shooting one from each load (lightest to heaviest) at individual specific targets until I completed one cycle. I'd then repeat but this time from heaviest back to lightest to complete the second cycle, then another lightest to heaviest to end the third cycle and the test. All shots were chronographed so I could analyse and determine potential nodes (flat spots in velocity as load charge increases).

Away from the range it was time to assess the outcome of my initial testing. Based on grouping alone, a so-called optimal charge weight (OCW) was identified to be near the maximum load. Boy, my rifle must like it fast! A charge weight between 35.5 and 36.0 grains produced 0.595" and 0.593" groups respectively, while the middle ground at 35.8 grains was a bit of a mystery, where two points of impact were touching and the other a flyer leading to a 1.105" group.

Plugging the velocities into a spreadsheet I was able to make a graph that showed a potential node in velocity to explore. I identified that Load 7 with 35.8 grains on average didn't have an increase in velocity than the lighter Load 6 at 35.5 grains. With this in mind, I chose to reload my next rounds at the more economical lighter Load 6 as I didn't have improvement in velocity (extra bang for buck). It was time to play around with seating depth in a bid to improve accuracy.

Well this attempt to improve things didn't go to plan. I reloaded four different groups, all with 35.5 grains of powder but projectiles seated at 0.010", 0.020", 0.030" and 0.040" off the lands. Back at the range group sizes were mediocre, the best a disappointing 1.3" at 0.02" off the lands with 0.03" being slightly worse still. Remember I said my rifle likes it fast? Well I think it may have been upset with me choosing a lighter charge weight for economic reasons, so point taken and back to the reloading bench.

Reflecting on the data I had before me, I went into 'round two' with the intent to go faster with a few more grains of powder and play around with seating depths near 0.02" off the lands. This time I loaded two groups of cartridges with 35.8 grains of powder with seating depths of .02" and .025", and two groups with 36.0 grains of powder with the same seating depths. This time I decided to shoot each group in a continuous string then wait five minutes before

beginning the same string of shots with the next load type.

Results were much better and I was happy to end this load development journey with a group size close to 0.5". Assessing all available data, it was clear the 35.8 grains load weight which indicated a clear node in velocity was now the optimum charge weight. With a final seating depth of 0.025" off the lands, this combination looked like the best I can hope for with the equipment I have on hand.

Yes, points of impact on the paper weren't touching, yet I need to keep reminding myself this is a hunting round running through a modest hunting rifle, so I shouldn't expect brilliance. Shooting a group smaller than a \$1 coin at 100m is a rabbit headshot every day of the week as one of my friends told me.

Now that my 22-250 reloading project is complete, next will be the 204 then 308 which I dare say will be another journey. With some lessons learned, hopefully the process becomes much easier with experience and I can give eventually offer other beginners some worthwhile advice. ●



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## National

### SSAA National Junior Challenge

July 10-13, 2025  
Wodonga Rifle Range, Vic  
Program: See SSAA National website for full event details. Contact: Arwen Casley-Porter 0456 127 000.

### Rifle Metallic Silhouette National Championships

August 28-September 2, 2025  
Monarto Shooting Complex, SA  
Program: Thursday: Practice. Friday: 80 shots Air Rifle. Saturday: 80 shots Rimfire. Sunday: 80 shots Centrefire. Monday: 40 shots Centrefire Hunting Rifle, 40 shots Rimfire Hunting Rifle. Tuesday: Overrun day if needed. Prizes: Medals all grades including juniors, two-gun and teams trophy. Nomination form on National website. Facilities: Camping with showers and toilets, breakfast and lunch available. Contact: Mark West at [rmsnats2025@gmail.com](mailto:rmsnats2025@gmail.com) or 0421 775 101.

### Long Range Precision National Championships

August 29-31, 2025  
SSAA Luna, Captains Mountain Complex, Qld  
Program: August 29: Rimfire 100m, Rimfire 200m (both mini-core target); 30: Centrefire 700m, Centrefire 800m (core target); 31: Centrefire 900m, Centrefire 1000m (core target). Facilities: Cabins and camping at range, bunkhouse \$15 each per night, juniors \$7.50, single occupancy \$60 a night, double occupancy \$45 each a night, campsite \$15 each a night. Full details on National website. Contact: [luna@ssaqld.org.au](mailto:luna@ssaqld.org.au) or PO Box 101, Inglewood Qld 4387.

### Combined Services National Championships

September 19-21, 2025  
Windamere Shooting Complex, Mudgee, NSW  
Program: See National website for extensive itinerary. Prizes: Medals for all pistol, rifle and team events, top gun and top junior. Facilities: Camping and caravans permitted at range from Thursday, toilets and hot showers at Range 2. Cudjegang caravan park nearby with cabins, vans and powered sites, phone (02) 6358 8462. Event contacts: [Ian.Crabbe@telstra.com](mailto:Ian.Crabbe@telstra.com) or 0428 862 378; [Anthony.Gatti@nswcsd.com.au](mailto:Anthony.Gatti@nswcsd.com.au) or 0499 987 899; [Ben.Doherty@bigpond.com](mailto:Ben.Doherty@bigpond.com) or 0409 831 258 (all after hours).

### Air Rifle Field Target National Championships

September 26-28, 2025  
SSAA Tin Can Bay, Qld.  
Program: September 26: Range open for practice. 27: Air Rifle Field Target 100 rounds (2 x 50). Prizes: Medals for first three in all grades. Facilities: Light lunch included with nomination fee, tea, coffee, cold drinks and water available. Camping facilities at range with showers and toilets, \$5 per adult per night. Contact: [tincanbay@ssaqld.org.au](mailto:tincanbay@ssaqld.org.au) or Brian Leach (07) 5488 0159, Brett Whiting 0467 332 303 or Chris Dale 0418 255 874. Full details on National website.

## ACT

### ACT Rifle Metallic Silhouette Snowball Shoot

June 7-9, 2025  
SSAA Majura Range, ACT  
Program: Saturday: 80 shots Rimfire, 40 shots Air Rifle; Sunday: 80 shots Centrefire; Monday: 40 shots Rimfire Hunting Rifle, 40 shots Centrefire Hunting Rifle. Prizes: Trophies all grades including juniors, two-gun trophies and teams event. Facilities: Camping on range with water and showers (\$10 per person per night), fires allowed if no ban, canteen facilities for the weekend. Contact: [Mark.Lovell@live.com.au](mailto:Mark.Lovell@live.com.au) or Scott 0411 465 254 (if unattended leave message).

## NSW

### SSAA (NSW) Big Game Rifle State Championships

May 30-June 1, 2025  
SSAA Glen Innes, Emmaville, NSW  
Program: May 30: Camping set-up from 10am, practice 12.30-3pm, Event No. 1. May 31: Events 2-7 from 9am. June 1: Events 8-11 from 9.30am. Medals for first three in all individual events. Facilities: Camping and caravans permitted at range, toilets and hot showers. Contact: [Gary.Beling@gmail.com](mailto:Gary.Beling@gmail.com) or 0409 751 384. Full event details on National website.

### NSW Centrefire Benchrest Four Gun State Championships

August 13-17, 2025  
Dairyville Range, Coffs Harbour, NSW  
Program: Wednesday: Practice; Thursday: Unlimited 100/200; Friday: Sporter 100/200; Saturday: Light 100/200; Sunday: Heavy 100/200. Facilities: Camping at neighbouring farm, swags at range (\$10 a night, juniors free), breakfast and lunch included in nomination fee. Entry form and details on National website. Contact: [Ian.Thompson@ianbenchrest@gmail.com](mailto:Ian.Thompson@ianbenchrest@gmail.com)

## Qld

### SSAA (Qld) Gallery Rifle State Championships

May 17-18, 2025  
SSAA Ipswich, South Ripley, Qld  
Program: Saturday 17: 50m Precision; Timed & Precision 1; 1500 Match. Sunday: Multi-target 1; Imperial Silhouettes; 1020 Match in Classic/Open Class. Facilities: Camping and kitchen available. Contact: [Don.Robinson@ssaqld.org.au](mailto:Don.Robinson@ssaqld.org.au) 986 070

### SSAA (Qld) Long Range Precision State Championships

May 23-25, 2025  
Captains Mountain Range Complex  
Program: Thursday: 100m zero check. Friday: 100m and 200m rimfire matches. Saturday: 700m and 800m Class A or H centrefire matches. Sunday: 900m and 1000m Class A or H centrefire matches. Facilities: Bunkhouse and cabins at range.

Competitors can access camp kitchen with fridges, cooking appliances, crockery and cutlery. BYO food and drinks. Contact: [Richard.White@ssaqld.org.au](mailto:Richard.White@ssaqld.org.au) 0417 637 694. Full details on National website.

## SA

### SA Rifle Metallic Silhouette State Championships

June 21-22, 2025  
Monarto Shooting Complex, SA  
Program: Saturday: 80 shots Rimfire and 40 shots Air Rifle; Sunday: 80 shots Centrefire. Range open 8.30am for practice and weigh-in, first match 10am and afternoon match around 2pm. Facilities: Barbecue catering, hot showers, toilets and cooking facilities to support on-site camping. Contact: [Mark.West@kentcivil.com.au](mailto:Mark.West@kentcivil.com.au) or 0421 775 101.

### SA Fly Shoot State Championships

July 11-13, 2025  
Monarto Shooting Complex, SA  
Program: July 11: Flag set-up available. July 12, 9am: Centrefire 500m Fly, five-target competition plus practice target, registered match counting towards Shooter of the Year. July 13, 9am: 200y Rimfire Fly, five-target competition plus practice target. Facilities: Barbecue available for use all weekend, camping permitted (limited power sites), hot showers, toilets and cooking facilities in clubroom. Contact: [Pat.0455.280.024](mailto:Pat.0455.280.024).

### SSAA (SA) Muzzleloading and Black Powder Cartridge Shotgun State Championships

September 21, 2025  
Southern Rangers Shooting Club, McLaren Vale, SA  
Program: Start time 9:30am: Breechloading Shotgun; Percussion Shotgun; Flintlock Shotgun. Contact: [Secretary@0412.574.444](mailto:Secretary@0412.574.444).

## WA

### SSAA (WA) Lever Action State Championships

May 30-June 1, 2025  
Albany Lever Action Rifle Club, WA  
Program: May 30: Practice. 31: Practice 7.45-9am, competition starts 9.30. June 1: Practice 7.45-9am, competition starts 9.30. Prizes: SSAA (WA) state medals and perpetual shields. Facilities: Camping and caravan area at range with power and water, canteen all weekend, breakfast and lunch available to buy. Contact: [Tim.Corby@ssaawa.org.au](mailto:Tim.Corby@ssaawa.org.au) or [Janoz.Racz@alarc@secretary.com](mailto:Janoz.Racz@alarc@secretary.com)

### WA Single Action State Championships

May 30-June 1, 2025  
Leschenault Handgun Club, Parkfield, WA  
Program: Saturday: Six main match stages and Discipline Chairman's meeting; Sunday: Four main match stages and trophy presentation. Facilities: Camping on range

with showers and toilets, breakfast cereal available, bacon/eggs \$5, evening meals \$15, tea and coffee, snacks and other drinks for sale. Contact: [states.waass@gmail.com](mailto:states.waass@gmail.com) or Sarah 0402 945 598.

### SSAA (WA) Shotgun Skeet State Championships

June 8, 2025  
Jarrahdale Sporting Shooters, Jarrahdale, WA  
Program: 100 targets, adults \$60 juniors no charge. Open to all SSAA members competing in the championships and any worker/helper on the day. Facilities: Free tea and coffee, cold drinks and snacks on sale. Contact: [Nigel.Youens@0466.341.379](mailto:Nigel.Youens@0466.341.379) or Peter Kemp 0435 428 191.

## Vic

### SSAA (Vic) Scoped Silhouette State Championships

May 24-25, 2025  
Melbourne Sporting Rifle Club, Eagle Park, Vic  
Program: Saturday 80 shots Centrefire, Sunday 80 shots Rimfire. Nominations on the day or call Mark Butler. Medals for first three in all grades. Contact: [Mark.Butler@0409.135.740](mailto:Mark.Butler@0409.135.740).

### SSAA (Vic) Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

September 25-28, 2025  
Melbourne Sporting Rifle Club, Eagle Park, Vic  
Program: Thursday practice. Friday 80 shots rifle calibre. Saturday 80 shots pistol calibre, Sunday 80 shots smallbore. Nominations on the day or email [msrc.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:msrc.secretary@gmail.com). Medals for first three in all grades. Contact: [Mark.Butler@0409.135.740](mailto:Mark.Butler@0409.135.740).

## SSAA Inc Event Cancellation / Postponement Policy

An event may be postponed or cancelled at any time by SSAA Inc, SSAA State Office or club directive.

SSAA Inc will not be liable for reimbursement to competitors for any costs associated with a postponed or cancelled SSAA Inc championship event for any reason. Competitors planning to attend an event should consider options for free cancellation or refund of travel and accommodation costs where available.

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### Australian Shooter

#### *Little wonder*

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### Australian Shooter March, 2025

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**Ridgeline 4k-trail-camera**  
Vaughan Murphy, Vic

**JUNIORS**  
**Walker's Razor Slim Electric Ear Muffs**  
Jacob Bazina, NSW

**SSAA Best Shots Mug**  
Andrew Campbell-Burns, Vic

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In the picture . . . the trail camera does its job.

## Hope you did a Roaring trade

**D**uring our usual Wednesday night podcast recording, it was with a sense of excitement co-host Jono mentioned it was now dark when he headed to the gym in the morning. I suppose to the listener it could've been a matter of feigned surprise of 'Really, you don't say?' or something equally cutting like: 'Yeah buddy, it happens'. Either would've missed the mark though, as the tell wasn't the words but the excitement behind a simple observation. For those in the know, Jono was the poker player going all-in with a bright eye and smile on his face.

To the uninitiated as February (as I write this) fades into March then rolls ever onward towards April, there's a palatable sense of increasing excitement among deer hunters. This buzz is a slow boil you might miss in December or even January but, by February, the kettle starts to whistle - and neither is it just an expression of excitement.

The coming weeks in April are showtime, though behind it is purposeful and at times frenetic activity. Rifles and ammunition have been sighted-in, cleaned and put aside in preparation for that one critical shot. Trail camera patterns have been laid out, checked, rechecked and moved, gear tested, replaced and renewed. There may even be a physical element like heading to the gym, walks with a pack and cutting back on pizza.

What's driving it all is the arrival of a highly specific balance between the hours of day and night. At that point in time - and it is both a point in time and location - the

hinds and does come into season. In doing so they in turn trigger an aggressive mating response in the bucks and stags, resulting in otherwise quiet gulleys, hillside faces and even open paddocks filling with the sound of roars and croaks.

It's hard to describe to those who don't hunt deer the anticipation this time of year brings. I know of almost 40 hunters who, after being lucky enough to secure a space, will be heading to forests across New South Wales. Rain, snow, heat, hail, they don't care and only a DPI forest closure notification can deter them. Others will head to private blocks either paid or gained through family connection, years of door-knocking and the odd bit of good fortune.

In Queensland, those of us lucky enough to get on will head to the Brisbane and Mary Valleys in search of roaring reds where it's the fence-jumpers we'll worry about. The reality of the Valley is fence-jumping poachers are a common occurrence during the Roar, making it ever harder for hunters, and yes I intentionally make the distinction between hunter and poacher, to access private lands.

Along with fishing for tailor on Fraser Island or preparing for duck season, the Roar and Rut are one of those ever-fewer activities we follow rather than dictate. Deer don't become all warm and fuzzy because of a calendar invite reminder, these things happen on a timeline completely devoid of human intervention. I think this is why, to many, this time of year is important. The sense it's happening whether we're ready or not gives it a level of importance

which pushes you out of the comforts of our modern world and exposes you, even for a short time, to something else.

I remember with a sense of recurring wonder when, in April 2024, I heard my first roar for the year. I'd been at it a couple of hours and heard nothing so I thought just keep moving, keep right with the wind and something will happen. Sure enough it did and as I entered a new gully system, I was confronted by the guttural roar. Sensibly I stopped and went to ground, and not just because it sounded like the stag was only 10 feet away. He wasn't but that little break allowed me to form a semblance of control. I readied myself and made my move.

I was behind pretty good cover, though again due to the volume and power of the roars it sounded like deer were impossibly close. I kept inching ever closer and finally saw it all. A stag and a few hinds, another stag up high and, by the sound of it, another out of sight but not too far away.

I kept my head and after much deliberation (and considering the terrible weather) made my move and had myself a stag. I returned twice more and on the second trip decided to hold fire, by the third they were gone. Clearly they hadn't received the email invite. So to all you dedicated deer hunters reading this in early May, I hope fortune smiled on you, your most recent success is still fresh in the memory and that supply of fresh venison is safely packed away in your freezer. ●





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