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AT LAST: A ONE-OFF SPECIAL EDITION FOR ALL OUR LEFT-HANDERS



THE

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Shooter

OUR POLICY

To create a better environment and community understanding of all forms of hunting and shooting sports.

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NATIONAL NEWS

REVAMPED SHOOTER **STARTS WITH OUR 'LEFTY' SPECIAL**

WORDS: TOM KENYON SSAA CEO



hope our members can forgive my self-indulgence but ever since I started at SSAA last year, I've been hatching the idea of a one-off edition aimed at us 'leftys'. When I started shooting more than 40 years ago, left-handed rifles weren't really a thing except for super-expensive, custom-made ones. Recently they've blossomed and, even though your dream rifle may not be available left-handed, there are now plenty to choose from.

Increasingly, importers are offering more models and making it easier to find left-handed rifles in their ranges. Special mention goes to Nioa for highlighting lefty models in their printed catalogue and website, as well as Beretta Australia for the way

you can filter their website to select only the left-handed range. All test models featured this month are also available in right-hand, so will be of interest to the 'majority' as well.

There are a couple of groups of us southpaws. There are genuine leftys who do everything such as writing, kicking and drinking as well as shooting left-handed. Then there are those like myself who do everything right-handed but are left-eye dominant, meaning the only thing I do left-handed is shoot rifles and shotguns.

We've included in this special edition an interesting article which explains how to determine which of your eyes is dominant. Who knows, maybe you're also right-handed but left-eye dominant, so your shooting might improve if you come across to the 'dark side'. Some have suggested vou may suddenly become smarter and better looking if you do, though I can't comment on that.

Joining me at the range for this special were two left-handed and regular Australian Shooter contributors in Mark van den Boogaart and Paul Miller. It was great to spend time with them and hear their thoughts on all things shooting, as they're both experienced shooters and excellent writers and I'm sure you'll enjoy their insights. I'd like to thank them for taking time out to spend a few days being part of the process.

And we have a range of other stories from around the country on matters peculiar to lefty shooters including knives, growing up left-handed and how to train the little lefty in your family. I can assure you, Simpsons favourite Ned Flanders featured heavily in the office last month with the SSAA 'Leftorium' in full swing! And keep an eve out on our social platforms for videos of the range day and thoughts on a variety of specially-selected rifles.

This month also heralds the launch of a refreshed Australian Shooter, where you'll start noticing some changes from subtle layout tweaks to new articles and columns. I'd like to thank our production team of Allan Blane, Beth Tyson, Thomas Cook and Alex Heppinstall for their long hours of ideas, discussion, trial and error which have made these upgrades possible. We hope you enjoy it.

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OPINION



TROPHY HUNTING IMPORTS IN AUSTRALIA: POLICY OR POSTURING?

WORDS: MATTHEW GODSON



P rior to the federal election, the Australian Alliance for Animals released a media statement announcing the Australian Labor Party (ALP), The Greens, Animal Justice Party, several minor parties and some independents have pledged to support a ban on the importation of certain hunting trophies into Australia.

As is often the case with advocacy groups driven more by ideology than evidence, the statement is long on rhetoric but short on substantive. data-backed argument. Fortunately, when you dig a little deeper on their website you uncover the actual party responses, alongside a summary of commitments from various candidates. All of which raises the question: Will a ban on imported hunting trophies genuinely improve animal welfare and wildlife populations? And, more importantly, what are the broader consequences (intended or not) of such a policy?

To help answer that we can look to the UK. In the 2023-24 session of the UK Parliament a comparable proposal - the Hunting Trophies (Import Prohibition) Bill - was introduced yet ultimately failed to proceed beyond the second reading. That outcome was not without reason. Last September, the University of Oxford released a compelling analysis indicating the proposed UK law would likely do more harm than good.

Researchers from Oxford's Department of Biology and the Oxford Martin Programme on Wildlife Trade found that, contrary to popular perception, trophy hunting can provide substantial environmental and social benefits. Their findings highlighted that well-regulated trophy hunting does the following: Helps preserve wildlands from being converted to agriculture; generates revenue to fund anti-poaching efforts; provides jobs and income for indigenous peoples and rural communities; supplies protein-rich meat to local populations; and supports conservation programs which have actually increased populations of threatened species.

Moreover, these benefits are especially crucial in areas where ecotourism or photographic safaris are not economically viable. In short, properly managed trophy hunting is not detrimental to conservation, it can actually be a cornerstone of it.

Oxford's researchers also criticised the UK Bill's lack of due diligence, noting it had failed to assess real-world implications for communities and wildlife. They concluded the legislation was 'disproportionate' and risked harming the very species it aimed to protect. Backing this up, a study by the International Union for Conservation of Nature found less than half of UK adults supported a trophy hunting ban, if it would increase threats to conservation or negatively affect rural communities. This reflects a growing public understanding that conservation is complex and often counterintuitive.

The Australian Alliance for Animals derives 76 per cent of its income from donations and bequests (more than \$2.5 million in total). Their own strategy prioritises "building financial momentum and reserves", a goal which arguably incentivises alarmist messaging over balanced dialogue. This raises a critical question: Was their campaign truly focused on outcomes for animals and communities, or on growing their donor base through emotional appeals? While their intentions may seem sincere to some, the policy proposals they advocate for should still be weighed against real-world impacts, especially when independent global experts present strong counter-evidence.

With the federal election now done and dusted, we need the re-elected government to remember good policy requires more than good intentions. It demands real-world results for animals, ecosystems and people. We must ensure our Federal Government doesn't make the mistake our UK counterparts have avoided. Rural communities in the world's poorer countries don't need us (or more specifically our government) acting as a 'white knight', riding in to save the day along with their endangered wildlife.

They already have tools available to manage their wild resources, at the same time providing incentives leading to local economic and social benefits. The way wildlife is managed in some parts of the world is different to the protectionist ways of Australia. That difference certainly works for them and maybe our government should stay out of the way unless we're approached directly for assistance.

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OPINION





ALL RISE FOR THE EVER-POPULAR .243 WINCHESTER



WORDS: BARRY WILMOT



ntroduced in 1955 for Winchester's Model 70 bolt-action sporting rifle, it's hard to believe the .243 Winchester cartridge is probably more popular today than when it first appeared more than 70 years ago. It had immediate success here in Australia, giving shooters a much-needed cartridge which could be used on medium-sized game such as kangaroos and goats. The only real option at that time was to use ex-military sporting .303s or the much slower .32/20 or .44/40 cartridges in lever-actioned Winchester rifles.

The cartridge was basically the .308 Winchester case necked down to take a .243^(6mm) projectile, which had a range of weights from the 55gr (3.6g) for use on light game like rabbits and fox, up to the heavier 105gr (6.8g) suitable for pigs and deer. This new .243 cartridge had light recoil and a flat trajectory and was ideally suited to any game hunted in Australia. The exception of course was the water buffalo, which demanded the use of a larger calibre cartridge to humanely put them down.

The lighter 55 or 60gr projectiles with muzzle velocity of around 3700fps are devastating on medium

game like foxes and kangaroos, and well-placed shots can drop them easily out to 300m. Heavier projectiles of 80 to 105gr, with muzzle velocity of around 3000fps, are eminently suitable for goats and deer and accurate shots will despatch any of these animals quick-smart.

55-GRAIN SOLID BASE

The .243 Winchester is also very 'powder friendly', with a large variety of different powders made in Australia and overseas available to be used with various projectile weights. Reloading the .243 cartridge is a simple operation as the brass doesn't stretch much, so case resizing is kept to a minimum. Provided the cartridge isn't reloaded to maximum, case life is good and they can be reloaded 10 or more times before the necks split and they have to be discarded. The life of the cartridge case can also be extended if they're only neck-sized during the reloading process, then full-length resized about every fifth time they're reloaded.

Another great advantage of the cartridge is it's been accepted and used by hunters all over the world. In fact it was recently voted the most popular hunting cartridge in the southern states of Africa, more popular even than the .458 Winchester and .300 H&H Magnum, a fact I found almost unbelievable. I also know if I was forced by circumstance to own just one rifle then, regardless of the maker, I'd choose one which handled the .243 Winchester cartridge.

Why, you may well ask? Because I could use it to head-shoot rabbits for the pot, spotlight for foxes on my friend's farm or travel to the north of Australia and hunt pigs and donkeys. Should I run out of ammunition after all that, I'd simply reload some of the cartridges myself using a cheap Lee Loader kit. Or I could drive to the nearest small town and buy a couple of packets of .243 Winchester factory ammo, which I'm sure would be sitting on the shelf.

In conclusion, the .243 Winchester cartridge has stood the test of time for good reason. Its balance of performance, low recoil and versatility makes it one of the most practical all-round rifle cartridges ever developed.

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DREAM BIG OR DON'T DREAM AT ALL

WORDS: LAETISHA SCANLAN



My son has been shooting clays (DTL) for a couple of years and is keen to dip his toe into the Olympic disciplines, with the dream of one day competing on the biggest stage of all. What's the best way to go about this and have you any recommendations or suggestions?

Mark D, via email

Great to hear your son has the Olympic passion burning already as that's the kind of ambition we love to see. I can completely relate as when I was younger. I was chomping at the bit to jump into Olympic disciplines myself. After a few years of Down The Line (DTL) I was constantly pestering my dad to let me have a go at Olympic Trap or 'trench' as we often call it. Thankfully, dad took some priceless guidance from none other than Russell Mark who told him: "Not vet. Let her learn how to win first." And honestly, it was some of the best guidance I've ever received.

You see, Olympic disciplines are not for the faint-hearted and can be downright humbling. The targets are fast, the angles are sharp and with a bit more attitude than you're probably used to in DTL. It's an incredible challenge and if you jump in too early, it can knock the confidence out of even the most enthusiastic young shooter.

So what does "learn how to win" really mean? It's not just about hitting more clays than the next shooter, it's about building the kind of form that holds up when the heat's on. It's learning to thrive under pressure, not crumble. That means becoming comfortable with being uncomfortable, missing, learning and bouncing back. It means throwing yourself into as many shoot-offs as you can, chasing constant 'possibles' and figuring out how to keep a cool head when your heart's racing. Basically, it's where the real growth happens and sets the tone for everything that follows.

Only when I'd made it to AA grade in DTL and was competitive at that level was I encouraged to start entering trench competitions. That foundation made all the difference. Sadly, I now see many juniors switching to trench far too early, before they've developed the technical and mental resilience required for success in such a demanding discipline. Often they struggle to keep up, their confidence suffers and they lose motivation before they've really had a chance to develop.

Interestingly, some of the top Australian ISSF shooters in our current national team are still active and highly accomplished DTL competitors and that's no coincidence. Those years spent mastering a more straightforward discipline teach consistency, confidence and composure, all skills which transfer beautifully when you do make the leap to Olympic-level shooting.

Now here's the good news. When you think your son's ready, there's a fantastic steppingstone discipline called Universal Trench (UT) that wasn't really on the radar when I was coming up. Think of it as Olympic Trap's slightly more approachable cousin. Targets are quicker and more varied than DTL, though not quite as intense or unforgiving as full-blown trench. It strikes a perfect balance, challenging enough to stretch a shooter's skills but not so overwhelming it knocks their confidence to zero.

UT has been growing rapidly in Australia and is fast becoming the go-to option for young shooters looking to test the waters. Even better, if your son starts to perform well, there are real opportunities to travel and potentially earn a spot on an Australian World Championship team. I suggest starting there, check out a few UT events and even just watching a competition to see how the event operates can be beneficial. If your son enjoys the challenge, that's a sure sign he's ready to take that next step.

In the end it's all about building a strong foundation based on technical skill, mental toughness and a love of competition. Those three elements, developed over time, are what give an athlete the best chance of success at the highest level. Best of luck to your son and enjoy the journey.

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TÖP SHQTS

FIND ANSWERS FROM THE BEST THERE IS. FROM WHAT TO USE TO WHAT IS THIS?, OUR TOP SHOTS ARE HERE TO HELP.



IT'S IMPORTANT TO KNOW YOUR LIMITATIONS TO ENSURE A ONE-SHOT KILL.

My question relates to hunting ethics and what is a reasonable maximum range to ensure the clean dispatch of a game or feral animal. I've recently taken up hunting with a bolt-action Tikka centrefire rifle in .308 Win and a Leupold 4.5-14x40 scope in Leupold mounts.

James W., NSW

The outfit and cartridge you describe will serve you well as you take up hunting and cover you all the way from rabbits to sambar deer in the Victorian High Country. The .308 Win is obviously way too much gun for rabbits and foxes, though is perfect for all species of deer here in Australia as well as feral pigs and goats.

Your question of a responsible or ethical hunting distance is very much a personal issue. Most people limit themselves to around 300m, though even at these distances you need to be a good shot to place your bullet accurately enough to ensure merciful dispatch of game or feral animals. With quality ammunition and plenty of practice at the range and in the field, you should accomplish this sort of distance and potentially a bit further. If you can, get in a bit closer as that's hunting as opposed to sniping.

There seems to be a trend where hunting firearms are becoming more like light target rifles, with skilled shooters using larger magnification scopes to achieve shots which in the past wouldn't have been considered ethical. There are obviously shooters capable of hitting steel targets more than a kilometre away, but does that qualify them to be shooting live game at those extended ranges? I personally don't believe it does, as the risk of wounding is far too high and therefore unacceptable. Anyway, good luck with your hunting and congratulations on thinking about those ethical limitations.

Paul Miller

I'm just back from the range and seeing where the shots hit the target is tricky. What recommendations would you give for a spotting scope with the following requirements: 100 metres, tripod, using .22-250 ammunition. And are there any that connect to the phone for easy viewing?

John, via email

A I've been using a 20-40 x 75 Konus brand spotting scope for the past 20 years and have been more than happy with it. Several fellow shooters use this brand too and I also have a pair of Konus red dot sights which perform well. Having said that, there are dozens of different brands of spotting scopes and the prices range from less than \$100 to "the sky's the limit". Many of these are made in the same factory in China and are of acceptable quality.

The other point is that many now come with mobile phone adaptors so you can see the target without having to stoop to look through the eyepiece. Furthermore, for prices starting well below \$100, it's possible to buy an electronic eyepiece that'll connect via Wi-Fi to a tablet or laptop so you can record your shooting as you go and save for reviewing later.

To back up this answer I asked former Australian Olympian Will Godward who's a telescope expert. He suggests visiting the Australian-owned ZeroTech website and taking a look at the Thrive 20-60 x 85mm scope as well as the Magview S1 phone adaptor (their website is <u>magviewgear.com</u>). I hope this is of some help.

Geoff Smith



With the future of recreational shooting in WA on shaky ground, I was wondering if you might be able to shed some light on the history of these stamped Ruger Security Sixes and the best way to sell such an oddity in the event it becomes too difficult to keep. I inherited it from my father who bought it new through the NT Police Force. I have all packaging and documentation down to the original handwritten firearms licence when obtained in the 1970s.

Jerry, via email

Thank you for contacting us with this very interesting piece. As you say, it's a Ruger Security Six double-action six-shot. 357 Magnum

ble-action six-shot .357 Magnum revolver. The handgun itself isn't remarkable but the provenance certainly is and raises a few questions from a collector's point of view. One such revolver listed at an Australian auction was described as being 'NT Police issue' or words to that effect, though in fact it never was an issued handgun according to records.

Up to 50 revolvers (number-stamped 1 to 50) were produced with a simile of the Northern Territory Police badge on the top strap. The stamp is similar to the police badge except it has the letters 'N' and 'T' where the words 'Northern' and 'Territory' would normally be on the banner. They were part of a commercial marketing exercise by Ruger and its possible many police departments around the world, especially in the US, were involved in a similar scheme.

NT Police presumably bought these revolvers and sold them on to officers who'd served in the force to have as a keepsake or memento. The guns were acquired by NT Police around 1979-80, in the middle of their production run spanning 1972-1988. Yours is certainly a collector's piece and the provenance makes it even more so.

Your selling options are either by private sale or consigning it to one of a number of auction houses specialising in such collectables. The latter option carries with it fees to both seller and buyer but at least the auction attracts a captive audience. The regular postal route is out of the question coming from WA so there's extra freight expense to consider. My tip would be to hold on to it as long as you can.

Rod Pascoe

SEND QUESTIONS TO: edit@ssaa.org.au

When seeking information on old or antique firearms, please include a photo of the proof marks on those guns which have them. Old shotguns typically have markings beneath the breech. Also outline the firearm's known history or provenance where possible.



LEADERS IN THE FIELD

SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE

WORDS: CHARLOTTE FOX elcome to *Leaders in the Field*, a new column dedicated to spotlighting the passionate, innovative and driven individuals shaping the future of Australia's shooting and hunting community. Whether they're social media trailblazers inspiring the next generation of shooters, conservation-minded hunters, grassroots advocates or industry giants making real change behind the scenes, these are the people pushing our community forward.

Each month in *Australian Shooter* we'll turn the spotlight on an industry figure to hear how they started, what they perceive as the biggest challenges we face as a community and what they're doing to channel things in the right direction. The landscape of shooting and hunting in Australia is changing. From legislative pressures to shifting public perception, our community is at a crossroads. But within it there are voices of reason, experience and vision - people who are not only standing up for our traditions but reimagining them for a stronger, more united future.

To launch the series we're delighted to feature someone whose work many of our readers will already know well. Chris Burns is a hunter and photographer whose images and stories have become a familiar and valued part of our *Australian Hunter* magazine. Through his lens Chris captures more than just the trophy, he brings to life quiet moments of the hunt, texture of the landscape and the deep connection between hunter and country.

His insight, both written and visual, offers a thoughtful and respectful portrayal of the hunting life, reminding us of the tradition, discipline and reflection which underpins it. In this first instalment of *Leaders in the Field*, Chris shares his journey into the outdoors, his perspective on the role of storytelling in modern hunting culture and how he hopes to contribute to a broader understanding of our community. Chris Burns describes himself as a 'commercial photographer and cinematic storyteller'. His spectacular photography, which can be seen on his Instagram account @chrisburns.photography, is driven by his love of hunting and absolute determination to protect it for future generations. Having crafted his skills and storytelling during the past 15 years, he's developed a style to tell the full story of hunting and hunters beyond the 'brag board' ways of old. He spoke to Charlotte Fox.

Where did you grow up and how did that shape your love of hunting?

I grew up in western Victoria about 50km west of Melbourne in a town called Bacchus Marsh, where I still live. It used to be a small country town but now, 35 years later, has expanded significantly. It's quite busy but as a boy it was nice to grow up in a place where you could be surrounded by apple orchards, rivers and fishing spots.

I didn't grow up in a family that went hunting but often went fishing as a teenager, which was essentially my gateway into hunting. Often I'd be down at the river trying to catch a few fish and see rabbits. That led my brother, when he was about 16, to pick up a bow and start hunting rabbits and foxes. At that time I was still into fishing but my brother, who was my biggest mentor, involved us more in hunting and working our way up from small game to pigs and goats.

From there we'd often travel to New South Wales with some mates and I really appreciated the freedom, camaraderie and adventure. It was also great to build relationships with local farmers and assist them with pest control.

Is that what you still love about hunting?

Yes and I still very much gravitate to being outdoors as it's so liberating. I always enjoyed fishing, yet with hunting there's a lot more to the whole journey and experience. It's obviously different now with a family, so our trips take a bit more planning. I feel it recharges me even though it can be strenuous and you're burning a lot of energy,

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but I come back refreshed from being in nature and under the stars.

How did you engage with farmers when you started hunting?

On the first few trips we connected through a directory of farmers who'd allow shooters on their properties. Most of the time they were specifically looking for assistance in eradicating wild pigs. In Victoria we're also fortunate to have access to public land.

Do you think your kids will be involved in hunting?

Yes and my main goal with everything I do, from hunting to using social media, is never do anything detrimental to hunting to protect it for my children and other people. My kids may not choose to hunt but I'd like them to have that option.

I still love hunting as much as I did when I was 16 or 17 and would be heartbroken if my children couldn't decide for themselves to have that opportunity and the benefits I have. It's so valuable to be outside, disconnected from the grid and in nature. I think as humans we're meant to be outdoors whether hunting, fishing, camping or something similar.

How did you launch your online presence?

In the beginning I'd go to Africa and do what everyone else was doing, safaris and those 'grip and grin' type photos. Through being involved in those trips I developed an understanding of safaris and how they help local communities generate income. Yet when I'd come back and post the photos, there would be a lot of negative comments and threats from animal welfare activists. It was around the same time Cecil the lion was killed and every day there'd be threats and nasty comments. The experience made me sit back and contemplate how I could tell that story differently.

How have you evolved your style since then?

I did that for about three years and was wondering 'why don't people understand what I'm doing?' So I developed my imagery to a point where I'd tell more of the story before and more of the story after. I wanted to try and educate people who were on the fence about hunting and maybe didn't quite understand the full story.

Basically I realised there was a chance to tell the story differently. I wanted to be able to explain the whole adventure, more like a documentary and step away from portraying what some might see as a single blood-lusting, grotesque image. I wanted to talk about being in nature, about travel, the adventure and camaraderie with the people you're with and communities you're visiting.

I know there are some who'll never change their opinion but, for those open to it, I want to show a little bit more of the journey rather than just the final moment. I want them to be able to see the positive aspects of hunting. Traditionally I think we've missed out on explaining that important part of our story as hunters.

How has the change in style affected your online experience?

After 10-15 years of progress I don't receive abuse any more. Platforms have changed too. Initially I was on Facebook but now largely use Instagram and my content isn't being directed to people who aren't interested in hunting. Because of that my experience is a lot more positive. There are now a lot of social media accounts which demonstrate we're not just about killing an animal but respecting the animal and harvesting the meat for use. Sometimes it's hard to capture the images you want but that's the challenge and it drives me to keep developing as a photographer.

What are you trying to achieve with your online brand?

For me it comes back to not doing anything detrimental to hunting, I'm not invested in chasing numbers or followers. I'm committed to being authentic and to my main goal, which is to create OPPOSITE PAGE: CHRIS IS CONSTANTLY SEARCHING FOR WAYS TO CAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF HOW WE FEEL ABOUT THE ANIMALS WE PURSUE.

CHRIS' SON TOOK THIS IMAGE AT DEER CAMP A FEW YEARS BACK. CHRIS GETS GREAT SATISFACTION TEACHING HIS CHILDREN AN ALTERNATIVE TO SHOPPING AT THE SUPERMARKET.

BELOW: CHRIS MANAGED TO CAPTURE THIS PUBLIC LAND HOG DEER HUNT SOLO. SELF DOCUMENTING HUNTS WITH A CAMERA TAKES A HIGH LEVEL OF DEDICATION, THE CAMERA OFTEN GETS IN THE WAY.



DOG & GUN

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HUNTING BRINGS A CAMARADERIE LIKE NOTHING ELSE CHRIS HAS EXPERIENCED, IT'S WHAT THE EARLY DAYS FOR CHRIS, HIS BROTHER AND THEIR MATES WERE ALL ABOUT. LATER IN LIFE THE HUNTS GOT MORE ADVENTUROUS AND THE HARDSHIP OF THESE UNDERTAKINGS CREATED MEMORIES FOR A LIFETIME AND LIFE TIME FRIENDS.

content I'm proud of and which doesn't portray hunting in a negative light. I'm not trying to be an 'influencer' driven by money, I'm genuinely trying to relay positive hunting stories.

How did you progress into working with clients? At times hunting photography can be quite generic. For example, you'd see a review of a rifle with a photo of it sitting on a log and feel like you'd see that photo a hundred times. So I realised there was an opportunity to portray that image differently.

Through changing the way I was telling hunting stories and presenting images, I started to develop relationships in the industry which led to doing product videos and photography. I've taken a rifle into the back country on a hunt and, along the way, logged super-authentic imagery and content around it. In effect I'm using the product where it's designed to be used. I also work with clients capturing their hunting trips.

How did you build photography skills and knowledge?

It started with David Attenborough documentaries. I always marvelled at how they could capture the amazing beauty of wild animals, especially in Africa. In relation to equipment I'm not formally trained, though I educated myself through deep dives into YouTube and exploring a lot of tutorials on that platform.

That's another message I'd like to promote, that education isn't a barrier for you to achieve your goals or pursue what fills your bucket, including capturing wildlife images. I also developed photography and video skills more when clients would ask me to record hunting trips. Often when you jump in at the deep end is when the most growth and development can occur.

What does your post-production or post-filming process look like?

For video it's a long time. I have a process of starting with a rough cut then moving through multiple cuts, adding voiceovers and music to come up with the final product. As a rough guide it takes about two weeks minimum to produce a five-minute video, though I'm also a bit of a perfectionist. With stills I download them then decide where and what part of the story each section of those photos will tell.

Chris, thank you so much for speaking with Australian Shooter and sharing your story. It's evident you're committed to the Australian shooting and hunting community and want to enrich it with your visual storytelling. I have one final question for you. Do you still go hunting with your brother?

I do - it just takes a bit more planning these days! ●



For the left handed clay pigeon's out there, **WingOne** Ultimate Handheld Clay Thrower is specially designed for LH throwers and retails for \$29.99. Also, **MTM** make ambidextrous clay target throwers like the EZ-Throw that is made from one piece of polypropylene that won't break or rust RRP \$29 **Dent's** Royale & Lady Regal heritage left hand leather shooting gloves. Available in mens and womens sizes, featuring a right hand trigger finger which folds back when not in use. Made in Britain with specially treated leather to add water-resistantance, they are a great choice for keeping warm in the field. RRP \$259.95 They exist, although elusive. Ergonomic **Wegner** Swiss Army pocket knives with thumb depression and tools designed for lefties. Available in models Commander (pictured), Traveler, Evolution, Cyclist, Skier, Forester, and Matterhorn Plus. The corkscrews even turn anti-clockwise. From US\$79.95, but we also recommend keeping an eye out on ebay.

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THE SHOOTER

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Welcome to The Leftorium

MARK VAN DEN BOOGAART OPENS THE CASE FOR THE DEFENCE

hen my editor asked me to put something together for this Lefty Special I replied: "Roger that," and began scribbling some barely legible notes in my lefty chicken scratchings. As of September this year I'll have been a left-handed shooter for 39 years, notwithstanding an enforced break around 1996 when, overnight, I parted company with about 90 per cent of my firearms. Like many at the time, that little act of community service sucked the fun out of it for me and for a while I concentrated on my bow, boat and fishing.

Interrupted as it was my journey's always been one of trial, error and learning. Back in the late '80s I started out with visions of cowboys, cavalry charges and circling wagons, a lot of enthusiasm and not much else. Luckily I've always been willing to put participation before proficiency and while I've often made mistakes, as my mum used to say, it all comes clean in the wash.

When I returned in the early 2000s I was little smarter, a tad wiser and a bit more cashed up. Coincidently, lefty rifles were far more common which quicky levelled out my financial lead and while I did buy a lot, I tended to buy well. For instance, thanks to a very understanding gun shop owner, at one time I had the only left-handed .30-06 stainless Tikka T3 Hunter in the world and yes, that cost a few dollars more.

Throughout my second life as a shooter I've continued to learn through a combination of hunting, shooting and sharing, along with plenty of shed time working on the various rifles I've owned. So rather than a review, this is a collection of opinions from a left-handed shooter and hunter, with those opinions formed in no small part through the plundering of my bank account. As for a title well I'll take our lead from Ned Flanders of *The Simpsons* and welcome you to The Leftorium.

ATTENTION SHOPPERS

If you want a left-handed bolt-action rifle, the Tikka T₃x range is the place to start. Sure there are others out there but Tikka lead the way when it comes to product range and options. Visit their website and filter your search by 'handedness', where you'll find 10 true left-handed rifles and a whole of calibre and barrel length combinations based on them. I don't know any manufacturer who has a comparable range so if you do, let me know.

Both my Tikkas are hunting rifles. Sure, they go to the range but for me that's to sight-in and practice for the big show, the two I own being an older T₃ Hunter in .30-06 and a T₃x CTR in .308. Designed specifically for lefties with a floating, cold hammer-forged barrel, high quality trigger and smooth action, I've never found a Tikka which doesn't shoot well straight out the box.

A LATTER VERSION OF THE RUGER SCOUT WITH CERAKOTED BARREL AND ACTION.

AUSTRALIAN SHOOTER | 25

and Ar The Car





THE BERETTA BRX CAN BE CONFIGURED EITHER LEFT OR RIGHT-HANDED IN ABOUT 10 MINUTES.

OPPOSITE PAGE: DOWN GOES THE BACON! If like me you're looking to hunt, the traditional T₃x Hunter or more utilitarian CTR platforms are a good place to start, thought there are plenty of others to choose from. If you're a sports, target or Practical Rifle lefty, the T₃x TACT platform looks the goods.

As a hunter I mucked about with every rifle I've ever owned. I just like to tinker and beyond their obvious performance and build quality, I really like Tikka's modular approach. Their rifles are easy to modify with a whole world of genuine and aftermarket upgrades and improvements on offer. This is something we took advantage of when, along with Beretta Australia we built Indi, a customised Tikka T3x based on the CTR platform (see the May, June and July 2022 editions of *Australian Shooter*).

COWBOY UP

While I have bolt-action, straight-pull and even a break-action rifle in the safe, for me it all started with lever-actions. I've owned plenty in Winchester, Marlin, Chiappa and Rossi in a range of calibres from famous pistol loads to the ballistic-tipped Hornady LEVERevolution in .30/30, so all told I've played cowboy a lot with the gun that won the West. Of the lever-actions my favourite was a Winchester Model 92 in .32/20 and while ammo was hard to come by and it didn't have much power, it was an oddity and I do like out of the ordinary. The lever-action I shot most was a Rossi Puma with 24" octagonal barrel. It was chambered in .44 Magnum and I burnt through a hell of a lot of it on Saturday visits to Belmont range. The best for me though was the Marlin 336, a superb rifle and with that LEVERevolution ammo it was highly accurate and hard-hitting.

Now while most think of lever-actions as 'cowboy' or 'Western' rifles (I know I do), they're not confined to a single design. Browning's famous BLR challenged the configuration and inherent ballistic limitations of a tube magazine, while the Savage 30 was another unique interpretation of the design. This continued with the reimagining of the lever-action as a tactical rifle courtesy of the Marlin Dark series while Henry, a famous manufacturer, released a box magazine crossover in the Henry Supreme.

Sticking with the Western-style lever rifle variant, while not true left-handed rifles the design is more forgiving of the lefty. Generally the loading port is on the right while the lever-action ejects cases straight up, which neither favours nor punishes the left or right-handed shooter. Thing is, a top-eject action doesn't work with a scope as the scoped barrel effectively closes out the open action. Years ago you could buy aftermarket combination deflection plate/scope mounts which solved the top eject issue and, while some were way better than others, I've never seen one eject to the left.

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

It's funny that a company approaching 500 years of continuous operation would create something ultra-modern and way out of the box, yet that's what Beretta did with the BRX-1. It's a straightpull which isn't that unusual but what makes it so different is its truly modular and ambidextrous design. A BRX-1 can be right or left-handed and takes just a few tools and 15 minutes of your time to configure it to your preference.

Furthermore, when changing from right to left you don't end up with a compromise where the bolt handle is on the left but the rifle loads, ejects and operates right-handed. What you get is the real deal in a genuine left-handed configuration. The other interesting feature is the calibre,



LEVER BUY ANOTHER LEVER-ACTION IT'LL BE THE MARLIN GUIDE GUN IN .45/70.



ABOVE: CLOSE-UP OF MARK'S CURRENT GO-TO RIFLE.

BELOW: FANCY FINISH VARIATION OF THE CLASSIS REMINGTON PUMP-ACTION RIFLE, THE 7600.



barrel-swap option as again, with the aid of some tools, you can change the calibre of your BRX-1.

Now here's the thing and it's a big thing. As a lefty not only are you challenged by what rifle you can buy, you're often limited on calibre. With a BRX-1 you can have a left-handed rifle in whatever calibre Beretta offers and I don't know of any other company who does that, and if they do, not at the BRX-1 price point.

So the BRX-1 is a lefty but how does it perform? Well as you may have guessed I've had a lot to do with one as I helped build a customised version in. 308Win. I've also swapped stocks, barrels, bolt faces and fitted various optics. Away from the shed I've harvested game and watched others take goats, pigs, deer and even buffaloes. How do they perform? Extremely well and boy is that straightpull action fast (see April and May 2024 editions of Australian Shooter for more).

BE PREPARED

If there's one rifle which exceeded expectations it was the Ruger Gunsite Scout. Back in 2012, I was shooting my Marlin 336 in .30/30 when the lefthand variant of the Scout hit the market, so I traded the Marlin for the Ruger. In Australia it was the 'International' model, a slightly longer-barrelled version of the Scout with no flash suppressor, in a weird matt stainless finish. With laminated stock, M77 action and big, clunky metal box magazine the Scout was an odd-looking character.

My expectations were low or, more accurately, I'd little in the way of expectations of the Scout. I saw it as a more capable version of the Marlin, uglier for sure but with better ballistics and greater capacity. It would be something I could grab from the safe and, along with some factory ammo, head out for a weekend hunting scrub country.

I topped it with a Leupold VX-III 1.5-5x20mm scope and headed to the range. While the stock design wasn't great and the recoil pad way too soft, to my surprise it was a shooter. Sure it barked but

it barked straight and suddenly I started thinking about tinkering. In between successful hunts I experimented with different optics, slings and replacement magazines.

I also Cerakoted the Scout for added protection and aesthetics and, despite my initial reservations, it proved greater than the sum of its parts and for years was my go-to rifle. It remained so until Australian Shooter and Beretta Australia asked me to build a rifle and funnily enough the outcome of that project would be very Scout-like.

PUMPING IRON

The reason I left pump-action rifles to last is I've never had much to do with them, never owned one, only fired them during review and none of my regular hunting and range friends use one. Like the lever the pump-action isn't a true left-hand rifle but is lefty-friendly. Almost all my experience with pump-actions has been around the Remington 7600, 7600 Police and a few shots with the 7615, all of which combine a box magazine with a pump or slide-action.

Yet this by no means their limit and, like the lever, they seem to be enjoying an uptick in popularity with several manufacturers now producing them for the Aussie market. It's worth noting that unlike traditional levers, pump-action rifles are optics friendly and not limited in ammunition choice due to the use of a box rather than tubestyle magazine.

WRAP-UP

So let's pull all this together. Lefty shooters have often had to make do and even today, several manufacturers don't make lefties and so be it. If they don't want my money I don't want their gear. For those who do, generally as a lefty we've had to contend with a reduce range of rifles with fewer calibre options. To top it all off, at times we've had to pay more and the only way I can explain this is right-handed rifles are essentially cheap factory seconds, knocked out by the bundle late on Friday arvo. Lefty rifles are the ones they get right!

The good news is the range and offering of left-hand rifles is increasing, you just have to look little further. You'll still won't see many on the gun shop wall so my advice is jump online and let your fingers do the walking. And if you see me at the range, introduce yourself as we lefties have to stick together: Winston Churchill, Craig Boddington and Steve Rinella can't be wrong.





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A two-handed shooter's dilemma

THE YOUNG KYLE ANDREWS HAD TO JUGGLE FAMILY DYNAMICS

s a child half my family was left-handed, with one parent and sibling each way and the good-natured rivalry very real indeed. There was often reference to left-handed scissors, a backwards can opener or other lefty versions of ordinary items which were either useless novelties or a godsend (and usually missing), depending on your point of view. From an early age I played hockey which is primarily a right-handed sport for safety reasons, and around the same time started tennis which I remember trying with both hands before settling on right-handed.

I well recall the first time I picked up a gun to shoot, a small break-open .177 air rifle I think may have been a BSA Cadet, the target being some scrap metal I found on the family farm. I remember that BSA's seals were so worn out it was probably sending pellets down about as fast as I could throw them.

But it didn't matter as I was fascinated with shooting from the start. My father had joined the local SSAA Moonta branch a year or two prior, with me tagging along to watch a range of competitions (play on the swings mostly) and try to help with scoring targets. I'd guess I was around six years old and keen as mustard to have a go, as most kids are.

Without thinking I brought that air rifle to my left shoulder to look down the iron sights, feeling and probably looking as awkward as most first-timers do. Quick as a flash before I had a chance to properly take hold and focus, my dad twisted me round and set up my stance right-handed, saying something along the lines of: "Not that way son, let's try it like this first." He then made a joke which I didn't really understand at the time, though it stuck with me regardless. "It'll save a lot of money not buying left-handed rifles if you're shooting your whole life. Then one day you'll be able to inherit my collection."

I remember later that day my mum commenting I was shooting right-handed and, as a typical five-year-old, I proceeded to parrot back dad's exact words, leaving her less than impressed and probably sparking a discussion about 'forcing' right-handedness. She was reliving the whole school experience of being rapped on the knuckles with a ruler for writing with her left hand, so this issue understandably had painful memories for her.

In any case it felt quite natural to shoot right-handed from day one, particularly since I've barely fired a shot left-handed since. As mentioned, my dominant hand tends to change between activities, so it may have eventually become my preference regardless. Through all of it I was lucky to have a supportive family on my shooting journey, knowing it didn't matter to them which finger I pulled the trigger with.

As many of you and particularly lefties will know, availability and a decent selection of left-handed rifles and shooting equipment has been sparse in the past, particularly off-the-shelf options. Things have come a long way since then



AT THE 2002 SSAA MOONTA 'SUPERSHOOT' TROPHY PRESENTATION, YOUNG GOLD MEDAL-WINNING KYLE ANDREWS IS FLANKED BY CLUB SECRETARY CRAIG ANDREWS, LEFT, AND PRESIDENT TONY ANDREWS.

of course, yet with a left-handed friend of mine recently waiting well over a year for a .22 target rifle ordered from a very well-known and respected brand, it's undoubtedly still an issue.

That said there are subtle changes in rifles becoming more common which make life easier, such as ambidextrous safety catches, grip mouldings and magazine releases, all of which look to make right-handed options somewhat more universal. I also find it convenient when shooting off a bipod or other rest to have my preferred left hand free to operate dials on optics or button menus in digital/thermal scopes. Making finer adjustments on elevation turrets, parallax or activating a laser rangefinder on new and unfamiliar products I've tested, all while maintaining a sight picture, has been an easy skill for me and a lucky side product of my background.

Fast-forward to around 15 years ago when I took up pistol shooting and had the lefty-righty decision to make all over again. Initially borrowing from my dad a Feinwerkbau .177 air pistol and Smith & Wesson Model 22A .22 self-loader, I'd had plenty of opportunities to try my hand at our club in Moonta, this time with lots of hilarious and unsolicited advice from both sides of the family on how to hold it 'correctly'.

I switched sides many times along the way, often during the same shoot just to compare scores, yet without convincing results either way. Although the beautifully moulded right-hand grip on the FWB wasn't too friendly for experimenting with my left hand, it was still useful to try it. A left-handed grip can be ordered, however the side lever for reloading became a little awkward as it tends to be placed faced down on the bench rather than up for use. So I'd recommend left-handers go for an air-operated option if possible.

The 22A is more user-friendly for lefties with symmetrical grip and central magazine release button, and I ended up buying one which I still use today. These days the 22A is used for Handgun Silhouette and Action Pistol out of an adjustable holster made by Hogue, which can also be set up left-handed for versatility.

It's worth noting that despite the slide release catch being quite awkward for me and very much intended for right-handers, in slow-fire competitions this isn't such a problem and, when faster reloads are required, the issue can be circumvented by a simple pull-and-release of the slide.

Despite now being firmly a left-handed pistol shooter, I still occasionally check to confirm my dominant eye. I use the sights to see if it matches my hand and find it changes without me realising, which has been known to have me experimenting with my right hand again! In the early days with a pistol I'd also find trigger control was initially far better with my right hand through many years of rifle shooting, though overall the stability of my preferred hand has won out for the lefties this time, much to mum's delight. ●



CRAIG'S PISTOL ON THE BENCH AT A HANDGUN SILHOUETTE COMPETITION.

What makes a *lefty* shotgun?



JOE GOES TO WORK ON A WELL-FIGURED WALNUT STOCK BLANK.

OLYMPIAN SUZY BALOGH (OAM) HAS THE ANSWER

ith roughly 10 per cent of Australians being 'lefties', should a left-handed shooter use a shotgun designed specifically for them? A left-handed clay target shooter mounts the gun

to their left shoulder and are most likely going to have natural left-handedness coupled with left-eye dominance, though this isn't always the case.

There are many reasons shooters may mount the shotgun to their left shoulder such as to resolve eye dominance issues, the vision in their right eye is compromised or injuries to their right arm or shoulder. Sometimes it comes down to having been provided with a left-handed shotgun as a beginner or mimicking a lefty instructor, so what can make a shotgun left-handed?

TOP LEVER

On a left-handed shotgun the top lever which opens the action moves from right to left, so can be more easily pulled over by the left thumb (fewer than 1 per cent of shotguns have this type of top lever). Most lefties adapt to a right-handed top lever which can feel unnatural, while short or weak thumbs can make adapting difficult and painful.

Some brands of shotguns have true left-handed top lever opening guns such as Blaser, Kolar, Krieghoff, Miroku and more recently Browning. Benelli and Beretta are among the brands with ejection ports on the left of their self-loading shotguns, desirable as the expelled cartridge doesn't fly across the shooter's face.

STOCK PALMSWELL

This is the crafting of an ergonomic swelling of the wood designed to fill the palm of the hand gripping the stock. A palmswell makes for better contact, finger position to the trigger, overall handling of the shotgun and reduced hand and wrist strain. Depending on the degree of the palmswell, it can be an extremely limiting factor in a lefty being able to effectively use a right-handed shotgun, as the fingers may not wrap around the stock as required.

STOCK GLOVE GRIPS

A further extension to customising a shotgun stock is a 'glove grip' design, where the thumb has a groove cut into the grip separately to the fingers, which themselves may be individually embedded to give an ergonomic 'glove-like' customisation. With a glove grip on a stock, that particular stock can only be used by the handedness it was designed for.

STOCK CAST

Most factory-made shotguns are straight-stocked, as in the stock is in line behind the barrels and action so the gun will fit both right and left-handers. Some factory shotgun stocks can have a small amount of bend either left or right of the line of the barrel and this shaping of a stock, so it bends either side of the gun, is known as the cast.

Casting is done so the centre of the shooter's eye the gun is shouldered to can look directly over the gun and down the centre of the barrel to align



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STOCK-MAKER JOE CAMILLERI BECAME A LEFT-HANDED SHOOTER BY NECESSITY. NOTE CUSTOM-MADE STOCK WITH GLOVE GRIP AND EYE ALIGNMENT WITH BLINKERS TO LIMIT DISTRACTION. the sights. Decades ago it was popular to add cast to guns by pouring hot linseed oil over them and clamping the stock to the desired bend. More commonly these days, stocks will have adjustable combs or fully adjustable stocks fitted to modify the cast.

Master stock-makers will carve cast into a custom stock at the comb, heel and toe so the gun fits comfortably into the shoulder and chest. This allows for not only the centre of the eye to align with the top of the gun's rib, but to be over the centre of the gun with both eyes level and not tilted. For a left-handed shooter the cast is angled from midline out to the left shoulder and is known as 'cast on' (for right-handers 'cast off' is towards the right shoulder). The broader you are in the shoulders, the more cast is required.

Shooters in this country are fortunate to not only be able to visit the Beretta Australia factory to be measured by Perazzi Australia for a custom stock, we also have excellent stock-makers. Four experienced masters I've used personally or directed clients to are Daryl Stevens in Queensland, Shane & Kevin Wright and Craig Fitzgerald in Victoria and Joe Camilleri in New South Wales.

THE LEFT-HANDED STOCK-MAKER

Joe Camilleri of Camilleri Custom Stocks in Sydney is himself a left-handed shooter. He's naturally right-handed but shoots on the other side because, as a boy, the 'norm' for shooting was to close one eye for better aim. Joe couldn't close his left eye to shoot, so was instructed to switch to his left shoulder so he could close his right eye and aim that way. He adapted quickly and remains a left-handed shooter, though fortunately coaching styles have changed for the better when it comes to eye dominance and handedness.

Joe became a stock-maker through necessity, as the ones he'd access to when starting out struggled to make a stock which fitted him as a 'lefty'. He hasn't made any personal technique adjustments and, as a left-handed shooter, competes as a mirror image to a right-hander in gun hold and foot position. Down The Line is his preferred discipline for which he wears blinkers to obscure movement of the shooter to his left. The only issue is he occasionally breaks a thumbnail when opening a stiff right-handed top lever and it's awkward when the empty cartridge bins are behind the shooters to their right.

LEFT-HANDED GUN BENEFITS

Many lefties adapt to opening a right-handed top lever, use a straight-stocked gun or move their adjustable comb to compensate for cast and do shoot excellent scores. Clay target shooting is a precision sport and a gun designed to aid movement, align vision, reduce injury, channel recoil and generally be more comfortable does make the process of breaking clays much easier.

• Suzy Balogh OAM is an Olympic and Commonwealth gold medallist



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DEREK NUGENT TACKLES THE ISSUE OF HAND DOMINANCE

TYPICAL OPTIONS FOR A LEFT-HANDED SHOOTER ARE BOLT-ACTION, LEVER-ACTION AND COMBINATION GUNS. iddle me this: What's the connection between Barack Obama, Bill Gates, Paul McCartney, Albert Einstein, Jennifer Lawrence, Leonardo da Vinci, Aristotle and August 13? It's of course their left-handedness with that date being International Left Handers Day. Handedness, or hand preference, is the tendency to be more skilled and comfortable using one hand (your dominant hand) over the other due to it being stronger, faster or more dexterous.

Right-handedness is the most common and occurs in about 90 per cent of the population. Left-handedness is a trait associated with roughly the other 10 per cent as is mixed-handedness or cross-dominance, the practice of changing hand preference in response to different tasks. In addition, there's a smaller sub-group which has a prevalence of about one per cent, with ambidexterity having equal ability in both hands.

I fall into the category of the highly confused the mixed-handed. I'm essentially a right hander in all things except when it comes to playing pool or shooting, though even then a contradiction arises as I use a pistol right-handed with left eye dominance. I've never understood why this should be but, like many others, I've experienced the trials and tribulations of being a lefty.

BIOLOGICALLY SPEAKING

There's some debate as to what exactly causes left-handedness, with most experts agreeing it's likely a result of heredity (genetic) factors in combination with some environmental ones. Left-handedness does tend to run in families, though not with the same degree of prevalence as other inherited traits and seems to be determined in the very early stages of fetal development.

Scientific studies of twins suggest genetics account for 25 per cent of the variance in handedness, with environmental factors responsible for the remaining 75 per cent. Left-handedness is twice as common in twins than in the general population where, if a parent is left-handed, there's a 26 per cent chance of a child following suit.

AS A SHOOTER

One of the worst pieces of shooting advice I ever witnessed was in a gun shop where a novice lefty rocked up looking to buy a .22 bolt-action rifle. I listened in amazement as the salesman advised him there were virtually no left-handed options for him to consider. He said left-handed actions were weaker than right-handed and he'd be better advised to buy the latter as he'd be able to operate it as efficiently as a left-handed one. I was aghast. The salesman simply wanted to sell what he had in stock rather than doing right by his customer and sourcing something more appropriate. Needless to say I've never bought from that shop by way of a silent protest.


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LEFTY SPECIAL | A LEFTY IN HIS RIGHT MIND!

And there's the rub. My biggest frustration as a shooter is availability of and access to left-handed bolt-actions. About 30 years ago I was lucky enough to walk into a gun shop and buy a Remington 700 BDL in .308 which remains my faithful go-to, though that was the exception rather than the rule. The number of times I've read new firearm reviews and thought "beauty, I'll have that" only to discover it's a right-handed offering only are painfully numerous.

A full wood Sako Bavarian or Ruger Guide Gun in .308 have long haunted my dreams yet remain unattainable. Similarly, I have a friend who has a beautiful Safari-grade Bruno 601 he simply doesn't use and would sell to me in an instant but for my 'affliction'. I understand the firearms trade is a business and it's a question of supply and demand but it hurts nevertheless.

Yet where there's a will there's a way. My advice to similarly afflicted shooters, particularly the novice, is to consider the two great saviours for the left-hander, namely lever-actions and double rifle/ combination guns. I've always had both in my safe and in particular am a keen advocate of the lever gun, which lets you access a good range of both rimfire and centrefire calibres.

A combination gun offers flexibility few shooters seem to appreciate here and I've written about both (see *Australian Shooter*, May and October 2023). Of course there's also a fine selection of single-shot models from a host of manufacturers if this is more your style and, thanks to the likes of Winchester, the pump-action seems to be experiencing a renaissance of sorts.

Lately the emergence of ambidextrous straightpull actions by makers like Beretta and Savage have added another dimension of choice for the lefty. All I'll say is persistence and perseverance will see you right when it comes to sourcing and buying firearms suitable for lefties and the choices improve with each passing year.

HONEST ASSESSMENT

I've never felt disadvantaged as a left-handed shooter and hunter. It is what it is and you just put your head down and get stuck in. As mentioned above, my only frustration has been to look on enviously at the selection of quality bolt-action rifles offered only to right-handers, sigh and reach for that old faithful Remington or one of my lever guns.

Certainly I've never felt disadvantaged as a marksman by being left-handed. And while it irked the military instructors on the range, my left-handedness didn't stop them installing me in the regimental shooting team with a customized SLR of my own in the armoury. Nor has being a southpaw compromised my ability to hunt, though put me on the right-hand edge of an extended line of stalking hunters and I'm at a distinct advantage.

All things being equal, regardless of our hand preference we're all advocates for the shooting sports and enjoy the benefits of being afield with pack, rifle and good mates. So I'll close with an undisputable scientific fact: Given the right side of the brain controls the left side of the body, could it be that only left-handed people are truly in their right minds!

THE FATE OF MANY LEFTIES DURING THE MEDIEVAL ERA.



Ambidexterity has its advantages

STEVEN IRWIN FINE

n all the decades I hunted I shot a vast number of animals and all with one-shot kills with only two exceptions and, even then, a rapid follow-up shot put them both down. Now I'm strictly a right-handed person and shoot from my right shoulder, though there is something worth noting. On a hunt with my sons when they were approaching their teenagers years, a close friend was talking about how lucky he felt to be fully ambidextrous.

He spoke of the main advantage being speed and adaptability, meaning he could send down a swift and well-aimed shot in different shooting situations. If the terrain of bush, trees and shrubs was plentiful he could shoulder his rifle quickly, as if the animal was in his line of fire he could simply swap shoulders.

That friend was William, a popular gunsmith who hunted all his life, mainly for the pot though off his left shoulder he took a good-sized buffalo. His hunting tales stuck long in the memory of one of my sons who, growing up, focussed on shooting from both left and right shoulders.

When my boys were young I told them there were only four reasons to shoot an animal, those being for food, a trophy, protection if a dangerous beast charged you and for feral control or culling purposes. One day we were sitting around an outdoor fire just before sunset when my youngest said he'd like to shoot a pigeon on a branch about 30m away.

I told him he could and, under strict supervision, handed him a .22 bolt-action rifle loaded with sub-sonic bullets, one of three firearms I owned. Shooting from the left shoulder he dropped the bird with one shot, after which I told him he'd have to eat it and showed him how to pluck the feathers and gut it. He ate it that night.

In my opinion, shooting from your left or right shoulder makes no difference, though if you're accurate off both then you have an advantage and a big one, especially if you ever find yourself in the path of a charging buffalo!



STEVEN'S AMBIDEXTROUS SON AT THE SSAA SPRINGVALE RANGE IN VICTORIA.



MORE TO BEING A LEFTY THAN MEETS THE EYE

ITALIAN CHAMPION ANDREA AMORE SHOOTS RIGHT-HANDED WHILE USING HIS DOMINANT LEFT EYE. ross-dominance is a term which applies to people who shoot left-handed but are actually right-eye dominant or vice-versa. Eye dominance is prevalent in primates with binocular vision, namely humans. Binocular vision is what allows us to form a single three-dimensional image using both eyes, the main advantage of this and one most relevant to shooters, being that binocular vision helps us gain depth perception from what we're viewing.

Depth perception is crucial to shooters trying to obtain a clear view of a target rapidly and accurately. In someone with normal binocular vision there's an effect of parallax, therefore the dominant eye is the one primarily relied on for precise positional information. The dominant eye isn't 'stronger' but feeds visual information to the brain quickest, therefore is crucial in sports requiring aim such as archery, darts and of course shooting.

As a shooter trying to aim with something that's essentially an extension of the eye, being right-handed but left-eye dominant poses a few challenges. This is because you're basically relying on your 'slower' eye to pick up the target, which can lead to inconsistent reaction times and quicker fatigue.

Studies in optometric journals online show cross-dominance has a big impact on shooting scores, as those with uncrossed dominance shot substantially better than those who had not. Many studies show baseball players, cricketers and golfers with cross-dominance had a slight advantage over their opponents, therefore this has the reverse effect in shooting. And from a purely genetic point of view, it's more common for women than men to be cross-dominant.

So how do we determine our eye dominance? If you're lucky enough to have your dominant hand and eye match, you've no worries when it comes to shooting. But if you're not and want to rectify this or still can't quite work it out, there are things to consider and important steps you'll have to take.

STEP 1:

Your first port of call should be seeking professional help. Sports optometrists have played a vital role in the success of shooters worldwide and it's well worth the small price you pay. After all, having 20/20 vision doesn't always mean you have good visual acuity and that's where doctors of optometry can help shooters as follows:

• Maximising their clarity and contrast with the correct prescription.

• Adjusting focus for sighting distance and movement of targets.

• Using tints on shooting glasses to maximise contrast.

• Eye training exercises which can enhance your sight and help with hand-eye reaction time.

It's important to note that trying to change your eye dominance is not recommend. Sports optometrists advise you can never fully re-train eye dominance, you'll only lessen the absoluteness of it which can cause more confusion down the track. Some do opt for this but always seek the advice of a professional as everybody's different.

STEP 2:

Consider shooting with a 'patch'. For some, dominance can transfer from one eye to the other depending on the conditions the eyes are under so, if you're not strongly cross-dominant, this approach may work to establish some consistency. It involves putting a small patch over the focal point of your dominant eye. The patch needs to be small enough to still let the peripherals for depth perception remain effective as well as letting enough light in. But it must be big enough so the focal point of your eye is covered, making it the less dominant eye when shooting.

Of course this isn't perfect as shooting's best done with both eyes open, though it's better to use a patch rather than closing one eye during disciplines requiring quick acquisition of a target, either moving or stationary. And it can be tricky learning to operate with a patch, as you're really only feeding half the visual information to your brain when shooting.

Overall it's reasonable to conclude that beginners who use a patch (or completely cover their dominant eye) will find it takes a little longer to master the art of target shooting. This is not meant to deter, rather provide the truths of dealing with being wired this way.

STEP 3:

An alternative and often last-resort approach is to simply change the side on which you used to shoot by becoming a left-handed shooter if you're lefteye dominant. This may sound daunting but makes more sense for beginners.

If you're a newcomer or know someone with this issue who is, encourage them to try shooting with uncrossed dominance. This is because it's still early enough for them to develop their skills on the other side before they've learned to shoot cross-dominantly (see the article on young Aussie Olympian Aislin Jones on Page 70). Pistol shooters can try using their left hand and moving the pistol across to sight the target using their right eye. ●

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FOV degrees/m@100m	11.7°/20.5m	10.4°/18.1m	7.3°/12.8m
Eye relief, mm		65	
Range of detection, m	2800	2000	2800
Built-in laser rangefinder		Yes	
Measurment range, m		800	
Video & photo recorder		Yes	
Built-in memory, Gb		64	
Battery life, hours	7+	7+	7

XG60

75/OUTDOORS





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MARK VAN DEN BOOGAART ON A LEFTY'S LABOUR OF LOVE Imost every year since I bought the 'Ought-6' its development has been chronicled in the pages of *Australian Shooter* and *Australian Hunter* magazines and, most pleasingly, it has also been part of my eldest boy's introduction to hunting. Now this all starts back in the early 2000s after a few years of forced hiatus post-1996.

My intent was to get back into hunting after a few years off but, as I'd lost all my hunting contacts, I gravitated towards competition shooting. While the action was fun the mind-boggling politics of competition shooting wasn't so, not wanting to waste any more time, I decided to look for greener pastures. Luckily I'd kept up my SSAA membership and with good mate Tim headed to Belmont. At the time, Tim and I had only recently crossed paths after last meeting in London, though as luck would have it he now lived a single train stop away and, like me, was keen to get back into hunting.

Between visits to Belmont we frequented the then Fortitude Valley-located Queensland Gun Exchange, so pretty soon our Saturday range days included Rossi Puma lever-actions in .44 Magnum and new Tikka T3s in .223. We burned through a mountain of ammo and as the weekends clicked by, started to give serious consideration to hunting. The consensus was a .30-06 was the way to go, so on our next visit to QGE we were ready to buy.

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ON OUR NOVEMBER 2010 COVER









As we were both lefties and already owned Tikka rifles, Tim bought himself a Tikka T3 Lite and I went for the T3 Hunter. Now as the .30-06 was to be my hunting rifle, I decided to go for something a little different. Working with the late David Auger, we hatched a plan to create a left-handed Tikka T3 Hunter in a stainless finish, topped with matching Leupold VX 3 scope and while a readily available rifle package nowadays, 20 years ago no such thing existed.

Through a combination of plentiful QGE store stock and modular design of the Tikka, this proved a straightforward enough task. While I didn't know it at the time, it was my introduction to the simplicity of the Tikka design and was the first such upgrade in what would become a 15-plus year project of making the rifle just right for a lefty.

As these things happen, about three years ago I mentioned to New Zealand-based hunting writer Peter Ryan that my .30-06 project was complete. But that's the end of the story so let's backtrack to the beginning. Not long after taking ownership of the rifle I shot my first red deer under the guidance of Paul, a highly knowledgeable deer man and longtime member of the Australian Deer Association's Brisbane branch. It was a rewarding experience, even more so as I'd been told by one of the great sages of deer hunting I'd never take anything with such a flashy, shiny rifle.

My first thoughts after taking that deer turned to the stock. I wanted something better and ended up at a gunsmith who suggested a Tru-oil finish was the answer. Admittedly that improved the look and a new recoil pad slightly increased the length of pull, though I felt it still wasn't right. What I really wanted was a better stock. I'd always admired classic hunting rifles and while I had the means to buy one, most brands didn't make classic left-hand rifles, at least not the way I wanted one.

After exhausting the list of available aftermarket stocks it became clear I'd have to go for a custom build. If you've never had a stock built from scratch, the experience is similar to those movie scenes where the star visits a suit maker and, while a stock builder's workshop is very different to a Saville Row fitting room, the process is much the same. You listen to their recommendations, pick the material, agree on a style, agree and maybe disagree with suggested additions and finally you're measured up.

To end proceedings a price is presented, you look at the number, die a little inside and casually nod vour head like vou're buving a coffee. Then you wait and wait. During that time you receive the odd update, make a few polite phone calls to check on progress and finally receive word to collect it. What I found that Saturday afternoon after receiving the call was my Tikka .30-06 was now sporting a highly traditional straight comb, Afghan walnut stock with New Guinea ebony fore and end caps and matching recoil pad.

Picking it up I was impressed by the lightness of the rifle and how well it shouldered and pointed. Most of all I was impressed by how well it fitted. Trouble was the addition of the stock made the rest of the rifle look a little odd and while I know it sounds self-defeating (and I grant you it was), I decided to reduce the stainless finish.



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HUNTING WITH BAILEY AND THE .30-06 IN 2016.



JULY 2024 AND THE FINISHED PRODUCT (MAYBE).

First to go were the scope and rings and all told the rifle has worn five different scopes. Those have been in order a stainless Leupold VX-3 3.5-10x40mm held in place with Tikka factory rings and, keeping those rings, I swapped that for a black Leupold VX-3 1.5-5x20mm. I then jumped up to a Swarovski Z6 1-6x24mm with matching 30mm Optilock rings. Sticking with the Optilocks I went back to Leupold and a VX-5HD 2-10x42mm then finally, and to this day, use a Steiner Predator-4 2-10x42 with illuminated reticle.

I also replaced the bolt shroud and trigger guard/magazine assembly with upgraded aftermarket versions, seeking a replacement for the standard Tikka polymer magazine. I hit on a locally-made one which had potential, though it caused the first and only jam I've ever experienced in a Tikka. On speaking with the manufacturer he kindly explained the jam was either my fault, the rifle's fault or a combination of both so, to make doubly sure, I gave Tim the magazine to try out. "Rubbish" was his assessment after a single outing and consequently I've stuck with factory magazines.

It was looking good though there were host of mismatched colours and finishes across the various metal surfaces, yet before I dealt with that challenge there was an unexpected addition. One December while staying with relatives in England, I took a train south to London to visit some famous gun-makers. The first was Purdey where other than a cap, everything was pretty much out of my price range. Next stop was Holland & Holland which was hardly bargain basement, though they did have a leather rifle sling which didn't break the bank so I bought it to bring the Tikka a little closer to a true classic.

So pulling it all together I decided the only way to make it just right was to apply a singular finish to the metalwork and that meant Cerakoting. I went all-in and chose the closest to a blued finish I could find. It worked and sometime around 2020 I had the classic firearm I was after and decided it would be my dedicated deer rifle. Every April I take it with me in search of red and fallow and maybe sambar eventually. In-between it does enjoy a run, like last September when it was used by another hunter to take a buffalo with a perfectly-placed head shot.

As to its future (or should I say future improvements), it's hard to put the brakes on something I've worked on for so long, though one thing I continue to tinker with is ammo. For years I shot Federal until last year I was challenged to try Norma Oryx which I did and they worked well, maybe a little too well. The 180-grain Oryx delivered way too much punch on red deer so, after conversations with Beretta Australia, I reduced the load to 150-grain Whitetails. Writing this in February, I'll know in about six weeks if the switch was successful.

So I reckon I've finished the Tikka and with a 12-year-old son who's keen as mustard to have his junior licence, my focus has shifted to new projects and new ideas. And before you ask he's a righty, so the idea of a generational rifle is no easy task, yet no mind, there are already two others in the safe that'll fit that particular right-handed bill.

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Learning all over again

TED MITCHELL OVERCOMES A LIFE-CHANGING INCIDENT

eading west in the back of the wagon, my thoughts were far from the next hunt. You see I wasn't heading out west to hunt, I was in the back of an ambulance en route to the local hospital. On that fateful day of October 15, 2000 my whole hunting scene and, in fact, my whole life took a turn for the worse. I was securing a few things on the roof of my vehicle with a bungee strap when the blasted thing let go and sprung back, the steel end landing dead centre of my right eye - my dominant and shooting eye.

At Ipswich Hospital they took one look, pumped me full of morphine and rushed me to Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane where the news wasn't good. My sight was gone as the strap had smashed the lens in pieces and drove it back into my eye. Worse still they may have to remove the eye, leaving me with a whole week in P.A.H. to reflect on what I was going to do next.

Rest assured I felt lower than a snake's belly and didn't know how I was ever going to cope. After all, I'd been training that eye for almost 60 years and it's pretty hard to teach an old dog new tricks. At the lowest point I forced myself to wander around in pyjamas and visit some of the other patients, always returning to my room feeling ashamed as there were people a lot worse off than me.

On returning home and picking up my rifles and trying to look through binoculars etc, I was down in the dumps again. Steve Cosby, a good friend who's paraplegic following a swimming accident, has been a tremendous help as he's just a tower of strength. He gets on with life without complaining and each time I talk to him, I draw strength. When guys like Steve can keep going and make the most of their life in the face of tremendous adversity, who am I to whine about a little old eve.

Not being allowed to drive for three months after losing the sight of that eye, I'd to rely on others to chauffeur me around. My son, young Ted, took me to a private range a few times, where I put heaps of rounds through my .22 as they're substantially cheaper than centerfire rounds. I was hitting targets now and again, though needed to acquire a much higher skill level before I'd be confident in myself, which is important.

I decided I'd have to think of another way to shoot as I just wasn't confident enough left-handed. I started playing with the .22 again and, finding that awkward as it was, I could shoot right-handed using my left eye. At least I could hold steady and my right index finger felt good on the trigger, I just had to get my head down lower. I went to visit my mate Arthur, thinking he'd be able to cut the stock down to allow me to get my head low enough to see a bit easier. Well that rifle stock certainly looks different now and the resale value will have plummeted, but who cares what it looks like so long as I can shoot.

After five months and about 3000 rounds I was becoming more proficient, so out to the range three times a week I'd go. Looking at stumps or cowpats and estimating their range before pacing it out to



see how close I was, helped me learn to judge distance. Seeing as the 'new' stock was working, I got in there and stuffed up the rest of my rifle stocks by cutting enough out of them to stick my head low enough to see left-eyed and right-shouldered.

Six months elapsed and I was hitting what I was aiming at with my rifles and missing stumps and gate posts with my truck. I'd started to evolve and could now judge distance reasonably well, while feeling fairly confident in my shooting ability. This was important as I knew I owed it to the animals I hunt to be able to grass them cleanly with one shot.

With the accident nine months behind me I was doing most of the things I used to do with two eyes - I didn't pour water on the bench when making coffee and could shoot my rifles as well as before, albeit not as rapidly. I learned to judge distance within reason and was resigned to the fact I had to put up with the situation whether I liked it or not (a couple of my mates reckon I always was a bit one-eyed anyway). There were lots of friends who showed they cared and helped me cope and for that I was truly grateful.

There'll be plenty of other people out there who injure themselves in ways that'll hinder their everyday life and to you I say: "Don't ever give up. I know from experience that's easy to say but very hard to put into practice. No matter how bad it may seem, there's always someone worse off yet making a go of their life. Be patient as there are lots of wonderful people out there who'll help you overcome the obstacles."



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Three Amigos



his is not a comparison article as we didn't set out to directly analyze a bunch of similar rifles, give them a score and declare a winner. That'll come later in the year. But what we did set out to do was take three left-handed shooters, a selection of left-handed rifles and give our readers some idea of the options now available to lefties. It should be noted however that all seven rifles here are available in right-hand too, so this is good information all-round.

We spent a day at the SSAA Monarto range ably supervised by Chris Carroll, vice-president of our South Australian Conservation and Wildlife Management (CWM) Group and a qualified Range Officer, so thanks for your time Chris and contribution to the Association.

All three shot all seven rifles and what follows is a summary of their thoughts. This list isn't exhaustive, these are just the left-handed rifles which were to hand at some of our regular distributors. As an aside, buying lefty rifles can be a bit of a challenge so be patient. Most distributors can only order these firearms once a year to fit in with factory production runs and have to 'guesstimate' how many they'll sell, so if the one you want isn't in stock it can take a little while to arrive.

Of course the waiting will make the receiving so much sweeter, though if you're in a rush and can be flexible with brands and calibres, check out the SSAA Gun Sales website for secondhand options. The site now has a left-hand filter to help you sift through the offerings more quickly. So without further ado here are some options as assessed by **Tom Kenyon, Paul Miller** and **Mark van den Boogaart**.



MARK VAN DEN BOOGAART, PAUL MILLER AND TOM KENYON READY FOR ACTION.



Lithgow Arms Crossover .22

KINDLY PROVIDED FOR REVIEW BY TSA

TK: There were three .22s on our shoot and this was the most surprising. I hadn't used a Lithgow rifle before (my 1941 .303 aside) and wasn't sure what to expect. It has a synthetic stock which alludes to 'tactical' in style but is light and functional, certainly much lighter than it looks like it should be. The stainless barrel was the longest of the three .22s though not by much.

The rifle was supplied with a bipod and, using it on the bench, I was able to shoot good groups, actually the best .22 groups. The action was smooth and didn't catch in any part of the motion of reloading a round. Unfortunately, this came with only a fiveround magazine which is fine when walking, though a little frustrating when there are chances for more shots (I'm a firm believer in 10-round minimum for .22 mags).

The bipod makes it difficult to compare the balance of this with the other .22s, yet even with it fitted it felt fine. Time restraints didn't permit us the chance to shoot without the bipod but even so, after a bit of getting used to, this is another rile that would have bunnies in danger when shooting freehand. I suspect without the bipod it would be as balanced and natural as the Tikka for freehand shooting.

I can see why they call this model the Crossover as it's as comfortable on the range as in the hills or on the go. I couldn't single it out for a specific use due to its all-round ability, though if I had to pick one I'd love to see how well I could tune it to be a good target rifle. Yes, I'd buy this one and would be perfectly happy walking for rabbits with it.

The folks at Lithgow have done the name proud and produced a great Aussie-made .22. If only they made left-handed centrefires! Please consider it. Oh, and keep an eye out later in the year for our tour of the Lithgow factory.





THE BOLT WAS EASY TO USE AND THE ACTION WAS SMOOTH AND FAST.

PM: Having never handled a Lithgow rifle I was keen to get to grips with this Aussie-made offering. The test rifle was chambered in .22LR and is also available in .17 HMR and .22 HMR. I was immediately impressed by its looks, not too 'militaristic' yet modern with an adjustable black polymer stock and weighing around 3.1kg, nice in the hand and ideal for field or target shooting.

It's another man-sized firearm which shot well over the bags and felt natural in freehand use, proving extremely accurate with the selection of ammo provided. The crisp, single-stage trigger let off at around 1.5kg and while the rifle comes with a five-shot single-stack magazine, aftermarket ones are available if increased firepower is required.

The action/receiver is high tensile steel, Weaver bases are Cerakote coated and a Picatinny rail is available as an optional extra. The 531mm barrel is made from Lithgow's proprietary military grade steel, hammer forged with six grooves and a twist rate of 1:16". It would be best described as a medium-weight varmint barrel with a target crown and muzzle threaded for use with a brake where permitted. The bolt action is robust, smooth and fed and ejected perfectly without exception.

This is a highly modern firearm in terms of looks, ideal for small-game hunting though would also acquit itself admirably in various target shooting disciplines due to its obvious accuracy and quality of build. A proud Australian offering. But would I buy it: In a minute!

MvdB: This was a whole new experience for me. I've been interested in the Crossover for a while after first seeing them in a local gun shop, though sadly a lack of left-hand options in the centrefire range has meant so far I've only admired them from afar. I've hunted with others carrying the Lithgow and they've all expressed their happiness with its performance and build (I even watched a new hunter take his first pig with a Crossover last year).

I've visited the town and factory but it wasn't until I came to Adelaide, I'd my first chance to look at one up close. It's obvious the Crossover is a contemporary interpretation of a sporting rifle, angular in design looking modern and purposeful. The shape of the stock, position of the safety and Cerakote finish make it just a little different from its contemporaries, though what really sets it apart is that 'Australian made' just in front of the bolt. It was nice to have a local connection in the test group and, topped with the ZeroTech Thrive scope, this was our homegrown entrant.

Sitting down with the Lithgow at Monarto, you realise the stock design promotes shooting from a supported position. Off the bench, bonnet of a car or tree stump, the flat edge extending to the toe of the butt combined with a high, flat comb and open pistol grip make it a very comfortable rifle to shoulder in a set position.

Used in conjunction with a bipod (the test rifle was supplied with a quality Magpul), the Crossover sits low and steady. I'm unsure how this translates to a rifle shot primarily in the off-hand position, but if you shoot from a rest or supported position, Lithgow was thinking of you when they designed the stock.

Overall, the LA101 Crossover with ZeroTech scope performed extremely well. With a solid action, clean trigger and well-supported shooting position, I felt if there was one rifle I needed a little more time with, it was probably this one. The build quality and attention to detail combined with its shooting performance make it a strong contender for Australian shooters and I'd really like to see a lefty option in their centrefire range.



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CZ 457 Varmint .22LR KINDLY PROVIDED FOR REVIEW

TK: CZ don't make bad rifles and this one lived up to their reputation. It looked beautiful with its wooden stock and a heavy barrel which promised accuracy. The action is smooth, probably the best of the three .22s, which is saying something as they all had excellent actions. Again, a five-round magazine which is a personal bugbear but it's a CZ thing stretching back to the Brno days, though 10-round mags are available.

This rifle is even heavier than it looks, yet despite the weight is well balanced and while not ideal for freehand shooting it's still accurate. From the bench it produced great groups and I suspect would do better with different ammo. With three writers shooting all seven rifles we didn't have time to play with ammo, yet I feel this



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one would eat up a good target load and spit out clover leaves or better. The supplied Meopta scope was fine but the Varmint could easily carry a bigger optic for target shooting.

The barrel and wooden stock (which was very comfortable) combine to make this a heavy rifle. I wouldn't be keen on lugging it around paddocks and hills and was a bit wobbly on freehand shots anyway, so I don't think this is a walking rifle. Where it would excel would be from a decent rest. I don't know enough about target shooting to know if it would make a good option over longer distances given the relatively short barrel, but I suspect it would.

This is a great rifle for shooting from a vehicle. Its relative shortness makes it quite practical to rest on a window or on the tray, meaning I could take full advantage of its strengths (I'd buy a bigger mag though).

PM: I tend to confuse older Brno ZKM .22 rifles with the more recent CZ .22s. According to *Guns & Ammo* magazine: "CZ and Brno rifles aren't made in the same factory, though they are both part of the same company, Colt CZ Group." Either way this is a fine firearm which, coupled with the Meopro Optika 6 scope performed very well indeed.

The substantial American walnut stock, to accommodate a 20" heavy cold hammer-forged barrel with excellent laser checkering (especially over the pistol grip), creates a man-sized firearm which looks purposeful and handles exceptionally well. The stock's ergonomics not only made it look good, it felt great in the hands and shot well over the bag and front rest, due in part to the flattened area under the fore-end.

The bolt looks like a traditional Brno in the action and was very slick to use, trigger pull adjustable and crisp as we've come to expect from Brno/ CZ rifles of all ages. A five-round magazine allows for reasonable shooting, though you can always buy a spare if you feel need to increase potential firepower when shooting off the back of a ute, or wherever you find yourself with an abundance of small game. This model also features easy barrel change if you choose to acquire another in .17. HMR or .22 Magnum.

I see this one as an accurate option which could easily double both as a target and highly effective field rifle. In combination with the clarity and power range of the Meopta MeoPro Optika 6 2.5-15 you have a highly versatile firearm indeed. Would I buy it? Most certainly and it would see plenty of use at the range as well as chasing rabbits, while for whistling foxes I'd buy a spare barrel in 17HMR.

MvdB: Of the three .22LRs I've owned one was a CZ, a beautiful rifle with fancy timber stock shaped in the Bavarian style. It was an older LUX model and I bought it one afternoon from Stevens & Sons in Brisbane. I'd often stop at the gunshop on the way home from the range and one afternoon there was the CZ, which I decided to buy as a way of introducing my then-girlfriend and soon to be wife to the shooting sports.

I liked the idea, she liked the idea but after a half dozen visits to the range the idea stayed just that, so the CZ sat in my safe until sold a few years later. To the shooter in the know it was something worth owning and I hope its new owner gets more use from it than I did. At first glance the test rifle demonstrates a connection to previous CZs and the Brno rifles which built such a well-earned following in Australia. Yet unlike my own CZ, this one features a heavy cold hammer-forged barrel that's solid, very bull like and obviously intended to improve accuracy and shot placement.

Complementing the barrel is a Turkish walnut stock cut in a straight-comb style, with chequering quite pronounced on the fore-end and pistol grip, making for a large contact area. The barrelled action is colour matched and threaded for those trusted enough to hunt with suppressors. This one has a two-position push-to-fire safety and the bolt a positive, 60-degree cycle. The open receiver is cut with an 11mm dovetail allowing for ease of scope-mounting, while the action's fed by a small detachable box mag.

Off the bench it was a confident shooter, ably complemented by the Meopta scope. It grouped well, cycled likewise and generally felt like a wellbuilt and robust rifle, much like past experiences with CZ. This is a well presented firearm designed for both the range and in the field and if you're after a .22LR this should certainly be on your list.

Tikka T1x Multi-Task .22LR

KINDLY PROVIDED FOR REVIEW BY BERETTA AUSTRALIA

TK: This is Tikka's .22 offering which really delivers. It's accurate and light with a smooth action and from the outset I liked its feel and balance, with the supplied Burris scope ideally suited. From the bench it shot good groups, not super-tight but definitely accurate. I didn't try any ammunition other than Winchester Super X, so there may be a better load which tightens groups a bit for this rifle.

The barrel's relatively short which seems to be about standard for a lot of factory .22s these days. It was heavier or at least looked thicker than standard with a nice carbon look. The synthetic stock's a traditional style but you know it's designed with weight in mind, so there's nothing superfluous on the rifle. The barrel, action and stock are just what they need to be to ensure the rifle delivers and no more. I liked the feel shooting freehand especially, as it came to shoulder naturally and its lightness and balance mean this is a great gun for walking the hills, shooting bunnies.

While I believe you could do well target shooting, for me this is a hunting rifle and one made for doing so on foot. That's what I'd use it for. A light, low-powered scope such as the Burris really suits and I could happily spend a lot of time with it, as it's the sort of rifle you can take camping to teach beginners. It has a larger capacity 10-round magazine and I've always found a bigger mag better, especially if spotlighting from a vehicle. It's a great allround .22 which could stay in the family for a long time.

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PM: This is more of a classic-looking rifle compared to the Lithgow Crossover, exactly the sort of clean 'look' I like and complements the centrefire Tikkas perfectly. There's a sharpness in its appearance and I know all three of us were impressed visually. The rifle's nicely balanced in the hands with the black synthetic stock robust, contributing to its bare weight of just 2.6kg. You can change the pistol grip for a steeper version which, from experience with the centrefire Tikka T₃X Wideland Veil, promotes better trigger finger alignment to aid consistent pull.

The rimfire action was typically slick like its Tikka centrefire cousins and was a pleasure to use, loading and ejecting perfectly every time. The 10shot polymer magazine presented each cartridge exactly like the previous one and sat firmly in the stock and action. The trigger's a single-stage, fully adjustable affair which appears to be the same one used in the centrefires, can be scaled down to about 1.5lb and is crisp and reassuringly predictable.

The 20" barrel with 1:16^{1/2}" twist rate is ideal for .22LR ammo and if you were to buy this rifle and a new chassis system, it would also make an impressive long-range rimfire competition firearm (as tested it's a great hunting option). Combined with the affordable yet super-clear Burris 'Dropline' scope, it was still easily the lightest of the rimfires tested and would be a delight to carry afield.

Super-accurate with all ammo tested though it did prefer one or two above the others, a classic example of where you'd have to experiment with various target or hunting loads depending on the rifle's intended use. If it wasn't for a lovely old right-handed Brno ZKM452 in my safe I'd buy this one in a heartbeat.

MvdB: I'm a self-confessed .22LR novice, having owned just three during almost 40 years of shooting and hunting. It's not that I don't like them, it's just I hunt more than I range shoot and target medium to large game. When I've chased rabbits, foxes and hares it's been with a shotgun so the .22LR has never been a standing calibre in my armoury.

After several years living rimfire-free, I decided to buy my eldest son a .22LR as part of his introduction to shooting. He's currently qualified and we're awaiting his Junior Licence approval to come through, then we'll turn our attention to a NSW Junior R-Licence.

As these things happen I bought him a Tikka T1x Hunter, so while I'm generally under-qualified on .22LRs, as the test rifle is a T1x I do have some credentials as a .22LR reviewer. This range shares much of the design philosophy and build quality of the T3x. In this case the test rifle makes use of a synthetic stock with reported length of pull of 13.25" which means, thankfully, it's more adult than junior-sized. For me this was real departure from previous experiences with .22LR. Many seem to be youth orientated and feel short and cramped, though not this one. My wallet's also happy about it, with my son already more than five feet tall at age 12.

At the range the MTR performed as you'd expect a Tikka would. Very accurate with a clean, crisp



trigger and smooth cycling action, the teardrop-shaped magazine also doing well feeding new rounds into action. When you do cycle that action, apart from the smoothness you notice something a little different about this rifle. Tikka make use of a 45-degree opening angle as opposed to the more commonly used 60-degree, the benefit being the bolt lift is shorter and consequently not so cramped for larger hands.

Maybe it's designed that way to accommodate the need for gloves in cold northern European winters, though whatever the reason it's something which makes the rifle more user-friendly for shooters of all sizes. The only downside I encountered with the shorter throw is you need to be a little more positive to produce a clean eject and reload. The Tikka T1x MTR performed just as impressively as my Hunter, shooting cleanly at the 50m target, so to ask the obvious question: Would I buy one? I already have. PAUL MILLER (CENTRE) ENJOYING THE CRISP AND CLEAN TIKKA T1X MULTI-TASK .22LR

Beretta BRX1.308

KINDLY PROVIDED FOR REVIEW BY BERETTA AUSTRALIA

TK: This is probably the prettiest rifle in the line-up. A walnut stock with matt finish and beautifully machined, blued metal work along with the straight-pull action combine to form a sleek, elegant shooting machine. Aside from Mauser's recently released straightpull which I shot at its release, I've not spent any time on a straight-pull before, so having one in left-hand meant I was able to experience all its joys. Once you get the hang of the action, which doesn't take long, this is fast and smooth and deserving of a larger magazine, rather than the compact and helpfully orange composite five-round double-stacker, which is still way better than three or four rounds. This one's fully ambidextrous though

it's not a matter of a quick flick, as you need to change the bolt face over to go to right-hand case ejection. What this means is with bolt removed, you have a very open back end of the breech with a long overhang extending from the barrel, which is a little disconcerting when you first see it but incredibly practical. It's a great rifle.

This performed well from the bench with good groups, it's well balanced and also shoots nicely freehand. It's a good hunting rifle for sure and having this in .308 as well as the Savage straight-pull in 6.5mm Creedmoor, meant I was able to make an informed comparison between recoil of the .308 and that of the 6.5mm (the former kicks harder).

It's short enough to be manageable in close scrub, so would be a good deer gun in hilly country such as the Snowy Mountains where I hunt a bit during summer. The larger mag and quick action mean it would also be a handy goat and pig gun. I have a Marlin .30-30 for just that sort of hunting and this would be an excellent replacement when the time comes.

Aside from wishing it had a 10-round mag to take full advantage of the speed and smoothness of the action, the bolt moves back quite a long way as you cycle it and came perilously close to my cheek. However, the rifle comes with different sized recoil pads so that issue can be easily solved. I enjoyed this a lot more than I expected to and along with the Savage, it has really opened my eyes to the benefits a straight-pull has to offer.

PM: This is the other straight-pull in the mix and was scaled with the addition of the superb Steiner 2.5-10x 42 scope, which looked perfectly in balance. From the moment I picked up the rifle I could feel the quality of construction and appreciate the amount of research and engineering that's gone into its design.

Featuring an ambidextrous straight-pull action, the difference between this and the Savage Impulse is you can choose the side for ejecting shells, so either way shells are ejecting from the opposite side of the action to the shooter's face. It's a 'one rifle fits all' scenario, perfect for a hunting family with a lefty in its ranks. The bolt's locked in place by an eight-lug rotating head complete with extractor claw and ejector.

This one was apparently born out of Beretta military technology with the 22.4" barrel burnished black and chambered in .308 Winchester, with a 1:11" twist to stabilize some of the long high-BC hunting bullets available in 30 calibre. As you might expect it's threaded for a muzzle brake or similar where permitted.

The action's not like an enclosed straight-pull bolt, rather a carriage which moves back and forth to lock up the action or eject a fired cartridge then reload another, incredibly slick and effective. The scope's mounted on a Picatinny rail above and independent of the carriage, to facilitate swapping barrels and bolt heads without having to remove the scope. Zero returns every time you switch barrels, such is the precision of this system.

There's a five-shot bright orange magazine which sits flush and the bolt handle's angled rearward at 45 degrees to facilitate easy grip and super-fast reloading, something easily achieved from the outset. The three-position safety works effectively on each of its settings, while the polymer stock is robust, streamlined and has an excellent recoil pad. Would I buy this rifle? I think I'm feeling the 'need' for it, though the pigs, goats and deer in the hills around Bigga and Binda in the NSW Southern Tablelands wouldn't like it in .308 Win one bit.

MvdB: This is a straight-pull bolt-action that's testament to almost 500 years of Beretta innova-

tion as a truly modern, modular rifle which offers left-handed shooters the same calibre, stock and accessory options as righties. Housed within an angular and ergonomically adaptable polymer stock, the bolt carriage is the beating heart of the BRX1. Fed by an external box magazine and controlled by a rear-mounted three-position safety, the straightpull action promotes fast follow-up shots while allowing the shooter to stay focused on the target.

Further enhancing the modular ethos and, unlike several other European straight-pulls, this one incorporates a Picatinny rail for ease of optics and accessory mounting. With barrel and bolt face interchangeability, you can find a calibre to suit whatever game you're chasing. In conversation with Beretta Australia, I believe a safari calibre is on the way and with that you have a rifle for hunting game from foxes to buffaloes.

It's fair to say I'm mightily impressed by the BRX1. I own one, a project rifle I built in partnership with SSAA and Berretta Australia. And Ian, my partner in crime from *The Hunters' Campfire*, hunts with a BRX1 right through the season starting with .30-06 for red, fallow, sambar and ferals before swapping the barrel to a .300 Win Mag for NT Buffalo.

Consequently I was comfortable with the BRX1/ Steiner set-up on the bench as it shot with a high level of accuracy and repeatability. I run Sako Super Hammerhead in my .308 Win, though this one performed well with all ammo available. Being so comfortable with the rifle, I spent a little more time focusing on my compadres as they were generally first-time users.

There are two thing first-timers can find a little tricky about this rifle, the first being installing the bolt carriage. Admittedly it does look complicated and can seem a little daunting but you must be confident fitting it within the receiver. There's a point of resistance which you push through as, if you don't, the carriage can jump out of the slide rails.

The second is when reloading after a shot, as new users tend to yank the carriage open and slam it forward (some unconsciously try to rotate the action rather than sliding it straight back). Good news is the action can handle rough treatment and, after a short time, a level of finesse sneaks into the operation. A sliding bolt is a learning experience for traditional bolt-action shooters, though in my experience it's generally a quick lesson.

MARK WITH THE BERETTA BRX1.308 MODULAR RIFLE



Savage Impulse 'Predator' 6.5mm Creedmoor

KINDLY PROVIDED FOR REVIEW BY NIOA

TK: This one has a synthetic, camouflaged stock with blued metal and, along with the Beretta BRX, is a straight-pull, the main difference between the two being the Savage only ejects to the right. The bolt handle swaps sides easily and so is able to be switched quickly from left to right and back again. Right-side ejection has never bothered me so I hardly noticed it but joy of joys, the rifle comes with a solid, old-school metal 10-round box magazine, reminiscent of that on an M-14. It's the right magazine for this rifle, as it means you can take full advantage of the speed of the straight-pull action.

The action was slightly different to the Beretta with a more definite forward movement required to lock the bolt home, but it's a case of different rather than better or worse and is easily mastered. Like many Savages I've used, it requires positive cycling of the action to ensure the spent cartridge is properly ejected.

Bench shooting produced tight groups and it was well balanced and easy to shoot freehand. The Savage AccuTrigger is excellent as you'd expect and I enjoyed shooting this rifle. The bolt's not as instinctive to remove or insert as you'd like but again, the quirks of this one are easily mastered and don't hamper the shooting experience.

Savage is clearly focused on the entry-level sector of the market and this rifle is exactly that for a straight-pull, as well as value for money. The speed of the action along with the larger capacity mag make it an excellent starting point goat and pig gun. Buy a second mag and you can do the environment a favour when you encounter a mob of either. The straight-pull combined with its big mag mean I'll be giving this rifle a lot of thought when the old lever gun grows a bit long in the tooth. **PM:** I've long been a fan of Savage rifles due to their level of quality and they accuracy they provide at a reasonable price. I've tested several down the years and this one's of a specification and novel action well beyond those in the past.

It features a quick to operate straight-pull action which took a little getting used to, was rather stiff in operation but loosened up during the test and became pretty slick. It was easy to remove from the action but difficult to replace, until Mark finally worked out the tricky manipulation required to deactivate the ball bearings which securely lock it in place when loaded prior to firing. Once this was mastered it was easy to put back in the action.

The Predator has a matt black aluminium receiver with 20 MOA rail machined into it and 20" carbon steel medium contour barrel, threaded for suppressor or muzzle brake where permitted. There's a substantial metal 10-shot magazine which greatly assists in the firepower department and can be detached ambidextrously. It protrudes well below the stock and looked a bit unwieldy, though that's just a personal opinion.

One of the rifle's most significant features is it can easily be changed from left to right-handed straight-pull action and back again. The down side is ejection is only to the right so, when operated in left-handed configuration from the left shoulder, spent shells are ejected across and close to the face, which can be a bit disconcerting.

The Savage AccuTrigger worked a charm as always and the rifle was more than adequately accurate in 6.5 Creedmoor. This would seem an ideal cartridge for predator hunting in the US and equally suitable here for goats, pigs and deer. The stock is synthetic with adjustable length of pull by way of supplied spacers with a recoil-absorbing pad. The comb is a nice rubber in a slightly Monte Carlo shape with the stock itself a Mossy Oak 'Terra' pattern, comfortable to hold yet quite heavy at 4kg (about 8.8lbs) without scope and mounts.

MvdB: To put it plainly I'm in two minds about this one. I previously reviewed a Savage 110 High Country and while impressed by the rifle, I was a little bewildered by the complexity of the bolt assembly. The Impulse's straight-pull design is in the same catergory.

Many moons ago I hunted pigs with a bunch of guys who all carried semi-autos. Mostly it was SKS and SKK variants amongst our hunting party, except for that one bloke who owned a Fabrique Nationale Model 1949 or FN 49 in 7.92×57mm Mauser. I must've felt a little inadequate as after our third or fourth outing, I put away my Model 94 lever-action and bought myself a little .30 calibre, M1 Carbine. It was my first auto loader, and as a young man with not much money to my name, I soon figured out how to keep my little M1 running with a handful of tools. As for the Chinese ex-military rifles, well a pointy stick and some mud was all you needed to keep those things shooting. On the other hand, the mechanics of the FN 49 challenged me a little.

Sure, it was a hog hammer, and I saw it drop more bacon that a butcher's shop, yet the action seemed a little too over engineered.



I feel the savage impulse my be in the same boat There's no doubt it's a shooter and while its fast straight-pull action and large capacity box magazine would make it a feral flattener, I'm still a little unsure.

To my mind, it seemed unnecessarily complicated for a hunting rifle.

Off the bench the rifle did go some way to alleviating my feelings about it. Like the action it's a straight-shooter and, combined with the Leupold scope, lived up to Savage's reputation for accuracy, while the big box magazine would give you plenty in the tank if you had to put away a mob of ferals. Through my own experiences off the bench and watching others do likewise, the action takes some getting used to. Initially we all tended to slam it then, over time, began to replace brute force with skill.

Aside from our initial challenges with its operation, like the Savage 110 High Country I reviewed previously, the Impulse Predator is feature-packed and represents good value for money. From its camo-finished polymer stock, integrated Picatinny rail, unique Savage AccuTrigger system and colour-coded barrelled action, you have plenty of bang for your buck. THE SAVAGE IMPULSE IS FAST TO RELOAD, ACCURATE, AND HAS GREAT MAGAZINE CAPACITY. IDEAL FOR PIGS AND GOATS.



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Tikka T3x Aspire .223

KINDLY PROVIDED FOR REVIEW BY BERETTA AUSTRALIA

TK: I'll give it away up front: I'm buying this gun. My current .223 will be going on SSAA Gun Sales with my SSAA member discount and this little beauty is coming home with me instead. The Aspire version of the T3x was designed exclusively for the Australian and New Zealand markets, has a synthetic stock, stainless steel barrel and action and the barrel is threaded and fluted.

The Burris scope was well matched and the rifle shot tight groups from the bench. In fact, after the 'Tacticool' T₃x, I shot my next-best groups with this. I like the larger bolt handle, the action is quick and smooth, while the six-round plastic magazine gives useful capacity and is more than enough to deal with the odd fox or cat.

This is a light rifle suited to hunting, though if you swung past the odd target competition with it you wouldn't be embarrassed. It's beautifully balanced and my freehand groups were tight enough to give me the confidence I'd be able to deal with cats and foxes at 70-100m without looking for a rest.

This is a rifle you can carry with you all day and rely on consistently. The use of a stainless barrel and synthetic stock mean it can handle rough conditions and survive the unsympathetic treatment my gear often endures. I'm looking forward to having it in my quiver.

PM: Designed by the Beretta team in Melbourne for Australian conditions, this has a nice combination colour scheme in green synthetic stock with black accents in the pistol grip and raised cheekpiece. The stainless fluted barrel and action make it ideal for this country. It looks nice, streamlined and well-proportioned and well matched with the Burris Fullfield 2.5-10x42 scope with Z-Plex reticle.

It felt typically Tikka and the soft fore-end and cheekpiece panels accentuated this. The pistol grip has a comfortable radius and aligned the trigger finger for excellent control, the single-stage adjustable affair being crisp and letting go at about 2lb (it must've been reset as they normally come from the factory at the 4lb max). Easily adjusted, it's a fine trigger which lends confidence whether shooting groups or in the field. Working the bolt was typically Tikka 'smoooth' and I know one of the others fell a little head-over-heels for this one.

Chambered in .223 Rem it was a delight to handle and shoot. This model's available in most popular cartridges up to .300 Win Mag, though lefty choices may be more limited. The stainless barrel is 24.3" and appeared to be free-floating in the rigid synthetic stock (choice of twist of 1:8 or 1:12 available). Results spoke for themselves. The T3x Aspire is a lightweight and highly accurate rifle, ideal for hunting and carrying significant distances and absolutely fit for purpose. I'd certainly buy this if I needed another .223, as its accuracy and clever design would perfectly complement my left-handed T3x Veil Wideland in 6.5 Creedmoor.

MvdB: There are many challenges in writing professionally, one being that sometimes a subject is just tough to make interesting. I once reviewed eight pairs of binoculars one after the other and eventually ran out of new things to say. A case in point is Tikka rifles as I currently have three and have owned five during my hunting life. Love the accuracy, reliability, repeatability, build quality and, most importantly, lefty options. Tikka tick all my boxes for a hunting rifle but as a writer there's a downside: Predictability. All that good stuff can make them challenging to write about as it can become a little repetitive.

Luckily there are exceptions. I found the T_{3x} Tactical extremely interesting and so too with the T_{3x} Aspire. What makes this one stand out immediately is it's an all-Aussie edition. Designed in consultation with the team at Beretta Australia, it combines a solid green synthetic stock, soft-touch pistol grip and cheek pad along with a lightweight, stainless fluted barrel (threaded for New Zealand) and that ever-reliable Tikka action.

It's a pack rifle built to be carried and, when needed, give you the confidence to make that all-important shot. It's also designed to be robust enough to survive those less-than-comfortable conditions associated with pack hunting and be ready to go, year after year. Cycling the action, the Aspire demonstrated all the hallmarks we've come to expect being smooth, positive and confidence inspiring. Overall this was a very pleasant rifle to shoot both from the bench and offhand.

Discussing the gun later with Paul, I mentioned it would also make a good youth rifle. It's combination of lightweight design, robust finish and calibre selection make it one I'll be considering for my eldest in a year or two. The Aspire is a visually appealing rifle which lives up to Tikka's well-earned reputation and interestingly, one of our party aspired to own it and I believe that aspiration was realised not long after the event.



Tikka T3x Tactical 6.5mm Creedmoor



KINDLY PROVIDED FOR REVIEW BY BERETTA AUSTRALIA

TK: This is a smile machine which I loved shooting and, like most of us on the day, I managed my best groups with it. The 6.5mm Creedmoor has a reputation for accuracy and maybe it was the inherent accuracy of the round, though I'm pretty sure the rifle itself had a lot to do with it (it certainly wasn't the operator).

The action was smooth and tight and reloading was a breeze, which is just as well as there was a lot of reloading to do. In this I was aided and abetted by the 10-round box mag which gets a big thumbs-up from me, maybe even a double thumbs-up. This gun was so much fun I wanted to shoot it all day but reluctantly had to give the others a go.

It has a long barrel, adjustable stock and cheekpiece, full-length Picatinny rail for scopes etc. and is threaded for the addition of a muzzle brake or sound moderator where permitted. The fore-end is a metal shroud around the barrel. Add in a big target scope such as the supplied Burris Veracity PH and this is a heavy rifle, so lugging it for kilometres is a non-starter.

It's definitely a target rifle and I'd add a bipod if it was mine. Long Range Precision is the fastest-growing SSAA discipline and this one is suited to that, though I can see a hunting use for it, unlikely as that may seem. If there's a watering hole where you know animals came to drink, you could set up a hide a good distance away with a clear field of fire.

The 10-round magazine and buttery smooth action means you could take out quite a few goats or pigs before they got away from you, though you'd want a vehicle or horse to take you and this beast there. If I was getting into target shooting I'd buy one. It's excellent so well done Tikka.

PM: This was something of a revelation for me as I've never liked the look of 'tactical' rifles and feel that look isn't particularly favourable with the general public with no understanding of firearms. These designs are the opposite of classic sporting rifle configurations, meant more for military or target shooters using them in competition. To be fair, I always had in the back of my mind these were based around self-loading actions, designed for combat and not sporting use.





This bolt-action Tikka has been specifically designed for Long-Range Precision and Tactical shooting and, as such, it's hard to imagine a better factory option. It still appears very military, though I'm aware the tactical look has become hugely popular worldwide. The thought and engineering built in to this rifle and its sheer quality of construction has to be seen to be believed. Chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor as well as .223 Remington, .260 Remington and .308 Winchester, you'll have long-range target shooting out to 1200m covered.

Tikka have used a 24" medium contour barrel with a fast 1:8" twist to stabilize the long, super high-BC 6.5mm bullets needed to hold their trajectory, and help cheat the wind at some of the longer distances in competition shooting nowadays. The muzzle's threaded, the bolt-action typically Tikka and super-smooth to operate. The double-stage trigger is superb, adjustable for weight of pull and incredibly crisp and repeatable in use. The rifle has a Picatinny rail on the receiver for day scope mounting, while the substantial steel box magazine fed flawlessly and fitted perfectly in the sculptured stock. For someone a bit shallow like me where looks count, this is very smart and not unwieldy.

A rigid 13.5" M-Lok five-slot Picatinny rail covers roughly half the length of the barrel from the interface of the action and barrel forward, for adding other accessories. The stock is skeletonized with a simple but effective cheek rest adjustment



to facilitate perfect and repeatable cheek weld, while it also folds to make it more compact to carry or transport.

All these features contributed to the smallest groups I've ever shot at 100m, two Fiochi Competition and Federal Premium Gold Medal loads all producing three-shot groups which were one elongated near round hole.

I wouldn't hesitate to buy this if I was into PRS or some other long-range game. It's a competition rifle and about 7kg all-up with Burris scope and mounts. If I ever take up PRS or, as an old chap, just want an incredible rifle for range work and the satisfaction of shooting ridiculously tiny groups, the bank manager will definitely be getting a call.

MvdB: This is by design, operation and appearance a precision centrefire rifle built for longrange and practical shooting disciplines. Yes, you could effectively hunt with it but it's not a carry around-style rifle. The barrelled action sits within a sturdy aluminium chassis that's complemented by an extended heatshield-style fore-end, which surrounds the barrel and continues towards the threaded muzzle.

Topped with a matching Picatinny rail, the foreend provides contact points for your supporting hand as well as plenty of mounting options for optics and accessories. The controls are every bit a Tikka though for me at least, the pronounced pistol grip and adjustable folding AR-style stock were a real departure from my experiences with the Finnish brand.

On the bench I shouldered it with no previous experience of a precision rifle. It felt decidedly foreign, so I adjusted the stock and reset the height of the cheek piece. The Burris Veracity scope seemed an appropriate match and after finetuning the focus, I single-loaded the rifle with 6.5CM. The two-stage trigger did catch me a little off-guard, though the steady long squeeze wasn't awkward, just different. The trigger felt more like a long controlled single-stage with a very clean break and as the 6.5CM is hardly a kicker, recoil was mild.

Checking the target I was a long way off the V-Bull, so adjusted accordingly via the large windage turret. On the next shot I'd over corrected a little, so again readjusted windage and this time elevation as well. The third shot was wholly acceptable so I fired my remaining allotted rounds, delivering a sub-MOA group. Job done.

The gun undoubtedly has 'wow' factor and results generated, along with the conversation between us, spoke volumes for its completeness as a shooting package. Like me, no-one else had any real experience with this kind of rifle, though it turned us into sharpshooting converts.

Yes it's heavy, its look won't appeal to everyone and owning a Creedmoor will invite plenty of backhanded comments about 'manbuns'. That said, the Tikka T3x Tactical is something special and as you'll see from the cover photo I'm the one carrying it but no, they wouldn't let me take it home. TIKKA T3X TACTICAL SMILE MACHINE IN 6.5 CREEDMOOR. MARK TRIED TO SNEAK IT HOME UNDER HIS JUMPER.

OTHERS TO CONSIDER

There are a couple of other lefty-friendly options out there we haven't featured but are certainly worth considering. Lever-action rifles fit the bill nicely, the only minor drawback being they mostly eject to the right but that's easily overcome. You may recall we ran the numbers on Rossi's Puma .357 Magnum lever-action last October, where our reviewer was so enthusiastic about the rifle he bought it!

And don't overlook the pump-actions which also eject to the right but are otherwise a great option. Also in that edition of last October we assessed the Winchester SXR2 in .308 and last April featured Wedgetail's exceptional Australian-made pump-action also in .308. Henry produce a .22 and there are too many others to mention here.

So whatever your target there's a lefty-friendly option for you. No need to struggle any more using your left hand to work the bolt on the right side and watch another feral disappear, only because you couldn't put another round in the chamber quick enough. Stand tall and proud my fellow lefties and enjoy the options out there. Put your painful right-hander on SSAA Gun Sales and hit up your local gun shop for a slice of lefty heaven.

Lefties can be world-beaters!

AUSSIE OLYMPIAN AND ISSF SKEET SHOOTER AISLIN JONES (RIO 2016, PARIS 2024) SPOKE TO SUZY BALOGH (OAM) ABOUT HER JOURNEY AND OFFERED THREE ESSENTIAL TIPS FOR LEFT-HANDED SHOOTERS



AISLIN SHOWS THE STYLE WHICH SAW HER COMPETE AS AN OLYMPIAN AGED 16.



islin was so keen to shoot clays she started as soon as she turned 12, trying simulated field at Bairnsdale Field and Game Club in Victoria before turning

to American Skeet. She started as a right-handed shooter but struggled until her father, Dave Jones, read an article on eye dominance. Dave contacted renowned coach, accomplished Olympian and former *Australian Shooter* columnist Russell Mark, seeking advice for his right-handed, left-eye dominant daughter.

Russell recommended that since Aislin was so young, Dave should immediately encourage her to shoot with the gun mounted to her left shoulder to take full advantage of her eyes. Aislin now says she doesn't even remember shooting right-handed as she only ever tried it a handful of times and, while becoming adept as a lefty did take time, it was no more than any other beginner.

She told me: "I consider myself very fortunate that Olympian and Commonwealth gold medallist Lauryn Mark was keen to coach a young female, left-handed shooter as Lauryn herself is a lefty. Working with her was fundamental in my nurturing and development to the point I made my Olympic debut at just 16."

She started in shotgun with a secondhand 20-gauge with an oil-bent stock to give a left-handed cast. With Lauryn as her coach, advice and equipment suggestions flowed and soon Aislin was using a 12-gauge Beretta Silver Pigeon with lefthand cast and, in her own words: "A huge chunk of wood cut off the back and an adjustable put in as I was going to be growing."

Aislin, a Beretta-sponsored athlete, says even now being left-handed definitely narrows the options with regard to stock blanks for a custom one to be cut. With her early guns she'd fit a piece of foam over the right-hand opening top levers, as they were a little harsh on her young thumb. Yet she continues to use a right-hand lever gun, though has grown and adapted so much she no longer notices it. When I asked if she'd prefer a left-handed option she didn't think it necessary any more.

AISLIN'S ESSENTIALS

1: Establish eye-dominance straight away. A good coach, stock-maker or sports optometrist will be able to assist in this most important aspect of shooting.

2: Find a gun that fits. One with either neutral (straight), left-handed cast or adjustable stock (or at least an adjustable comb) will let you align your eye over the barrels and down the sights. Consider a gun with a left-hand opening top lever to enhance dexterity and ease of opening and minimise potential wrist or thumb strain.

3: Seek coaching. A left-handed coach is ideal as they can teach from the same point of view and advise on certain nuances. However, a good coach who can visualise and understand left-hand adjustments can be just as valuable.

OTHER LEFTY CONSIDERATIONS

• Lead will be different for left and right-handed shooters when approaching the same target, due to stance and head position. Be mindful that when a right-handed shooter advises the lead is, for example, six clay lengths in front of a target, for a lefty it may be more if the target is going right-to-left or less if it's going the other way.

• Targets going right-to-left can be more difficult for left-handed shooters, as the gun may be pulled away from the face as you swing. Practice keeping your head on the stock.

• Targets coming from the right can take a little longer to see clearly, so gun-hold and eye-hold position will be out a little further than for targets from the left.

• A bonus for lefty American Skeet shooters is they're less likely to be disturbed by shooters progressing to the next firing position or distracted by the referee standing to their right.

• In DTL, ISSF Trap and Five-Stand, shooters who've completed their shot and are unloading, ditching empty cartridges and progressing to their right, may be seen in the left-hander's peripheral vision. Wearing blinkers on your shooting glasses can remedy this. Try not to think about distractions and instead acknowledge, accept, reset and move on.

• In DTL, if you get to choose the people in your squad you may opt for a shooter to the left of you who's also left-handed, or at least someone who'll consider not moving about too much and throw shells in the bin at the last minute.

• For DTL Deaville Doubles shooting, you might like to be on the right side so you can see what

your partner's doing, or choose to be on the left so there's less chance of distractions.

• If you're in a DTL team shoot-off and the order can be selected, maybe put two lefties together to help maintain the squad's flow.

• In DTL and ISSF Trap, consider timing the start of your shots to compensate, giving shooters to your left time to settle down, or speed up commencement before they start to move.

• In ISSF Skeet be prepared for the referee moving from one side to the other and reposition the release button cord, as they're required to be on the side the gun's to be mounted.

• Be prepared for empty cartridge bins and microphones to be placed in positions which suit right-handers. You may need to reposition microphones or raise your voice to achieve crisp target release.

• Use a toe tag to rest your gun on as rubber gun rests are usually set on the right.

• Develop a unique stance with right foot forward and your own eye-hold and gun-hold positions. Use mental imagery, practice drills to assist with adapting and be patient. With dedication, a left-handed shooter can be the best in the world as seen in Australian ISSF Trap champion Penny Smith, the current number one. ●



COMPARE THE SHOTGUNS OF LEFTY AISLIN JONES (CAST ON) AND RIGHT-HANDED FELLOW OLYMPIAN LAURA COLES (CAST OFF).



l used to feel left out

BUT THINGS ARE CHANGING, SAYS MONTSE JAIME ards on the table, I'm a lefty but have always shot 'regular' right-handed guns as it was just easier (I'll explain later). Yet with knives, things don't get easier and the same goes for basic tools including scissors. Growing up a lefty had its drawbacks, as back in the day there was a big push to use your right hand as a matter of course. This worked for some, while others like me struggled and continued to use our left hand. There were few if any dedicated rifles, knives or other tools for left-handed use, though fortunately a lot has changed during the past 20 or so years.

So a lefty shooting a regular rifle? Frankly I'm one of the lucky ones as while left-handed in everything else I do, I turned out to have a dominant right eye. Luckily my grandfather saw fit to test this when I was a child, otherwise I'm sure I'd have preferred a dedicated lefty rifle which would have complicated life considerably. So if you have lefty kids or are teaching lefties to shoot, please do a basic near-far alignment test to determine eye dominance.

Anyway, the long and short of it is it took a lot of time at the range to adapt to shooting a right-handed rifle. At first it felt unnatural, my grouping was poor compared to that of my siblings and motivation took a hit. Perhaps shooting just wasn't for me. The saviour was my ever-patient and smiling grandfather who urged me on and secretly stashed some used targets. When aged about 20 I was ready to call it quits and that's when he pulled out the targets I'd shot as a child. The notable improvement in grouping over the years was the push I needed to keep going and now, every time I'm at the range or out bush, I'm happy I did.

The biggest struggle, as mentioned, was learning to do some things with my right hand. In my teens I dreamt of one day owning a dedicated lefty rifle, though they were rather exotic. Hardly any gun shops stocked them and if a few featured at the occasional trade show I visited, they were very expensive, as were dedicated aftermarket accessories.

Some lefties (with dominant left eye) opt to just adapt and shoot a regular right-handed rifle, something I have of course tried but can hardly recommend. Besides the possibly poor fit due to stock design there are various challenges, as the bolt's on



THE BERGARA BA13 IS SYMMETRICAL AND SUITABLE FOR LEFTIES. STUD TO THE RIGHT OF THE HAMMER CAN BE CHANGED TO THE LEFT.

the 'wrong' side and designed to be operated by a right hand. Same for the safety which, depending on design, can be a major hassle. On some rifles loaded from the top, the loading bay will be on the wrong side, just like the magazine release mechanism. Perhaps more importantly, the ejection port of a regular rifle will be in your face - literally. This means you either move away and un-shoulder the rifle, or risk hot spent brass smacking you in the teeth.

Fortunately there are solutions. First up the availability of left-handed rifles has greatly increased and, with this, prices seem to have dropped slightly. Shop secondhand too as while this may limit your options, I've seen some real bargains as people try to offload hard-to-sell rifles. Secondly, get used to single-shot or express rifles. Yes you only get one or two shots at a time but many of them, even affordable models like a Bergara BA13 or fancier ones like the Haenel J9, are perfectly fine for lefties. The former is symmetrical except for a protrusion on the hammer, the latter has a slightly raised cheekpiece for right-handed shooters, but nothing you can't easily overcome by installing a slip-on lefty accessory.

Knives have proven a challenge too. Aside from those with moulded grips, there are a couple of issues to be aware of. Firstly we'll split them into fixed-blades and folders, both of which exist in ambidextrous and lefty models these days, though run-of-the-mill knives are still designed for righthanders.
AMBIDEXTROUS BARREL OPENING MECHANISM ON THE BERGARA BA13 WORKS WELL FOR LEFTIES. Callo Jage L

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AMBIDEXTROUS SHEATH VERSUS RIGHT-HAND ONLY. Fixed-blades with moulded grips for right-hand use are a no-go so don't bother trying them as they won't be comfortable. Luckily that still leaves plenty of options, as anything with a symmetrical grip is your friend and will work as well for a lefty as a right-hander. While this is true for the knife itself, sheaths are a notable exception. Many are designed for right-handers, which means lefties will draw the knife with the edge facing the 'wrong' way. This is a minor inconvenience but one to keep in mind if you use the knife a lot or depend on being able to draw it quickly.

Folders are a little more complicated so avoid grips designed for right-handed use. Folders are often carried on a pocket clip and if it's not designed for a lefty (or reversible), you'll draw the knife with the opening mechanism facing away from your fingers, meaning you first need to reverse the knife. And speaking of opening mechanisms they're a potential issue, as anything



A NON-REVERSIBLE POCKET CLIP WILL RESULT IN AN 'UPSIDE-DOWN' DRAW FOR A LEFTY, MAKING OPENING THE KNIFE TEDIOUS; A ROTATING SAFETY MECHANISM LIKE THAT ON OPINEL KNIVES IS CONVENIENT FOR LEFTIES.

with a flipper on the back of the knife will allow ambidextrous use.

However anything with a stud on one side of the blade will pretty much require a right hand to open it, unless designed for lefties or if the stud is symmetric on both sides. Cut-outs in blades a righthander will open with their left thumbnail will open with the right thumb, resulting in the business end of the blade facing the user. Not ideal.

Finally, safety mechanisms are often designed for right-hand use while liner-locks, slides, buttons and all sorts of other locking mechanisms will be tedious or impossible to work with the left hand. This means you either get used to doing so with your right hand or look for a lefty version. Fortunately there are knives with locking mechanisms on the back that'll work for anyone, as well as options like Opinel knives with their rotating collar safety design that'll be fine.

It was easy to feel 'left out' growing up a lefty and, just for fun, try cutting a piece of paper using your left hand with a regular pair of scissors. The good news is a lot has changed and there are many more dedicated left-handed rifles, knives and tools to be had today. For young shooters I strongly recommend determining the dominant eye to decide whether to go with a regular of lefty rifle. I'm a huge fan of single-shot rifles because of their enhanced comfort, they're safe (no catching hot brass with your face) and they avoid some of the hurdles presented by bolt-action models.

When it comes to knives, fixed-blades with symmetric grips are a good starting point but ensure the sheath is reversible. Folders require a little more thought and when selecting one make sure the clip, opening and safety mechanisms work for you. Of course this is personal but I've found that even if I enjoy a certain folder, I'll eventually give up on it if the clip only offers right-hand carry. The same is true for models which offer a safety that's right-hand only, so my preferred opening mechanism by a long shot is a flipper on the back.

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ADVERTORIAL



FEEL THE HEAT: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THERMAL DEVICES

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hermal imaging devices have become increasingly popular in the shooting community, offering a powerful edge not only in low-light and no-light conditions, but also daytime courtesy of the newer and more sensitive technology available today. Whether tracking game in the dead of night or enhancing situational awareness on a hunt, understanding the basics of thermal technology is essential. This beginner-friendly guide breaks down how these devices work and explores the key types available: monoculars, binoculars and scopes.

HOW THERMAL IMAGING WORKS

Thermal devices detect infrared radiation (also known as heat) rather than visible light. Everything emits some level of heat and thermal sensors capture these differences to create an image. Warmer objects appear brighter than cooler ones, making it easy to detect animals, humans and warm objects through fog, heavy brush and even complete darkness. However, one major theme of all these devices is 'nothing can hide from thermal' and normal colour camouflage offers no protection to animals, making thermal the superior detection option for hunters.

COMPONENTS

The heart of any thermal device is the sensor which features a number of specifications, but today the easiest way of quickly identifying a sensor's quality is via two measurements:

1: Resolution. Measured in pixels, such as 384 x 288 or 640 x 480, the higher the resolution the clearer and more detailed the image will be, just like a TV screen.

2: NETD: This number, often in millikelvins such as <35mK or <20mK, measures the lowest temperature difference the sensor can detect, appearing as more defined 'contrast' between heat patterns on objects. For purchasing, the lower this number the better for more detailed images.

Another crucial component is the lens which features an expensive, opaque element called

germanium which, when sculpted and polished, focuses the thermal radiation on to the sensor. Commonly measuring from 9mm to 75mm, the bigger the lens the further the sensor can detect heat, but the narrower the field of view and vice-versa for smaller lenses.

MONOCULARS

Thermal monoculars are compact, single-eye devices ideal for scanning and spotting. They're lightweight and portable, making them a favourite for quick observation. Because you use only one eye, they preserve your natural night vision in the other, which can be helpful in certain conditions. Monoculars are also typically more affordable and are highly recommended as the best-value spotting device. They also come with or without a laser rangefinder (LRF) depending on the user's choice.

BINOCULARS

Thermal binoculars offer the advantage of using both eyes, making extended viewing more comfortable and natural. They're typically larger and heavier than monoculars but provide better depth perception, enhanced visual software and a wider field of view. For serious hunters or professionals spending long spells behind optics, thermal binoculars can be worth the investment.

SCOPES

Thermal scopes mount directly on to rifles, providing accurate aiming in conditions from bright daytime to complete darkness. Modern thermal scopes often include digital zoom, video recording and ballistic calculators, while choosing the right one means considering factors like range, resolution, battery life and reticle options. These are an excellent tool for night-time shooting and pest control and most today are tube scopes using 30mm mounting rings on Picatinny rails.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Thermal devices open a new world of shooting opportunities. Whether using a handheld monocular for spotting, binoculars for extended use or a scope for precision shooting, thermal imaging gives you the advantage when visibility is limited or animals are proficient with camouflage. For any shooter new to the field, understanding these basics is the first step towards harnessing the full potential of thermal technology. ●

Advertorial provided by Roy Barber, Head of Training at The Night Vision Shop



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*SOURCE: Yole Group Report on 2020 Share of Global Thermal Manufacturers.

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HUNTING

Tackling an ongoing feral dilemma

DEREK NUGENT LOOKS AT AUSTRALIA'S 'BIG FOUR'

ustralia's a continent beset by invaders and I say that not with any revisionist, woke socio-political agenda in mind, but as a simple acknowledgement of truth. Since European settlement in 1788 there's been a veritable flood of introduced species into Australia, one which continues unabated to this day. It may surprise some readers to learn there are now more introduced species of plant in Australia than there are native ones.

There are an estimated 7800 vertebrate species in Australia, six per cent or some 460 of which are deemed to be introduced with 14 per cent of those (roughly 64 species) classified as 'invasive'. Not all introduced species are categorized as invasive, this label being reserved for those (plant, pathogen and animal) having negative impacts on the environment, the economy and/or human health.

Many thousands of non-native species of flora and fauna have been either deliberately or inadvertently introduced, with fully 30 per cent of said introductions occurring since 1970. And government modeling suggests in the first half of the 21st century introductions are set to rise by a staggering 36 per cent.

This number includes those plants and animals of recognized benefit to the nation's agricultural economy and general livability of our environment, as well as the many destructive invasive species which have established a significant feral presence separate to, and beyond, managed domestic populations. Herein lies the issue: These feral populations of invasive species impose a great cost on our economy and are highly detrimental to the nation's environment as well. They are indeed a feral menace.

THE COST

It's been estimated that since the 1960s the total cost of invasive species to the Australian economy has been roughly \$410 billion. Most recent research (2023) concludes the current yearly average cost to Australian agriculture of vertebrate pest animals and weeds is a minimum of \$5.3 billion, weeds accounting for 82 per cent and animals the rest. This figure is made up of \$3.8 billion in management costs and \$1.5 billion in production loses to crops and livestock.

The highest levels of expenditure are to be found in NSW (26 per cent), WA (25) and Queensland (17). Of the roughly \$1 billion annual impact caused by vertebrate ferals, the vast majority is attributable to foxes (\$200m), rabbits (\$200m), wild dogs (\$320m), pigs (\$160m) and goats (\$13m), about \$900 million. The remaining \$100 million is the result of the activities of feral populations of deer, camels, donkeys, rodents and the like.

The cost to the environment is a more confronting and emotive calculation. The largest impact comes from invasive species which include 187 plants, 46 vertebrate ferals and two pathogens among their number. Australia's unique wildlife and ecosystems have evolved and adapted over millions of years and don't readily withstand the introduction of feral species, particularly the 'big four' vertebrate predators: cats, foxes, dogs and pigs.

These ferals have a massive impact on native animal populations. It's estimated three billion native animals fall prey each year, 2.6 billion attributed to predation by cats and foxes alone. Feral predation has been blamed for the complete extinction of more than 34 marsupial and rodent species and resulted in the mainland loss of a further nine, which are now found only on coastal islands.

Furthermore, feral vertebrates compromise the integrity of the soil and waterways and are also known carriers of diseases. Sadly, they have few natural predators or fatal ailments and high reproductive rates, meaning populations don't diminish naturally and can multiply or re-establish rapidly. Let's look at the 'big four'.





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FELIS CATUS: FERAL CATS

The feral cat is the same species as the domestic and has been in Australia since 1788, having arrived with the First Fleet. Within a relatively short 70-year period they were thought to be firmly established in the wild and today, it's estimated only 0.1 per cent of the land mass of Australia is cat-free. They exist in all ecosystems including forests, woodlands, grasslands, wetlands, alpine and arid regions.

They're predominantly solitary nocturnal animals, lying up during the day and hunting and scavenging at night. They're carnivores and prefer live prey with each cat said to consume 225 reptiles, 130 birds and 390 mammals a year. This is roughly five times as many reptiles and more than twice as many small mammals as foxes, with estimates suggesting feral cats consume as many as two billion native creatures annually.

Feral cats can present as being larger, more muscular and aggressive than their domestic peers. While numbers can only be estimated, most sources agree on a population of between 2.1 and 6.3 million roaming wild in Australia, with an average density of around one cat per 4km/sq, though that figure can easily rise to three in good seasons or bountiful environs. NUMBER ONE THREAT TO NATIVE WILDLIFE: A FERAL FELINE AT LARGE.

Estimates suggest feral cats consume as many as two billion native creatures annually



VULPES VULPES: EUROPEAN RED FOX This was introduced into Victoria around 1855 for 'sporting' purposes and by 1870 was well established across the state. It was recorded as having first

colonized NSW in 1897, NT 1901, Queensland 1907 and WA 1912 and today inhabits 80 per cent of Australia, including 50 islands. As the name suggests it's pale to deep reddish brown even occasionally grey in colour, with its legs predominantly black, its tail bushy and tipped in white or black. Interestingly, the tail aids balance, provides warm cover in cold weather and acts as a signal 'flag' to its peers.

Only about 10 per cent of a fox's diet is carrion with the rest consisting of native animals, some invasive feral vertebrates like rabbits and hares and livestock including lambs, kid goats and poultry. Their take is believed to be around 600 million a year. Foxes take a greater toll on bigger native animals like possums, gliders, wallabies and the like than cats, with ground-nesting birds and their eggs also highly at risk.

There are an estimated 1.7 million foxes in Australia with an average density of one per 4km/sq, though in agricultural regions this rises to seven in the same area. The density is highest in temperate mainland regions and (believe it or not) urban environs where food and shelter is abundant. As a case in point the Victorian Government estimates a population density of 16 foxes per square kilometre in Melbourne! Environmental sources quote an annual fox-related kill rate of 1000 animals per square kilometre in high-density areas.





CANIS LUPUS FAMILIARIS: WILD DOGS I've written on wild dogs previously (*Australian Shooter*, May 2024) but by way of summary, in Australia the term refers to any undomesticated dog existing in the wild. Exact numbers is virtually impossible to calculate, though synthesizing available data from various research projects gives a very broad estimate of between 16,000 and 150,000, with the true figure open to speculation.

Yet they're an established, significant predatory species widespread across the nation and are present in all states and the majority of environments and ecosystems. In the wild, dogs have an average lifespan of five to seven years. Appearance is often dependent on the ancestry of each animal as reflected in its physical 'look' with regard to size, build and colouring, most being short-haired and can weigh up to 60kg. Wild dogs are social animals and will regularly form packs for the purposes of defence and hunting.

They're most active at dawn and dusk but can and are encountered at all hours of the day and night, targeting whatever food sources exist in their locality. This includes agricultural stock, other feral vertebrates and their young, along with an array of native animals including 14 endangered or vulnerable species of mammals, reptiles and birds (small populations in niche ecosystems are especially vulnerable).



SUS SCROFA: FERAL PIGS

Australia's population of feral pigs are descendants of various breeds imported across the years. Initially restricted to areas near European settlements, they're now found in all states and territories, particularly wetland and river ecosystems, having spread through natural dispersal, accidental escape or deliberate release.

In fact 45 per cent of the continent, including several islands, host thriving populations, though they're most common in the northern and eastern states. The national population is estimated at between 3.5 and 25.5 million, though numbers show significant seasonal variation due to their adaptable behaviour and prolific reproduction rate.

Population density is estimated to be between one and 20 animals per square kilometre depending on the eco system concerned. They can breed all year round, producing between five and 12 in a litter and sows can have two litters a year. With this in mind, it has been suggested that between 55 and 70 per cent of a given population needs to be culled annually to curtail population growth.

Usually they're nocturnal and quite shy, particularly in response to hunting pressure. Boars will have a home range of between 10 and 50km/ sq with sows 10-20km/sq, though they have a habit of reducing this significantly if a consistent and reliable food supply exists. Males and females differ in size and weight with sows 50-60kg and boars 80-100 although individuals can exceed these averages.

Feral pigs represent a significant threat in respect to predation, competition, habitat degradation and disease transmission. Being omnivores they prey on both native flora and fauna consuming mammals, reptiles, birds, amphibians and eggs and it's believed up to 70 per cent of sea turtle nests in far north Queensland are raided by pigs.

Federal Government research identifies 161 'threatened' native species of flora and fauna on a



national level and a further 442 species of fauna and 2319 of flora as being 'at risk' on a stateby-state basis. Pigs eat all parts of a plant including fruit, seeds, tubas, bulbs, roots and foliage and habitually root up large areas of vegetation in search of food, providing ideal conditions for the transmission and establishment of pest weeds.

They're a known host for diseases like leptospirosis (and most worryingly potential hosts for foot and mouth disease) and parasites. The dirt in their trot-

ters and fur spreads plant pathogens like phytophthora cinnamomi which causes dieback in plants. Feral pigs damage rural infrastructure, foul water sources and are accomplished raiders of crops and livestock. They'll target lambs, calves and kid goats and it's believed 40 per cent of newborn lamb kills are attributable to pigs. They habitually consume cereal, sugar cane, fruit and vegetable crops and, by way of example, around 20,000 tonnes of cane is lost annually to them.



TOP: A MOB OF FERAL PIGS ON THE MOVE JUST AFTER DAWN.

BOTTOM: DEGRADATION OF A WATERWAY IN FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND BY FERAL PIGS.

INSET: A TUSKY PREDATOR SAFELY DISPATCHED.

AN UNFORTUNATE TRUTH

The existence of feral animals in Australia is a double-edged sword. On the one hand they represent a hunting resource which is exploited by tens of thousands of people across the nation, all of whom are contributing their share towards the \$2.5 billion pumped into the nation's economy by shooters each year. On the other hand they represent a financial drain, agricultural curse and ecological disaster, which as the statistics and sources quoted above indicate, almost defies belief in terms of its extent and impact.

Yet there's no easy fix as feral populations of vertebrate animals are firmly established and no doubt here to stay. While all levels of government, agricultural associations and conservation groups advocate for and implement management programs on a variety of scales with differing degrees of success, there's undoubtedly an important role for shooters and hunters to play in the mitigation of this nationwide menace.

Whether as an individual or part of an organised program like SSAA Farmer Assist, there exists the agency to perform a valuable community service by taking every possible opportunity to cull the 'big four' ferals when and where they're encountered. While we may never constitute the totality of the response to the problem, we can be a highly pragmatic and cost-efficient part of the solution, something very much in the long-term interests of the nation both economically and environmentally.

Statistics and data quoted in this article have been synthesized from a variety of publicly available sources.



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ELLIOTT ON TARGET FOR A HUNTER DOUBLE

STUART ELLIOTT (CENTRE) WON THE LIGHT EVENT TITLE FROM BRENDAN ATKINSON (LEFT) AND MILAN MORRELL.

HEAVY HUNTER CHAMPION STUART ELLIOTT FLANKED BY RUNNER-UP ANNIE ELLIOTT AND THIRD-PLACED BRENDAN ATKINSON. he SSAA range at Captains Mountain in Queensland was the venue for this year National Benchrest Championships for Light and Heavy Hunter class rifles. Using benchrest rifles, the course of fire differs in that it's shot for score rather than group size. Five targets are shot at 100 and 200 yards, with a possible score of 250 at each yardage and an overall possible of 500 points. In addition, shooters who hit the tiny dot in the target centre have this added to their score and, as it turned out, those dots made all the difference.

First up was the Light class with most using a 6mm PPC benchrest rifle, though some elected to change barrels to use the 30 BR. The 30 makes a bigger hole and can turn 9s into 10s, the downside being they're slightly more wind sensitive. The first relay produced the best target of the morning with a possible 50.5x shot by Brendan Atkinson. However, consistency always pays and Stuart Elliott won the yardage with a 250.13x from Milan

HEAVY WINNERS



Morrell on 250.10x and Russell Gibson with the same score but decided on countback.

The longer yardage was always going to be tough and nobody managed a 250 score, wind and mirage making sure of that with the best card shot a 50.3x by Tyrone Thompson. This was a good contest and the yardage win went to Atkinson with 247.3x from Elliott on 246.4x and Morrell on 245.3x. The grand aggregate title went to Elliott on 496.17x, from Atkinson on 496.14x and Morrell on 495.13x.

The following day brought the Heavy Hunter event and, if conditions looked easier, they most certainly were not. At the shorter yardage Ken Wheeler shot 50.5 on two relays which helped him to victory with a score of 250.19x, ahead of Gavin Marschall on 250.17x and Alistair McMillan on the same score, again decided on countback.

The final yardage required total concentration and the best card went to Ean Parsons with 50.4x, the only one to come close to a possible card at that distance. The battle for the yardage went right down to the final target, where it was Atkinson on 250.8x just ahead of Elliott on 250.7x and Morrell on the same score (another countback). When all the scores were added up it was a family affair, with Stuart Elliott securing the double with a grand aggregate of 500.22x from Annie Elliott on 500.22x and Atkinson on 500.19x. The shoot was very well attended and expertly run by the team at Millmerran Range, so thanks to all who put in the time and effort to make the event a success. ●





SIMPLY THE BEST?

I was excited to read Con Kapralos' review of the Zastava LK M70 in .270 calibre (*Shooter*, May 2025) as I own an earlier version of this rifle and love it. I believe I'm at least the third owner of this firearm which I bought from a mate who also came by it secondhand. My Zastava .270 is fairly old but still functions beautifully, having used it recently to bag a fallow doe (so old in fact it's stamped 'Yugoslavia').

My research on the rifle suggests it's an improved Yugoslav version of the equivalent Russian knockoff of the German Mauser. These originally came with three different trigger options and mine has the 'dual', more appropriately used on higher calibre sniper rifles in the same format.

From reading Con's article I can see they've change very little from my almost 30-year-old firearm, my belief being it's so well made they didn't need to change anything. It's brilliant in simplicity and simply brilliant. Thanks for bring attention to this well made and designed rifle. Full marks to the good people at Zastava.

Steve Schembri, via email

HIT 'EM WHERE IT HURTS

I've been a reader of Australian Shooter and all its previous versions since the 1960s and always found it interesting and informative. One subject which has been regularly covered is the contribution sporting shooters make to the control of feral animals which is a noble sentiment. Almost every edition carries pictures of a shooter crouched behind his or her latest trophy, yet the only problem with this is it ignores a glaringly obvious biological fact which applies to all mammals, including we humans. This is the undeniable truth that it's the females which produce the young.

If one male is removed from a population it's immediately replaced by another (this also applies to human males, often before they know they've been replaced!) The end result is there's no effect on the overall population whatsoever. As any farmer will tell you, if you want to help control feral animals then shoot the females. I'm sure most farmers would be more impressed if they came across the carcasses of 20 feral sows on their rounds as opposed to one boar.

Graham Turner, NSW

THE NUMBERS CAN LIE

I've been reading the latest SSAA email newsletter and in particular the article on gun control. Numbers of guns in possession is up 25 per cent on the 1995 figures but no mention of the Australian population that year being 18.5m compared to 26.5m now, give or take a few.

When authorities quote road toll figures, I often wonder if they take into account the growth in population from year to year, along with so many of our new arrivals coming from countries with questionable road rules and those who move to Australia and drive unlicensed. Anyway, as a long-term member now almost 70 years old, I love my SSAA emails and *Australian Shooter* magazines. Keep them coming. Kel Cartmill, Qld.

SEND LETTERS TO: edit@ssaa.org.au

National

Muzzleloading Postal Shoot

July 1-December 31, 2025 Events: Military 50m offhand Class 1; Traditional 50m offhand Class 2; Flintlock 50m offhand; 100m Benchrest Class 1 & 2; 100m Benchrest Class 3; 25m Precision Revolver Class 1 & 3; 25m Precision Pistol Class 2; 25m Snap Pistol Class 1 & 2; Percussion Shotgun (25 clays); 100m Benchrest Black Powder Cartridge Rifle (ASSRA Target). All scores to Muzzleloading chairman by December 31. Prizes: Medals for first three in each event. Contact: Steve Nicholas 0419 805 299. Full details on National website.

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

Action Match Steel Challenge National Championships

August 1-3, 2025

Kukerin Practical Pistol Club, WA Program: July 31: Practice. August 1: Rimfire match. August 2 Centrefire matches Day 1. August 3: Centrefire matches Day 2 and presentation. Facilities: Camping with toilets, local accommodation nearby, pre-booked Friday and Saturday dinner \$40 each night. See National website for full details. Contact: Steve Marris - ssmarris@westnet.com.au

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 or 0421 775 101.

Long Range Precision National Championships

August 29-31, 2025

SSAA Luna, Captains Mountain Complex, Old

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@ ssaaqld.org.au or PO Box 101, Inglewood Qld 4387.

Combined Services National Championships

September 19-21, 2025 Windamere Shooting Complex, 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. Cudgegong caravan park nearby with cabins, vans and powered sites, phone (02) 6358 8462. Event contacts: Ian Crabbe crabbes1@telstra.com or 0428 862 378; Anthony Gatti info@nswcsd.com.au or 0499 987 899; Ben Doherty bfjdoherty@ 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@ ssaaqld.org.au or Brian Leach (07) 5488 0159, Brett Whiting 0467 332 303 or Chris Dale 0418 255 874. Full details on National website.

SSAA IHMS National Championships

September 26 - October 3, 2025 Eagle Park Shooting Complex, Vic Program: September 26: Smallbore and Field Pistol practice. 27-29: Small Bore and Field Pistol competition for Production, Revolver, Standing, Unlimited, Unlimited Any Sight, Unlimited Standing. 30: Big Bore practice. October 1-3: Big Bore competition for Production, Revolver, Standing, Unlimited, Unlimited Half Scale, Unlimited Any Sight, Unlimited Any Sight Half Scale, Unlimited Standing. Facilities: Camping with showers and toilets. Daily use of clubhouse. Canteen available Friday - Monday. Contact: Peter Mannu: metallicsilhouette@gmail.com

BPCR Silhouette National Championships

October 3-6, 2025

Monarto Silhouette Range, SA Program: Oct 3: Set-up and practice. 4: 40-shot BPCR iron sights. 5: 40-shot BPCR any sights. 6: 40-shot BPCR smallbore iron sights. Facilities: Camping available on range, barbecue on Saturday night. Contact: John Visnyai johnviz@hotmail.com or 0421 117 391.

International

Pacific Zone Muzzleloading Postal Shoot

July 1-September 30, 2025 Program: The MLAIC Pacific Zone Postal Shoot is held every two years with participation from Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, USA, Canada, Brazil, Japan and Argentina. SSAA members interested in representing Australia this year can register by contacting the Muzzleloading Awards Secretary, registration open from April 30 to June 1. Shooting will take place from July 1 to September 30, all matches must be shot on registered dates in each state and can only be attempted once, youth (U-21) and women's events also available. For more details, contact: Michael Nicholas 0467 763 716 or secretary@ ssaapara.org.au

Law Enforcement Activities 10th Anniversary International Tournament

October 11-12, 2025 SSAA Majura, Canberra, ACT Program: PPC 48, PPC 72, APS 90, APS 150. Facilities: The ranges in use for this event have toilets, barbecue and tea/coffee facilities, accommodation nearby. Contact: See National website for full details.

NSW

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

Qld

SSAA Fly Shoot Nationals

August 29 – September 1, 2025 Madden Range, Belmont Qld Program: August 29: Setup and practice. August 30: 500m CF LG, detail 1 Warmer card. August 31: 500m CF HG, detail 1 Warmer card. September 1: 200yd RF, detail 1 Warmer card. Facilities: Camping permitted \$10 per person per night. Hot Showers and toilets. Bookings essential. The QRA Range (qldrifle.com) next door also has accommodation facilities. Contact Vince Vaina 0412 750 850.

SA

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.

SA Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

August 2-3, 2025 SSAA Para Range, SA

Program: Saturday: 40-shot Rifle Calibre Lever Action Silhouette. Sunday: 40-shot Pistol Cartridge Lever Action Silhouette; 40-shot Smallbore Lever Action Rifle Silhouette. Facilities: Camping on range, canteen. Contact: John Visnyai johnviz@hotmail.com or 0421 117 391.

SA Air Rifle State Championships

September 13-14, 2025 SSAA Para Range, SA

Program: Saturday: 10m Precision Air Rifle (40 shots), 10m 3-Positional Air Rifle (60 shots). Sunday: Field Target Air Rifle (75 shots). Prizes: State medals for all grades including U15 and U18. Facilities: Canteen, light meals, snacks, tea, coffee, drinks available all day. Camping on range with showers, toilets and power available. Contact: Paul Rawlings paulee06@bigpond. net.au or 0403 436 905.

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

September 21, 2025

Southern Rangers Shooting Club, Mc-Laren Vale, SA

Program: Start time 9:30am: Breechloading Shotgun; Percussion Shotgun; Flintlock Shotgun. Contact: Secretary on 0412 574 444.

SA Gallery Rifle State Championships

September 27-28, 2025

SSAA Para Range, SA

Program: Saturday: T&P1 30-shot GRCF or Classic; 1500 150-shot GRCF or Classic; 50m Precision 30shot GRCF or Classic; Multi-target 24shot GRCF or Classic; Sunday: T&P1 30-shot GRCF or Classic; 1500 150shot GRCF or Classic; 50m Precision 30-shot GRCF or Classic; Multi-target 24-shot GRCF or Classic. Facilities: Camping available, canteen, barbecue on Saturday night. Contact: Dave Mc-Carthy atm3855@yahoo.com.au

WA

WA Lever Action Silhouette State Championships July 3-6, 2025

Narrogin Sporting Shooters, WA Program: Thursday: Practice 7am-5pm. Friday: Rifle match (80 shots). Saturday: Pistol Cartridge (80 shots). Sunday: Small bore (80 shots). Prizes: Medals in all grades for top three, trophies for two-gun, three-gun and juniors, four \$50 gift vouchers. Facilities: Camping with showers, toilets, limited power. SSAA Narrogin will supply a Saturday night meal. Contact: David Brougham 0432 748 703 or laswa2011@gmail.com

SSAA (WA) Fly Shoot State Championships July 19-20, 2025

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA Program: First warmer target will start 8am sharp, sign-in and weighing of guns 7am. CF Heavy gun, CF Light gun, smallest grouping LG and HG, Highest target score LG and HG, Two-Gun LG and HG, Rimfire, Smallest group, Highest target score, Juniors, Three-Gun. Fly patches on offer for all events. Facilities: Barbecue lunch and cool drinks/water included in entry fee. Contact: Stuart Pethybridge 0417 991 314. Full details on National website.

SSAA WA 5 Stand State Championships

September 21, 2025 Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA Program: Shotgun. 100 targets = 4 rounds of 25. Facilities: Hot food, cool drinks and snacks available for purchase. Tea and coffee offered free of charge. Contact Neil Cobb 0404 040 357 /neilcobb@bigpond.com

SSAA WA Rifle Metallic Silhouette State Championships

October 25-26, 2025 Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA Program: October 25: Centrefire Silhouette (40 shot), Centrefire Hunter (40 shot). October 26: Rimfire Silhouette (40 shot), Rimfire Hunter (40 shot). Facilities: Some camping available. Limited hot showers within 400m. Contact: Paul Dunn 0407 428 175 / pauled1939@gmail.com

SSAA WA Sporting Clays State Championships

November 9, 2025 Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA Program: Shotgun. 100 targets = 4 rounds of 25. Facilities: Hot food, cool drinks and snacks available for purchase. Tea and coffee offered free of charge. Contact Neil Cobb 0404 040

357 / neilcobb@bigpond.com

Vic

SSAA (Vic) Single Action Black Powder State Championship July 18-20, 2025

Little River Raiders, Eagle Park, Vic Program: Friday: Long Range, Plainsman Match. Saturday: Side events, Four main stages, Dusk shoot. Sunday: Six main stages, presentation. Facilities: Free camping at range with limited powered sites, toilets and showers. Contact: Tony Diablo 0419 187 980 or diablot6@bigpond.com

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. Medals for first three in all grades. Contact: Mark Butler on 0409 135 740.

Victorian Muzzleloading State Championships

November 15-16, 2025 SSAA Eagle Park, Vic Program: Class 1 and 2 Muzzle Loading Rifles, Breech Loading Rifle 200m, Handgun Precision, Muzzle Loading Shotgun. Facilities: Limited onsite camping. See National website for full program of events. Contact: Craig Kinder.

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HISTORY WILL SHOW WE'VE ACHIEVED GREAT THINGS

WORDS: MARK VAN DEN BOOGAART



f you've made it this far you're either a lefty, parent of a lefty or you just have staying power so, as a back page column should, let's close out this special left-hand edition. We lefties have come a long way. Nowadays it's more about dealing with inconvenience and, as mentioned earlier in the magazine, a limited selection of rifles and shotguns. Yet there was a time when left-handedness was a thing of myth, superstition and, at times, serious discrimination and incrimination.

Even as a lad in early '70s Brisbane there was a lingering perception that wrong-handedness might be a sign of wrong-headedness (in my case they may have been right). With a southpaw pencil grip and page at almost 90 degrees, that sweet old wooden ruler-wielding busybody of a Grade 2 teacher treated my approach to handwriting, scissor operation and a myriad of other mundane activities as a glitch in the matrix, which a countless number of rappings on the knuckles would repair. Luckily my dad, a large Dutchman with a distinct loathing of authority, didn't take kindly to their approach and after a 'quiet' word they left me alone.

Historically, left-handedness has been viewed with a sense of distain and fear. In many cultures the left hand was considered unclean and to pick up an object with it was unlucky. Left-handedness was even one of those loaded indicators of witchcraft and sorcery. Why? Well Beelzebub was a lefty so, you know, birds of a feather.

If nothing else, disliking lefties had universal appeal and this commonality has been reflected in civilization and language. The word 'sinister' and term 'sinister hand' define evil and the mechanism by which evil is enacted. Interestingly the Latin root for sinister is sinistra

> (on the left). Yet as with many things, the connotations of the past have faded with time. It's still a right-handed world and every day we lefties accept there are certain tasks which are a little harder to perform, but we get past it.

> Research tells us left-handedness is a natural variation in human biology 'affecting' roughly 10 per cent of the global population. The belief that brain hemisphere function in left-handed people is different has been disproved, though there are real cognitive and creative differences among lefties, in part stemming

from learned physical experience. It seems if something doesn't work, you don't think "I'll just change hands", you actually start looking for left-handed solutions.

There's also the fact left-handedness is incremental and can be measured and rated. Personally I'm a nine out of 10 on the scale, meaning extremely left-handed. For me the inconsistency is the cricket bat as I stand, swing, miss and am clean bowled like a typical right-hander. Many famous musicians, artists and athletes fit the bill, though it's recognised their left-handedness contributed to creative success. Jimi Hendrix famously played an upside-down 'normal' guitar and Paul McCartney plays left-handed bass.

In sport, lefties including Rafael Nadal, Martina Navratilova and Sachin Tendulkar are all bona fide legends while the arts can boast Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Pablo Picasso and Rembrandt. Gaius Julius Caesar, the first Caesar. was left-handed as was Napoleon Bonaparte and legendary wartime leader Winston Churchill, each of them with a famously unique gesture captured in sculpture, portrait and ultimately photograph. For Caesar it was a particular way of pointing, Bonaparte with that strange 'hand-in-his-shirt' stance, while for Churchill it was the V for Victory, though oddly and maybe even conspiratorially, they do so right-handed.

In the literary world Samuel Langhorne Clemens (you may know him as Mark Twain) was one of us as was Lewis Carroll, and it may be surmised the latter lent heavily into his unique creativity when he wrote *Alice in Wonderland*. And sticking with the 'big brain' department we can't forget the lefty genius of Albert Einstein. As a hunter I look to Steve Rinella and Craig Boddington, while as a shooter its Annie Oakley.

So looking ahead and apart from dealing with scissors, utensils, certain bolt-action rifles, generic pistol controls and laptop power inputs, we lefties have overcome the confines of the repetitive and predictable right-hand world and are rewriting the rulebook, one awkwardly smudged page at a time.



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