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AUSTRALIAN

August 2025

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Shooter

THE MAGAZINE FOR SPORTING SHOOTERS



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TIKKA T1X HUNTER FITS YOUNG AND OLD ALIKE



BINOS IN REVIEW

PAGE 46



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Lifting the lid on those 'mysterious' proof markings

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AUSTRALIAN Shooter

Beauty...and a beast

MARK VAN DEN BOOGAART
ASSESS A BOLD CLAIM BY SAUER



In many ways this rifle review has been a long time coming. It all started back in 2008 when I was thinking about buying my first 'nice' rifle and by nice, I mean my first dedicated left-hander in a calibre and model of my choosing. Previously as a lefty I'd compromised but now had almost enough money in my pocket to change that. What caught my eye was the Sauer 202 Elegance, a beautiful thing in every way with its timber, metalwork, overall appeal, calibre

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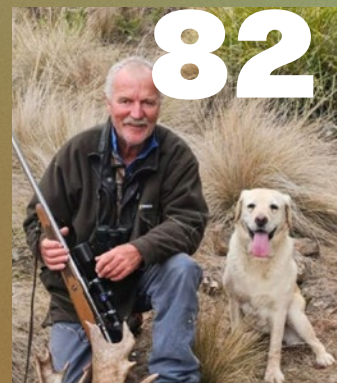
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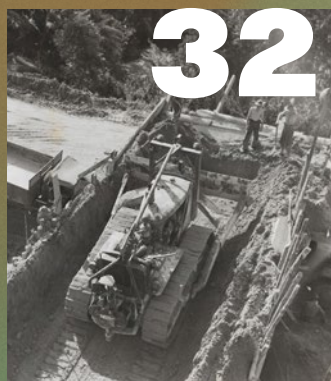
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AUSTRALIAN Shooter

OUR POLICY

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

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WE'RE STRONG ... BUT COULD BE STRONGER

WORDS:
TOM KENYON
SSAA CEO



I spend lots of time thinking about how to make the SSAA better. We're a member organisation which works better when there are more of us, so it stands to reason one of the best ways to improve is to increase our membership. That's where you come in. Roughly 20 per cent of Australian shooters are members of the SSAA but I believe we can make this number much higher.

The best way to recruit people is through word of mouth, so if you have friends who are shooters but not members, ask them to join. Have mates whose membership has lapsed more than two years? Invite them back. The SSAA is running

a competition and giving away two five-year memberships (with *Australian Shooter* included) for you and a friend. It's easy to enter. Just encourage your mates to sign up with the SSAA and ask them to enter your membership number and name in the referral section when they join.

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And it's also true for friends who don't shoot. Ask them why not, encourage them to give it a go and apply for their licence. The more shooters there are in Australia, the better it is for us all. Be prepared to talk more about your sport. If people ask what you did on the weekend, don't skip over the couple

of hours at the range, tell them you went shooting. We love what we do so why shouldn't we talk about it? In my experience, lots of people are interested in taking up the sport or even returning after a break, so a little encouragement could get them over the line.

Many of you will know by now that Queensland members are no longer receiving *Australian Shooter*. This is incredibly disappointing but we're working on ways for those members who wish to continue receiving it can do so. As you'll have seen, we've refreshed the look of your national magazine and had overwhelmingly positive feedback, so thank you to everyone who contacted us about it.

In finishing, we said farewell to long-serving Administration Officer Debbie Wing last month. Debbie was with the Association for more than 20 years and was an integral part of the team. We're sad to see her go but wish her well in retirement and on her new adventures.

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OPEN SEASON

NSW HUNTING BILL A BOLD STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

WORDS:
MATTHEW GODSON



A commendable move towards practical wildlife management was taken in the New South Wales Parliament on May 28 this year. The Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment (Conservation Hunting) Bill 2025 was introduced by The Hon. Robert Borsak MLC of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party, the Bill aiming to formally recognise conservation hunting as a legitimate environmental and cultural tool.

The legislation was built on a simple but powerful idea, that licensed conservation hunters can play a key role in controlling invasive species which are damaging native habitats, harming agricultural productivity and threatening the cultural fabric of both indigenous and non-indigenous communities.

The Bill was a practical response to an ongoing problem. Invasive species such as feral pigs, rabbits, foxes, feral cats, wild dogs and wild deer are costing New South Wales millions of dollars each year. These animals have the potential to disrupt ecosystems, outcompete native wildlife and create enormous challenges for landowners. Despite years of taxpayer-funded government control programs, the problem persists.

In his media release, Mr. Borsak said the Bill acknowledges the critical role of conservation hunters in controlling invasive species and how it's about empowering communities to take practical, ethical and effective action where other efforts

have fallen short. At the heart of the proposed legislation were several important reforms designed to professionalise and legitimise conservation hunting. Key features of the Bill include:

- Creation of a Conservation Hunting Authority: A central body to oversee regulation, licensing and policy.
- Introduction of a Conservation Hunting Licence: This would replace the current R-Licence, modernising and broadening its scope.
- Recognition of cultural traditions: The Bill acknowledges hunting as a deeply rooted cultural practice for both indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.
- Use of suppressors: Licensed hunters would be permitted to use suppressors (devices which reduce noise) to enhance animal welfare and ethical standards.
- Support for bounty schemes: These incentives aim to encourage broader public participation in invasive species control across both public and private land.

The Bill is more than just pest control. Mr. Borsak said it wasn't just about killing pests, it was about stewardship, community and restoring balance to the environment, adding that for too long, government pest control programs have been costly and always ineffective. The Bill empowers licensed hunters to contribute to a community-based conservation model that works. By supporting hunting practices which are well-regulated, humane and environmentally conscious, the



FERAL ANIMALS DO UNTOLD DAMAGE THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA.

Bill aims to provide a long-term, cost-effective alternative to conventional control methods. It also aims to support regional economies and reinforce the social fabric of rural and remote communities.

With the Bill tabled in the Legislative Council, Mr. Borsak had called on all members of both houses of the NSW Parliament to support this critical reform. He said it's about balance and ensuring hunting is well-managed, ethical and effective.

On June 4 debate and scrutiny of the Conservation Hunting Bill within the Parliament begun. As expected, the loony groups consisting of The Greens and Animal Justice Party flung as much mud as they could at the idea hunters could help with pest control. They waffled on to such an extent that the time set aside for debate wasn't long enough, causing debate to be paused and rescheduled for later in the month.

Many amendments have been filed already which aim to dilute some of the key goals of the Bill including greater access to suppressors. If access to suppressors remains blocked, that would be a disappointing outcome. Why are people worried about increasing the efficiency of conservation hunters to control more pest animals? Could it be some aspects of the 'pest control industry' don't want their gravy train exposed?

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WORDS:
SCOTT HEIMAN



The first time I took my now wife on a hunting trip, she was amazed at how my little brother and I could instinctively navigate. Going along game trails, scrambling up re-entrants and following the contours of mountains we didn't talk, though we'd occasionally look at each other and nod as we both knew what the other was thinking. While Kath thought we were meandering aimlessly, my little bro and I knew exactly where we were.

When we stopped for a break she asked how far we were from the car. Our response: "It's just over that ridge." And sure enough, 30 minutes later there was the car directly in front of us. If you'd followed our path with a drone, you'd see we'd completed a loose circle covering more than 15km of ground following a herd of goats, whistling up a fox and popping a couple of bunnies. We'd been gone for hours, yet trekked straight back to the car from a completely different direction from where we'd set off.

Since then, one of my favorite things to do is to ask my wife and daughter: "Where's camp?" "Where did we leave the car?" or "Which way's home?" Even when we have one of my daughter's friends in the car and we're dropping them off at home, I love asking them to give me directions without using Google. Through these simple 'games' I hope to instill in my daughter a solid sense of direction, as it's amazing how many people these days have no such spatial awareness.

Practicing navigation is essential if you're hoping to generate and maintain the skill. That's because there's a part of the brain where the primary function is memory, navigation and time perception. People with an innate sense of direction are likely to have a better developed and more active entorhinal cortex within the hippocampus, as they use it more than others and so (like any other muscle in the body) it gets bigger.

A study of London taxi drivers in 2000 found their entorhinal cortex was huge, a result of all the intensive training and practice they'd had navigating London's streets without a phone or in-dash navigator. That said, navigation is a perishable skill as if you don't use it you'll lose it, sometimes within as little as 30 months if studies are to be believed.

During Operation Desert Storm in the 1990s, the US military turned off their GPS satellites to cripple their enemies' rocketry. Yet because US artillery and mortar crews had become accustomed to using GPS, they'd forgotten how to operate their manual plotting boards to apply fire on the enemy. The solution? Bring old soldiers out of retirement to teach the new breed how to use their guns without the aid of computers.

US forces had to re-learn this same lesson during the war in Afghanistan (as did many armies operating in that arena). That's because some armies had stopped teaching non-combat troops how to navigate using a compass and relied

solely on GPS. After the deficiencies in this strategy were laid bare during warfare, the training continuum for the US Army was altered to include instruction in the use of a compass and paper maps, with refreshers held during promotion courses. And just like the 'Skill at Arms' badge (crossed rifles) which recognises soldiers' marksmanship, there's now also an 'Expert Soldier' badge to acknowledge proficiency in basic combat skills such as land navigation and weapon competency.

Yet navigation isn't just a skill required by military troops. An international study in 2022, led by researchers at University College London, gave more than 400,000 people worldwide access to a mobile phone video game called Sea Hero Quest, designed to test players' navigational skills. The study found people living in cities have a poorer sense of direction than those living in rural areas, especially if they're living in an urban setting with a straightforward, grid-like street layout such as Melbourne. And this should come as little surprise. We've known about the differences between city slickers and country bumpkins since Aesop's fable of 570 BC: 'The Town Mouse and Country Mouse'.

But technology has compounded the issue. A follow-up study showed participants who'd reported high GPS use since the initial round of testing demonstrated a substantial decline in spatial memory. All of which goes to show if we don't practice navigation skills because we rely on GPS, our navigational abilities will suffer. Relatedly, the part of the brain that's critically involved in navigation (the hippocampi) will shrink.

If you develop Alzheimer's disease or dementia and have relied heavily on GPS without prioritising your brain health, you may show symptoms (like memory loss or visuospatial difficulties) sooner or more severely than those who've relied less on such technology. So to avoid getting lost or losing your marbles, put down your phone and turn off Siri. Listen to the voices inside your head instead of inside your dashboard, plan your route, pay attention to the signs and practice navigation. In short, give your brain some exercise.

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DREAM BIG OR DON'T DREAM AT ALL

WORDS:
LAETISHA SCANLAN



Q I've been hearing so much about red dot sights, can they be used successfully in 5-Stand, Trap and Skeet shooting, and wonder if they'd really help my scores and are they acceptable to use in competition? Also, if I bought one would it take a while to get used to it and just how hard would it be to become accustomed to swapping guns for different disciplines? Do you feel switching guns for different targets would hinder my scores and I may not 'get used' to shooting with different firearms? I've a mixture of flat-rib Beretta 12-gauges and a Miroku shotgun in Trap configuration.

Barry S., Vic.

A Starting with red dot sights, I personally haven't used one and have never seen them in formal competition across 5-Stand, Trap or Skeet. While red dots can be effective in rifle and pistol disciplines, shotgun sports are all about instinctive pointing rather

than precise aiming. Introducing a red dot sight could actually work against you by encouraging you to 'aim', which can be counterintuitive in this context.

Another concern is how a red dot might interfere with your overall sight picture. These sights sit higher on the barrel and can restrict your view, which is a big drawback in disciplines where peripheral vision is key. Your eyes may be drawn to the dot instead of locking on the target, creating an unnecessary visual distraction. In clay shooting simplicity is often your best asset, as the less conscious thought you give to aiming mechanics, the better your instinctive shooting becomes.

You'll also notice top-level competitors don't use red dots in these disciplines. If they offered a real advantage you'd see them widely adopted at elite level, but you don't. That's usually a clear sign the traditional setup involving a properly fitted shotgun and solid technique remains the most reliable and effective choice. Red dot sights may sound appealing and promise a quick-fix solution, yet they're no substitute for the basic fundamentals of proper gun fit, correct lead and consistent follow through. In terms of competition rules, I'm not entirely certain whether red dot sights are permitted in Australian events, so I'd definitely recommend checking with the specific club or organising body of the competition, just to be sure.

Now regarding your question about using different guns for different disciplines, this is quite common, especially among shooters with a variety of firearms at their disposal. Each clay target discipline places different demands on

your gun setup. For example, Trap generally benefits from a higher point of impact, heavier barrels and tighter chokes to better shoot rising or going-away targets. Skeet typically favours a flatter-shooting gun, shorter barrels with quicker handling characteristics and more open choke patterns.

Already owning a combination of 12-gauge shotguns puts you in a position to tailor each one to a specific discipline as you see fit. This can save time and effort adjusting comb height, rib angle or chokes between sessions, while allowing each setup to be fully optimised for the target presentation you'll face. As long as each gun fits properly and you put in consistent practice, you'll have no trouble transitioning between them. It shouldn't hinder your performance, only enhance it.

In summary I wouldn't recommend investing in a red dot sight for clay target disciplines if the goal is to improve your scores. Your time and effort will bring far better results by focusing on the fundamentals of ensuring proper gun fit, developing a consistent mount, maintaining clear visual focus and regular range practice. With the shotguns you already own you're in a great position to fine-tune each one for an intended discipline. Take the time to have each one set up properly and reinforce those fundamentals through regular practice and competition and I'm confident your scores will reflect the effort. Hope this helps.

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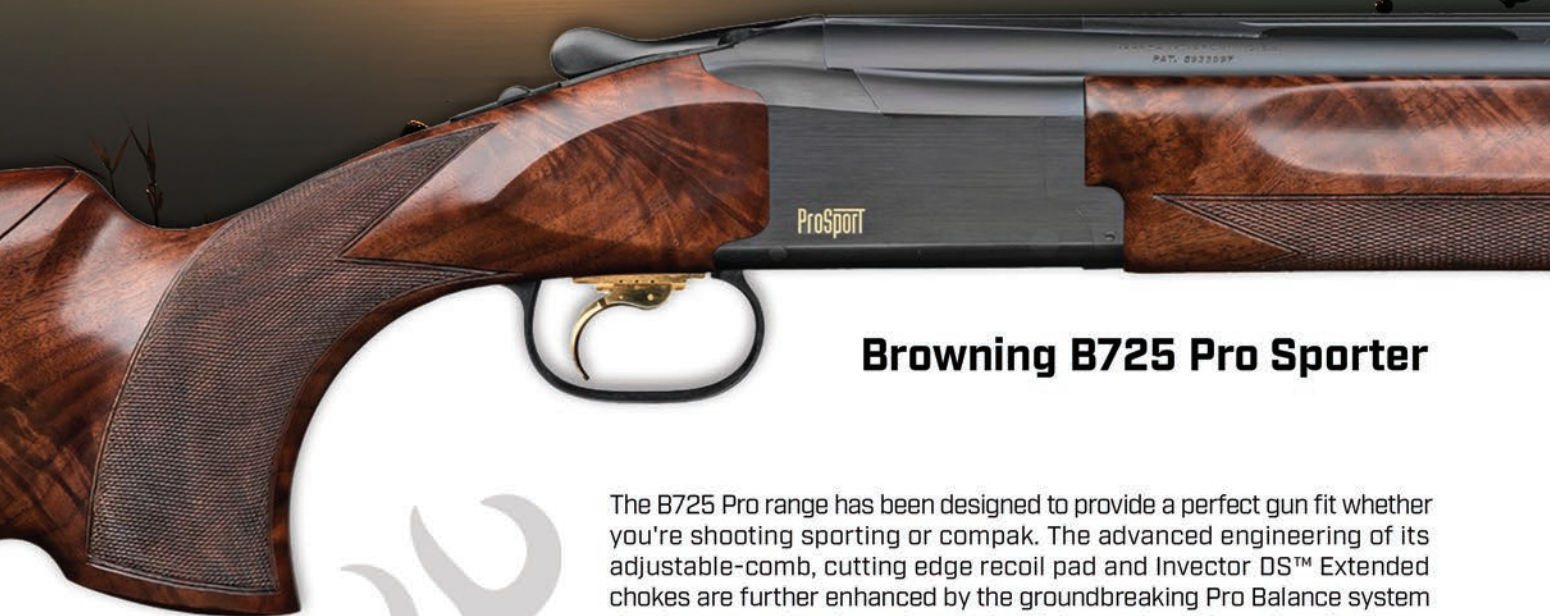
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Q I have a Browning A5 auto which was my dad's and I've been trying to find out whether it's a light, heavy or magnum model. The gun was made in Belgium with ventilated rib and 32" barrels. I've checked Browning websites and other information online but can't find any numbers or serial numbers which match. All the A5 has is a small 58 and 4101 (as photo) and on the barrel is written ACIER SPECIAL C12 CART2. If you could find any information on the gun it would mean a lot to me.

Mitchell S., SA



A Thanks for your photos which have been most helpful. I've sent you three scans from a 1963 brochure for the FN Browning Auto 5 from Belgium which clearly identifies your gun. I think web-searching these days often results in a lot of misinformation, as unedited content allows people to guess or just make up 'information'. Anyway, here are some facts:

Acier special means 'special steel' in French. Production in Belgium was greatly interrupted by WWII and only resumed in 1952. Your shotgun was made in 1958 (as indicated by the smaller

MODELS

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12 bore super lightweight	(2, " " ")
12 bore super lightweight 3 or 4 shot	(3, " " ")
12 bore Magnum	(4, " " ")
16 bore standard, lightweight, superlightweight	(5, " " ")
20 bore lightweight	(6, " " ")

The detailed specification of all these models is given in the table on the next page. Information is given there particularly regarding the length of the barrel, the dimensions of the stock, the weight of the gun and the cartridges.

'58') and the remaining 4101 is a manufacturing serial number. I understand the Fabrique Nationale d'Armes de Guerre - Herstal factory made FN Browning A5 shotguns for the international market separately from those produced for the US. If you have the original registration certificate it would be interesting to see which number was used to register it.

At the time your dad obtained his gun (assuming he bought it new) the Australian agents were Gollin and Co. They advertised the standard-model gun in the 1962 Hunting and Shooting Annual with a ventilated rib barrel for £73, 10 shillings and, while higher-grade models were available, the fact your gun has a plain blued trigger (rather than gold) suggests it's the above model. At the time this price wasn't at all cheap as the A5 was expensive and beautifully designed and made.

You'll see from the details I've sent you the longest barrel length was 31.5" (they were advertised as 32" in Australia), which means

it would've had a full choke. The C96713 number on the barrel is the barrel serial number as opposed to the number stamped on the base of the cartridge lifter.

Geoff Smith

Q I'm interested in reloading for my .243 Win but am unsure if I'll actually save money by doing so. Also, are reloads as accurate as factory ammunition?

Jonathon D., Qld.

A If you're thinking of reloading to save money, you'll need to be doing a fair bit of shooting to warrant the expense of buying a quality reloading kit like those available from RCBS and Hornady. You'll obviously need to buy suitable projectiles, powder, primers and I'm assuming you've kept your .243 Win cases. If not you'll need to buy those too. With the world upside down at the moment as wars and unrest soak up factory

ammunition, all these components are much harder to come by and way more expensive than they were just a few years ago.

If you do the calculations you'll probably still save a little (especially on exotic, expensive factory cartridges), but accounting for your time would blow that out the water. If you only shoot a few boxes of 20 cartridges a year then the capital outlay isn't worth it. Just find what factory loads suit your rifle (this can also be an expensive process, buying several brands to test) and enjoy occasional shooting.

If on the other hand, if you do a fair bit of shooting and are interested in ballistics and tuning loads to suit your rifle, then the investment is a tiny part of the pleasure and education you'll extract from the fascinating world of reloading. Many SSAA members are keen reloaders and you can learn enough from the guys and girls at the nearest range to set you on your way.

I hope you take the plunge as you can definitely improve on factory ammo as your learning curve advances. There's also a great deal of satisfaction to be had from tailoring loads and seeing them perform well on targets and out in the field if you're a hunter.

Paul Miller



THERE'S A WHOLE WORLD OF ENJOYMENT TO BE HAD FROM RELOADING YOUR OWN AMMO.

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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.



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WILD AT HEART TURNING DEER CONTROL INTO A BUSINESS

WORDS:
CHARLOTTE FOX



ADAM WITH HIS LOYAL PAL GUNNER.

The description on the Wild Venison website perfectly describes **Adam Neilsen's** story as "a chance to do things better". He said: "It started as an idea and weekend hobby, to help control herd numbers by harvesting wild deer humanely and ethically and ensure minimal waste. What followed was a journey into true sustainability, food preparation and education."

Many would've seen Adam's story on ABC's Landline, highlighting how he assists local farmers control wild deer populations on their properties, which he then turns into commercial venison products. Adam's journey is an exemplary demonstration of blending entrepreneurialism, ethical hunting practices and sustainable wild animal management. He spoke to Charlotte Fox.

HOW DID YOU GET TO WHERE YOU ARE NOW?

I started my professional career on boats and worked on the water for 15 years in the fishing industry, including game fishing on charter boats. I eventually reached the point where I was sick of fishing - I'd fish at work then on my days off I'd had enough. So I decided to become a bow hunter and taught myself how to fling an arrow and went through all the highs and lows of bow hunting. I was lucky to have access to a large property with a huge number of deer.

One day I was on the back fence of the property when the neighbouring owner saw me and came for a chat. Turns out we'd been mates years ago and had lost contact but we got on like a house on fire. From that conversation and seeing the demand across several properties, I realised there was a commercial opportunity to start transitioning from recreational to commercial shooting.

HOW DID YOU PROGRESS FROM THERE?

After getting married I didn't want to be away from home so much and looked for other jobs. I got along well with the local butcher where I ended up doing a mature age apprenticeship. I bought that shop just before the global financial crisis and, like all retail businesses at the time, got absolutely hammered. I lost half my clients in the first six months as they moved away but persisted for four years until I'd built the business up again and sold it.

From there I retrained and achieved a Diploma of Conservation Land Management at TAFE, specialising in pest management. From that experience I was able to see how pest management programs worked and the waste associated with them, which made me think "there has to be a better way to do this". It was prime animal protein going to waste. So I decided to use my butchery skills, diploma and firearm skills to try something different.

WHAT WERE THE EARLY STAGES LIKE?

Initially I was harvesting and processing two animals a week as well as doing market research. I was butchering for family and friends and seeking feedback by asking questions like would you buy it, what do you like or don't like about it? I continued that research for about eight months and realised there was a commercial opportunity.

With input from a mentor who was a pioneer of the deer industry in terms of wild game harvesting, I knew what I had to do and went through the required accreditation processes and built my facility. I was going to have someone else do the processing but with no-one even remotely close I



had to do it myself. I obtained a Certificate Three in meat safety, had a meat inspector train me for the final 'ticking the box' and had a retail model.

HOW ARE THE REGULATORY PROCESSES?

There was a bit of rigmarole to go through with the local council for development application, though overall they were responsive and supportive. I also needed accreditation from Safe Food Queensland and found them easy to deal with as long as you work within their parameters.

ARE AUSTRALIANS KEEN TO TRY GAME MEAT PRODUCTS?

It's all about trust. As a general rule the Aussie palate extends to meat proteins like pork, beef, chicken and a bit of turkey at Christmas. So with wild game products, whether it's deer, venison and even kangaroo there's hesitancy around it which means you need to make sure your product and service is A1 from the get-go.

You have to maintain that experience throughout the entire process to ensure the customer has first and foremost a first class product. But also something that's going to last in relation to shelf life, meet their expectations and alleviate any concerns they might have.





HOW DID YOU BRANCH OUT BEYOND FAMILY AND FRIENDS?

My wife and I asked ourselves: “How do we get this product to market?” Ultimately we decided on farmers’ markets, built a refrigerated display trailer and attended one at Noosa. This was during Covid and markets were super-popular at that time. Everybody was going to them because they were outdoors and a lot of people were more health conscious in the way they were consuming proteins and food.

From that first market we built a steady little client base and were astounded by how willing people were to try the products. We gained a good reputation in relation to our products and service, then the people who coordinated the market offered us a spot at a second one. We’re now doing three markets on the weekend and it’s a fantastic way to introduce game meats to the general public.

HOW DO PEOPLE RESPOND TO THE RANGE OF PRODUCTS?

You can have people walk past for six months then all of a sudden they’ll stop for a chat, a lot of which stems from our reputation. We frequently have people say: “I’ve been told to see the venison guy.” Market communities are quite vocal with people having their favourite businesses, which means word of mouth is important.

In terms of range we’re basically a butcher’s shop on wheels, so anything a butcher would sell we offer. We do products to order as well as a range of steaks, whole cuts, roasts, mince, nine flavours of sausage and a pet food range. We have ready-made meals coming up as well as bone broth and biltong.

WHAT’S YOUR PRODUCT BRANDING?

We say it’s the best meat you can eat as it’s not subject to any animal husbandry. It lives its best life. It eats what it needs to eat to be in the best condition and we harvest it ethically and humanely. We also talk about sustainability as it’s a truly sustainable industry as long as the animals aren’t over harvested.

WHAT’S YOUR PROMOTION STRATEGY?

I’m not very social media savvy so we employed a marketing team who run our socials and website. It’s rewarding we’ve build the business to a point where we can afford to engage a team like that and they’ve brought so many opportunities. We’ve just done an event where our product was featured with celebrity chefs and that all came from marketing.



DO YOU GET MUCH NEGATIVITY?

It's not too common though conversations always depend on what people are interested in. Everyone's entitled to an opinion and we should respect that. Some people want to know about harvesting, some about the processing and others about the product. Not everyone wants to see animals being harvested. A lot of people from the hunting community love the harvesting side of things, whereas a lot of people from the food community are less interested in that. I think it's a good education for people, though it can be difficult to give an all-encompassing view of what we do.

WILL YOU CONTINUE DOING THE HARVESTING YOURSELF?

We have a team of three in south-east Queensland at the moment. I run a four-wheel drive side-by-side buggy, so I need someone to drive while I stand in the back with a spotter. I like having a safety spotter to confirm what I'm looking at and ensure target identification. I'm aware we're being given access to someone's property so make sure we operate with absolute professionalism to maintain the landowner's trust.

HOW MANY ANIMALS DO YOU HARVEST A WEEK?

It depends on what I need and what species we're on to. We have access to a fantastic chital herd where I'll harvest 10 animals to take 300-400 kilograms. With red deer you can shoot six for the same amount as they're bigger animals.

HOW DO YOU SEE CONSERVATION HELPING FARMERS?

The ultimate aim is reducing numbers to better allow for the livestock farmers are trying to raise. If you have a group of 50 to 100 deer moving through a paddock at a night they can eat significant amounts of fodder, which isn't going into the intended production system and impacting efficiency of the farming enterprise.

Farmers work hard enough to maintain their businesses without having that unnecessary competition. It also highlights the beauty of the model we've set up as a free service. Where most pest management businesses have to be paid for their service, we focus on making a living from the end product.

CAN FARMERS CONTACT YOU?

Anyone can contact me via the Wild Venison website. It's not a system where I'll take a call then go to a property that night or next week to start shooting. There's a process I like to go through before we pull a trigger, going to a property to map it comprehensively on a tablet. We

map each track, no-shooting areas, buildings and dwellings so at all stages of the night, we know exactly where we are and where we can and can't shoot. Once we've mapped an area we also do a little bit of a night surveillance for an idea of numbers. It's interesting to see the contrast between deer numbers people assume they have based on what they see during the day. It's amazing how many more there are at night.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?

I have a goal by the end of the year to employ a full-time butcher. At the moment my wife and I do everything but now the business is showing enough profit to afford one. That success is the result of lots of hard work. More at wildvenison.com.au



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There are a lot of high quality tripods out there, and like us, you may have difficulty sifting through them all trying to decide on 'the one'. Our pick is the **Vortex** Summit Carbon II due to it's compact, lightweight design, smooth panning, lifetime warranty and steady positive reviews from users. RRP from \$729.95 and bino adapter \$129.



For on the go cleaning, we like the neat little Lens Pen from **Burris**, with retractable soft brush to remove dust and debris and a chamomile pad on the opposite end. Fits in any pocket. RRP \$35.20



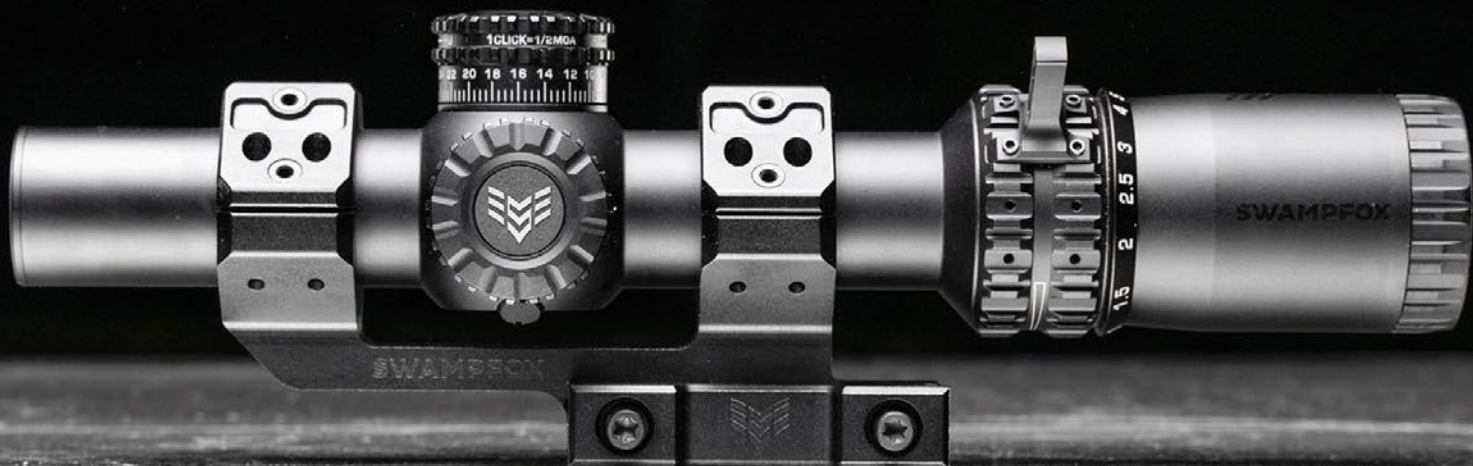
There are many cleaning sets out there to keep your bino lenses optically brilliant, but we really like this **Swarovski** CSO set for it's environmentally friendly materials. Bamboo cleaning brush? Check. Two microfiber machine washable cloths? Check. Lens cleaner in a refillable glass bottle? Check. RRP \$95





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Lithgow Arms appoints TSA Outdoors as new distributor

ROD PASCOE

Lithgow Arms, the firearm manufacturing arm of Thales Australia, has appointed TSA Outdoors as its new distributor for civilian rifles. The transition from the previous distributor was announced in February and TSA's Chief Marketing Officer, Ben Clarke, said his company's looking forward to representing fine quality products from an iconic Australian gun maker.

TSA has been operating for more than 50 years and will be known to many as Tasco Sales Australia, starting out as a small family-owned business in Sydney marketing a wide range of firearm accessories. The announcement of this new venture coincided with TSA's addition to the Shooting Industry Foundation of Australia (SIFA) as a patron member alongside Beretta Australia, Nioa and Winchester Australia.



COMPONENTS ARE PRODUCED TO THE SAME HIGH-PRECISION MECHANICAL TOLERANCES EXPECTED IN MILITARY FIREARMS.

At a meeting at the Lithgow plant in June, representatives from the shooting and outdoor media gathered to hear a presentation by Lithgow Arms' Chris Burton who heads the civilian side of rifle production. Theme for the day was 'reliable, accurate and Australian-made', referring to advancements in the range of sporting rifles over the years and the fact rifle manufacturing has been part of the New South Wales town since 1912. In his presentation

Mr Burton, a patriotic Lithgow Arms employee, declared: "Every Australian should own a Lithgow [rifle]".

Lithgow is situated on the western side of the Blue Mountains, a couple of hours from Sydney and considered the gateway to the central tablelands. Its location as a government firearms manufacturing plant, originally known as the Lithgow Small Arms Factory, was chosen for its abundance of industrial and mineral resources and is placed well outside the range of gunfire from enemy ships off the east coast.

Writers from major shooting publications as well as invited outdoor and hunting influencers were given a comprehensive tour of the business side of the Lithgow operation. In buildings dating



MODERN HI-TECH CNC MACHINES PRODUCE FIREARM COMPONENTS; SOME MACHINES FROM THE EARLY DAYS ARE STILL CAPABLE OF PRECISION WORK.

back to pre-World War One, modern hi-tech CNC machines now replace large antique belt-driven lathes and mills. These were once mounted on oil-stained timber floors to produce firearm components and complete sporting rifles, to the same high-precision mechanical tolerances required for Lithgow Arms' Defence firearm production.

The media event was not only a chance for Lithgow Arms and TSA to celebrate their new venture, but to showcase the importance of a strong, revitalised local firearms industry and its relevance to Australian job skills, precision engineering and manufacturing in regional New South Wales.

The Outback, Hunter and Varmint centrefire models were the main talking point of the day, with attendees given the chance to try each rifle in various calibres at the adjoining Lithgow rifle range. The Lithgow/TSA team are rightly proud of their sporting rifles, offering shooters a wide choice of dimensions, barrel lengths and profiles, stocks and ammunition options across the range. Targets were set up at several distances out to more than 500 metres to test accuracy as well as ease of handling and comfort.

Most rifles were topped with a variety of scopes, mainly ZeroTech, also marketed by TSA. All firearms were given a thorough workout which capped a highly informative day, including up-close exposure to products and behind-the-scenes manufacturing processes. The accuracy, reliability and Australian-made theme continued in the range session, where skilled Lithgow staff were on hand to point out features of the rifles and lend assistance with sighting. There were tutorials in trigger adjustment and those who brought their own Lithgow rifles were given maintenance and adjustment pointers by the crew. ●



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JIM DICKSON SALUTES THE ROSSI M92 LEVER-ACTION

The Brazilian-made Rossi 92 is a high-quality copy of the M1892 Winchester. The gun will be familiar to anyone who ever watched a Hollywood 'Western', as this is pretty much the movie standard regardless of the era the film is supposed to be set. It's a John Browning design, achieved by scaling down his massive M1886 45-70 lever-action to fit the 44-40 cartridge of the M1873 Winchester.

The M1892 was lighter and smaller than the M1873 as it had a compact rising bolt lock instead of the toggle lock of the M1873. Due to the timing of its introduction when the American frontier was still being settled, the 44-40 cartridge ended up accounting for more game of all types than any other cartridge.

It repeated its success in South America where both models of Winchesters were extremely popular. The 44-40 was a large bore pistol power cartridge which proved an excellent subsistence hunting option, able to take big game yet still not ruin a lot of meat if small game was the quarry. When you can only take one rifle into the wilderness with you that's a vital consideration, as is the fact the ammunition was more compact than higher powered rifle shells.

The M1892 was light and handy, taking up little room when traveling, yet was fast and deadly in action. It was the ultimate all-round rifle for many a trapper, wilderness dweller and Eskimo and was often their only firearm. It was so successful that as late as the 1960s and '70s, the 44-40 was the only cartridge you could be sure of finding at remote Canadian trading posts.

Admiral Robert Peary, the man who located the geographic North Pole in 1909, carried one on his polar expeditions as did other noted explorers including famed Amazon adventurer Percy Fawcett. It also saw military service, with the British Royal Navy using 21,000 of them in WWI. Ultimately 1,007,608 were made until production ceased as Winchester began retooling for WWII. After the war they didn't bring it back and it wasn't reintroduced until 1997.

The M1892 had too strong a following in South America to ignore and, in the 1970s, Brazilian gunmaker Rossi began producing it. The quality was first rate and far better than the Winchester 30-30 M1894 rifles I've seen which were made in the '70s. Best of all they now also chambered it for the more powerful .45 Colt cartridge.

The 44-40 was designed as a .429 diameter 200-grain bullet propelled by 40 grains of black



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SIDE VIEW OF THE ACTION OPEN SHOWING JUST HOW LITTLE THE BOLT COMES BACK TOWARDS YOUR EYE.



powder. The .45 Colt was developed to meet the US Army's requirement for a pistol cartridge which would kill a horse with one shot at 100 yards. It was a .454 diameter 250-grain lead bullet propelled by 40 grains of black powder.

The US Cavalry at that time were aiming to wipe out the great herds of buffalo roaming the plains, to deprive Native Americans of a food source and open up the land to settlers. Cavalry troops treated it as 'sport' to ride alongside the buffalo and shoot them with their powerful new revolvers. There was a shorter and weaker S&W .45 round for the S&W Schofield revolver, which led to the term .45 Long Colt to differentiate the pair.

It wasn't until the 1970s lever-actions were chambered for the .45 Colt, as the original rim diameter of .500" was fine for the push-rod ejector of the Colt Single Action Army revolver, yet too small to work reliably in a lever-action rifle extractor. When the army adopted the Colt New Service revolver M1909 as a stopgap measure they increased the rim diameter to .540, the largest the massive Colt New Service revolver cylinder could accommodate.

Since this was way too big for the old Colt SAA revolvers, factories began making the .45 Colt with a .512 diameter rim, the largest the Colt SAA could handle and which also worked reliably in the new swing-out cylinder double-action revolvers. Why Winchester didn't immediately chamber their M1892 rifles for the .45 Colt then remains arguably one of the worst marketing oversights of the time.

When Rossi 92s in .45 Colt were first imported into the US By InterArms in the 1970s I bought one. At that time most of them were going deep

into the Amazon, so the stock wore a thick coat of wax which would be most welcome in that rain-forest environment. I cleaned it off with WD-40, which left the Brazilian hardwood stock a beautiful rich red color that went well with the blued finish over the mirror-polished metal. Internally everything was perfectly fitted and worked as slick as glass.

The rifle was as accurate as it could be fresh from the factory with no other accurizing work necessary or even possible. The trigger broke cleanly at 4¼lbs and the gun weighed a mere 2.4kg. Barrel length was 19" and overall length 37" with a 13" length of pull. The sights were Partridge, square notch rear and square front like a modern pistol has and in all these years it has never given any trouble whatsoever, faithfully firing every type of .45 Colt ammo there is without a hitch.



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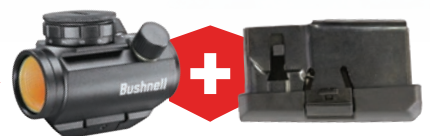
ON THE LEFT IS THE SLIGHTLY BOTTLE NECKED 44-40, THE ORIGINAL BIG BORE OF THE M1873 AND M1892 WINCHESTERS ALONGSIDE THE STRAIGHT-CASED .45 COLT.



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L-R: TOP OF THE ROSSI ACTION CLEARLY SHOWS THE BRIGHT FINISHED TWIN LOCKING LUGS AT THE REAR OF THE RECEIVER; WHEN THE ACTION'S OPENED THE LOCKING LUGS DROP OUT OF SIGHT, ALLOWING THE BOLT TO COME TO THE REAR AND CYCLE THE ACTION.

As a deer rifle I much prefer it to the M1894 Winchester 30-30, as it has much greater knock-down power and arguments for the 30-30 having a superior trajectory fall flat. Most deer should be taken within 100 yards and, if you're in the woods, you wouldn't normally be able to clearly see anywhere near that far.

But it takes a subsistence hunter to truly appreciate this rifle and it's 'do everything' capabilities and I was one of those for years. A while back my wife and I had Alaskan trapper's licences and were living in a one-room log cabin deep in the Alaskan Interior. Ranges were short in that forest and we ended up using the automatic pistol version of the .45 Colt, the .45 ACP.

We were both decent pistol shooters yet most aren't that adept with a handgun and that's why this rifle was so popular, as it did the same thing in a package that was easier for most people to shoot and hit with. Indeed, when you look at this rifle alongside a Colt Single Action Army revolver or other .45 Colt pistols, it really looks small.

This is a rifle that's certainly no larger than it absolutely has to be and that's part of its appeal. When you live deep in the wilderness and have to carry everything in through miles of forest and swamps, every inch and ounce counts. The only light we had at night was one kerosene lantern and a big candle as that was all we could carry.

During that long trip we'd encounter various large animals, not all of which may be intimidated or harmless. A grizzly bear in the alder thickets is every bit as dangerous as a charging NT buffalo in thick cover and, if you run into a female with cubs, you can have a real problem, one that may only be solvable by fast and accurate shooting. That's where the light, handy and fast-firing 92 shines and when one rifle for everything is all you have, this was and is a fine choice. ●





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Thompson on top at Centrefire nationals

**BRENDAN
ATKINSON**

The National Benchrest Centrefire Championships were held over the Easter weekend at the SSAA Captains Mountain Range near Millmerran in Queensland. Spread over 5000 acres, this outstanding venue caters to the majority of SSAA disciplines as well as providing accommodation and spacious camping areas.

The first event decided was for Unlimited rifles which have few restrictions, many shooters using rail guns which under some conditions have a distinct advantage. Ten-shot groups are required and the best of those was a neat .162 shot by Steve Blaine. The 100-yard aggregate saw a popular win for Ron Sinclair who used his benchrest rifle to produce a winning .2654 ahead of Milan Morrell on .2822 and John Babic on .2930, both using rails.

The longer yardage was shot in tricky conditions which proved to be the undoing of many

and made for a challenging afternoon. The best group was shot by Michael Thompson with a .412, one of only two under the half-inch mark. The aggregate was won by Babic on .2972, second was Paul Sullivan on .3125 with Thompson third on .3148. In the grand aggregate standings, Babic took the gold medal with .2951 from Thompson on .3164 and Ean Parsons on .3276.

Easter Saturday was Light Benchrest rifle time with firearms not to exceed 4.763kg in weight. Tiny groups were the order of the morning and the best of those was a .122 shot by Richard Winckel. The aggregate however showed a comfortable win for John Gnech on .2196 from Sullivan on .2306 and Ron Sinclair on .2390.

At the longer yardage some remarkable groups were shot, the smallest of these being a .278 from Les Fraser. The aggregate saw a good win for Josh Russell on .2182 from Sullivan on .2305 and Thomas Thompson on .2630. Light Benchrest winner was Sullivan who made few mistakes to record .2306 from Russell on .2458 and Annie Elliott on .2598.

Heavy Benchrest is usually where the smallest groups are produced and this year didn't disappoint. Conditions were good and, on his fourth card, Parsons produced an outstanding .090 for smallest of the morning which helped him win the aggregate with an excellent .1652, well clear of Elliott on .2008 and Will Greer on .2402.

The afternoon continued the trend and the smallest group was an amazing .203 shot by Kerrie Moore, no doubt using her self-manufactured bullets. The aggregate win was also impressive with David McKillop on .2107 from Michael Thompson on .2165 and Will Greer on .2344. Heavy Benchrest winner was Parsons on .2219 from Elliott and Michael Thompson.



RON SINCLAIR WON THE 100-YARD EXPERIMENTAL MATCH USING HIS BENCHREST RIFLE.



MITCHELL TALLER, MICHAEL THOMPSON, DARREN PARSONS AND EAN PARSONS WON THE TEAM SHIELD FOR NSW; PAUL SULLIVAN WON THE LIGHT BENCHREST TITLE FROM JOSH RUSSELL AND ANNIE ELLIOTT; FOUR-GUN CHAMPION FOR 2025 IS MICHAEL THOMPSON (CENTRE) FROM PAUL SULLIVAN (LEFT) AND EAN PARSONS.



ANNIE ELLIOTT SHOT CONSISTENTLY TO TAKE THE TWO-GUN SHIELD.

The final event was the Sporter class for rifles not exceeding 4.082kg, meaning in the 6mm PPC calibre they can be quite lively to shoot. At the shorter yardage it was McKillip who produced the best group with a .152 but the aggregate went to Mitchell Taller on .2546, from Michael Thompson on .2592 and Les Fraser on .2808, those aggregates indicative of the conditions.

It was tough going at the longer distance with Paul Sullivan's .269 group being the smallest seen. The yardage saw a clear win for Parsons with .2503 from Michael Thompson on .2795 and Taller on .2887, the Sporter grand aggregate

title going to Michael Thompson on .2693 from Taller on .2717 and Parsons on .2880.

So in summary the 2025 results look like this. Two-Gun (light and heavy) champion is Annie Elliott, making a successful return to centrefire benchrest, and her .2443 saw her take the title from Paul Sullivan on .2531 and Ean Parsons on .2547. Three Gun champion (Sporter, Light and

Heavy combined) is Ean Parsons on .2658, just ahead of Michael Thompson on .2665 and Paul Sullivan on .2725.

The most prestigious title in centrefire benchrest is the Four-Gun trophy, and this year it went to Michael Thompson on .2790 from Ean Parsons on .2812 and Paul Sullivan on .2869. The Australian Benchrest Hall of Fame requires a shooter to obtain 10 points for entry, and this year both Ean Parsons and Michael Thompson achieved the milestone so congratulations to both. Full scores on the Benchrest Australia website at benchrestaustralia.com ●

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CHRIS REDLICH RECALLS THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF VICTORY IN THE PACIFIC THROUGH HIS GRANDFATHER'S DIARIES

I couldn't help but be moved by the palpable sadness on reading the letters from my grandmother to my grandpa while he was away training for war. At home and helpless due to the separation of distance, Ethel battled painful blood poisoning brought on by a serious infection of the hip. She pleaded for his return and, after finally being granted compassionate leave by his Commanding Officer, grandpa Jim returned to be with his wife in Queensland.

Tragically, she passed away from acute sepsis less than 24 hours before he got there. Jim was heartbroken. Had she received a shot of penicillin the outcome would've been positive, so it's a stark reminder of what we take for granted today and how hard it was for families during the Second World War.

Jim was the fourth of five Redlich children born to Latvian immigrants and, like many young people of the war era, they were keen to serve their country in its hour of need. By late 1942, the tide of Japanese invasions had been met with fierce resistance from Australian and Allied forces

but they were far from finished. Despite being recently married, Jim's chance for enlistment arose later and with older brother Harold having previously served in the Middle East with the 2/15AIF, he was keen to join the same battalion.

In a conversation I had with him more than 20 years ago, grandpa recalled when the family received word that brother Harold was 'killed' or 'missing in action', the news directly impacted his immediate decisions (see A Gallant 'Rat' in the May 2020 edition of *Australian Shooter*). Jim's mother begged him not to join to spare him the same fate as Harold, yet his passion to serve remained strong.

His experience as a steam engine operator in rural sawmills played a part, and he enlisted in June 1942 as a plant operator with the RAAF instead of his brother's infantry unit. After the devastation of losing his first wife, the ensuing uncertainty saw him reposted to another outfit where he soon made new friends and became a valued operator with the 8th Airfield Construction Squadron (8ACS).

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CHRIS'S FAVOURITE PHOTO OF GRANDPA AND HIS 'LOCAL' MATES.

With his unit Jim travelled across Australia and was involved in the construction of remote airfields near Katherine and on NT's Gove Peninsula. Eventually the time for active service arrived, with three years of graft on home soil proving the perfect grounding for what lay ahead. On Tuesday, April 10, 1945 Jim and his mates left Sydney on Dutch ship SS Swartenhondt bound for hostilities in the Pacific, to boost the massive Allied effort in regaining contested territory. First stop was the island of Morotai.

THE LANDINGS

By 1941 Borneo was one of the biggest oil producers in the region. Understandably, Japan required this valuable resource to feed its war machine if it was

to continue the conquest of neighbouring Pacific islands. With the impending Japanese invasion of Borneo in mid-1942, the Dutch had sabotaged most of their own installations on evacuation, though it didn't take long for the imperial warlords to reinstate them.

By May 1945, Japanese forces were wearing the weight of heavy losses yet continued their aggression. They'd completely underestimated the enemy's will to fight, what I like to call 'old

school' Aussies who'd "give it to 'em" at every opportunity. Despite strategic Allied victories including defeating the Germans in Europe, our Pacific forces were unaware at the time the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki would force a Japanese surrender within months.

For the time being it was 'business as usual' with 8ACS responsible for maintaining and rebuilding key airfields on the islands of Indonesian Morotai, Tarakan and Balikpapan on the mainland of south-east Borneo. Reading my grandfather's diary made me feel like I was looking at a smoke-filled sky lit by bright orange explosions across the island, while bobbing around the ocean waiting for a chance to join in. He wrote: "We had a landing force of 18,000 strong at Tarakan, with 3000 of those being frontline troops."

Across the three theatres of war, remaining Japanese-fortified enemy defences were softened by repeated air force and naval bombardments prior to the invasion and, once they'd established a landing, our artillery continued the barrage. Multiple AIF infantry units supported by tank armour and flamethrowers carried out land assaults and continued the onslaught.

It would've been a highly unnerving sight for the Japanese watching an approaching armada of Allied ships but, once secured, 8ACS and other engineering elements left their LST (Landing Ship Tank) and came ashore. At the Morotai landing, Jim noted he was the first of his crew to drive the bulldozer off and mentioned that if he'd sank, the LST would have to get closer, though he made it ashore without a problem and the rest followed.



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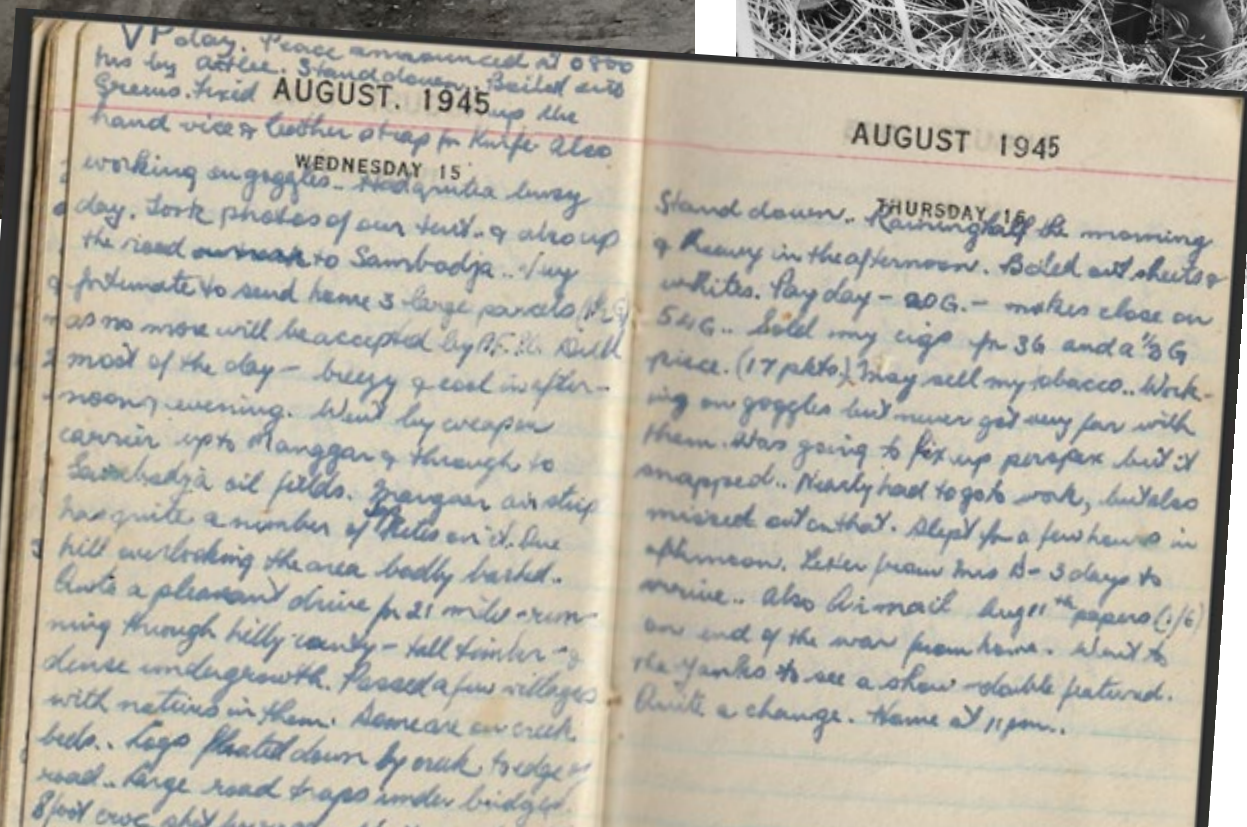
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TOP: AIRFIELD UNDER CONSTRUCTION WITH RAAF SPITFIRE IN THE BACKGROUND.

INSERT: AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER AND THE M1928A1 THOMPSON SUBMACHINE GUN WITH CUTTS COMPENSATOR (AWM PHOTO).



LEFT: GRANDPA'S DIARY ENTRY FOR VP DAY.

Some LSTs did become unstuck on coming too close to the reef as the captain's skill was tested at identifying underwater obstacles. Jim's 8th Airfield Construction Squadron was a small cog in a very big wheel, as all three Australian and US services combined and complemented each other in order to complete the task.

Day-to-day chores for Jim included long hours pushing fill out of gravel pits, machinery maintenance, 'picquets' (guard duty) and ensuring Allied aircraft had somewhere safe to take off and land. If an airstrip was damaged by enemy bombing it was repaired immediately, with coral from the beaches a key ingredient for road-base.

He tells of times when they were caught off-guard by a high tide and the machines became bogged. Engineers greased up critical joints and capped off vital points of entry from sea water and, once the tide receded, vehicles were retrieved and returned to work. Meanwhile, remnant Japanese forces remained defiant, constantly probing and harassing Allied positions, with many soldiers lost on a daily basis.

One thing Australians did well was make friends with indigenous populations, which negatively impacted Japan. While Jim and his mates tried to grab some sleep after dark, Borneo natives (known then as pygmies), small in stature yet big in strength, killed marauding Japanese who dared get too close to our men. Their presence was evident in daylight when dead Japanese were found with poison darts in their necks.

All men regardless of duties were issued a weapon, typically the reliable Lee Enfield .303. The Thompson submachine gun was grandpa's favourite, which he affectionately referred to throughout his diary as Tommy. Unlike my other grandpa, Reg, who'd used his Bren gun in New Guinea (see *Australian Shooter*, August 2022), not a shot was fired in combat by Jim, though he carried it everywhere on foot or in machine and maintained it as if his life depended on it. Clutching his Tommy while on guard duty, he mentions nights where some of his mates had previously been shot doing the same job.

JIM'S TOMMY

The Thompson submachine gun formed the backbone of Allied small arms for close quarter combat and saw solid service across all theatres of the Second World War. Designed in 1917 and entering service in 1921 the Australian-issued, American-made M1928A1 is a derivative of the unmistakable gangster models of US prohibition era, with its drum magazine and pistol-style fore grip.

The M1928A1 was a recoil (blowback) operated, fully automatic submachine gun with a top cock breech, top ejection port and front and rear open sights. Chambered in the .45ACP round it could achieve a cyclic rate of 600-725 rounds per minute, yet because of its limited 20-round box magazine wasn't favoured for continuous bursts. Some Australian Tommy guns were equipped with a muzzle brake in the Cutts Compensator.

It was an important inclusion which tamed muzzle jump by redirecting propellant gases upwards and reduced inaccuracy of vertical shot stringing, common with these guns during bursts of automatic fire. Jim's model had the horizontal timber foregrip and underside sling loop. This arrangement didn't always suit our forces and, with typical Aussie ingenuity, some rearranged the sling with a fencing wire loop to the top of the barrel, allowing it to be slung waist high with barrel facing forward 'at the ready'.

Unfortunately the .45ACP cartridge wasn't known for its accuracy beyond 50 yards, meaning our forces favoured other firearms like the Australian designed and built 9mm Owen gun for jungle warfare and, to a lesser extent, the 9mm Austen submachine gun. Nevertheless, the Tommy had its supporters and during years of Allied use served its purpose well.



GRANDPA'S MATE TED WILLIAMS AND HIS TOMMY.

Day-to-day chores included machinery maintenance, guard duty and ensuring Allied aircraft had somewhere safe to take off and land



TREASURED FAMILY MEMENTOS INCLUDING JIM'S MEDALS, ID TAGS AND CAP BADGE.



JIM IN HIS RAAF SERVICE DRESS

VICTORY AT LAST

Although their commander wasn't entirely popular with all Australian soldiers, General Sir Thomas Blamey on August 15, 1945 summed up the sentiment of our troops in the final two paragraphs of his Order of the Day:

"We have fought through the burning days and freezing nights of the desert. We have fought through the ooze and sweat of tropical jungles. We have defeated the Italians and the Germans and we would soon have destroyed completely the Japanese before us.

"We are now to go to our homes, having done our part in ensuring freedom, for which we have fought so future years to ensure it remains the crowing heritage of Australian people. Above all, we give thanks to the Almighty for His greatness and crowing mercy that marks for all people the total downfall of tyranny."

The Japanese surrender in the Pacific was the last of the formalities to end our involvement in six years of war. We can only imagine the sense of relief our troops felt when Japanese officers finally signed the papers and handed over their swords.

In his writing, Jim detailed personal fatigue and his sorrow for lost mates. He mentions the fear of being killed, sadness for slain locals and, like most, homesickness for their beloved country. During the war years he lost a brother to service and his wife to illness, while Australia sadly lost around 34,000 personnel with total casualties topping 100,000.

While the tactics, techniques and procedures of the AIF had improved since World War One, a significant percentage of the Australian public yet again paid the ultimate price. Jim's story was

never intended as a historic account of the Borneo campaign, more a compilation of memories shared, diary entries explored and an overview of his issued weapon to commemorate the 80th anniversary of Allied victory in the Pacific.

In January 1946 he discharged from the RAAF at the rank of Corporal, his Certificate of Service and Discharge stating unsurprisingly he was of "very good character". I noted also many a letter was written to Ethel's parents as well as Marjorie, who Jim married in 1947. Marjorie was my dear grandmother and together they raised a family of three, including my father, and shared 60 years of marriage. I remember grandpa Jim as a loving man who adored his family and, after all he'd been through in those early days, had earned his peace in later years. ●

• A special thanks to my aunt Claire who scanned multiple diary entries for me, AWM Publications (*Stand Easy*, 1945) among numerous others, Brian Labudda of Wondai Traders and my brother Charlie for his help in sharing accurate recollections.





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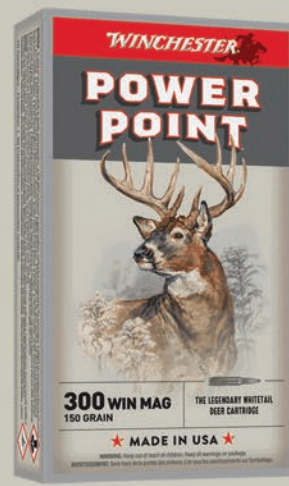
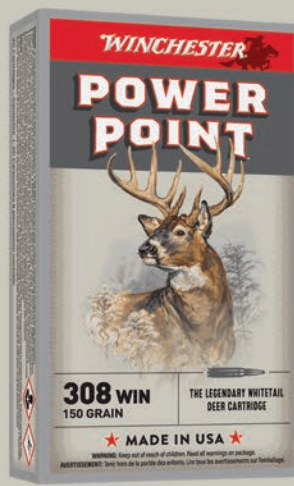
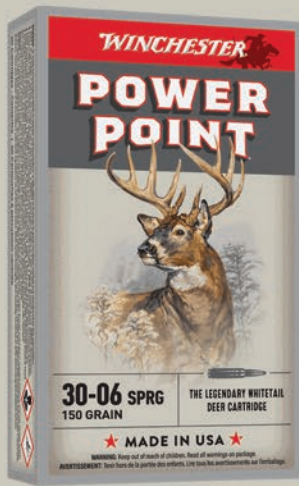
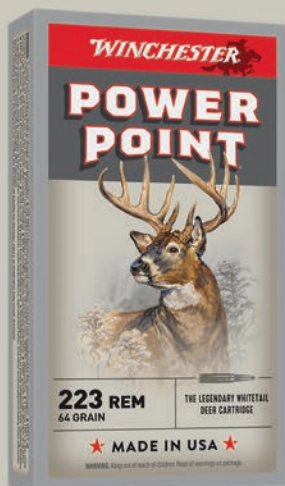
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Now the dust has settled

JOHN DUNN REFLECTS ON A LIFETIME IN FIREARMS

As a septuagenarian I've reached that stage in life where many of the drives of my younger years no longer push me as hard as they used to. I've slowed down, my priorities have changed and nowhere is that more obvious than in my waning interest in hunting and firearms, especially the latter. I watched my Old Man go through the same process many years ago and here I am, heading down the same road.

There was a time when firearms were an over-riding interest, as I liked most of them and needed to know as much about them as I could. That involved a lot of learning and from my early 20s through to my late 60s it never stopped. Being in the writing business kept me involved and for the latter 20-odd years of that timeframe I was a licenced firearms dealer.

Early in 2020 everything changed when a horrendous bushfire season made us realise just how vulnerable we'd become and, as much as we loved our rural lifestyle, time had caught up with

us. After 27 years it was time to move on, so we bought a house in town and began to prepare for the relocation. Almost immediately complications we'd never had to deal with began to arise, all of them revolving around my collection of firearms.

As a firearms dealer, I'd had regulation-compliant strongroom storage facilities for more than 20 years. Moving camp meant I'd have to go through the strongroom building process all over again, a costly business no matter how you come at it. On top of that my dealer's licence was due for renewal at the end of the year and I really wasn't sure I wanted to continue with it. I'd had a good run and enjoyed every minute, but perhaps it was time to give it away so, after several weeks of deliberation, that's what I decided to do.

Disposing of my dealer stock was easy. Some stored firearms had been in the safe for so long the fees owing on them exceeded their true value and the original owners didn't want them any more, so I sold off what I could and surrendered the rest. Some of my collectable single-shot firearms were also being held on the dealer's licence so sorting them out was something of a quandary. Some I'd worked long and hard to acquire, others were left over from my early days of collecting. There were modern reproductions and original collectable rifles I'd written about and hunted with. I'd enjoyed them all and consequently it was hard to choose which ones I could live without.

While demand for the superlative No.1 Ruger models never seems to fade, the market for other single-shots and my boys' rifles of yore was and remains somewhat limited. Keeping that in mind it made good sense to me to dispose of them in the present on my terms rather than have them sold some time in the future, perhaps as part of my estate, a thought which left me cold on a number of fronts.

It took several months but by the time we moved into the new house, only a handful of firearms remained. Most had gone to customers, others were sent to auction or to other dealers for sale on commission. Some I transferred to my personal shooter's licence at the last minute, mostly as a means of holding on to them until I finally decided if they were going to stay.

Some of them didn't and five years down the



A NICE BANTENG BULL TAKEN ON THE COBOURG PENINSULA WITH A THOMPSON/CENTER BREAK-ACTION RIFLE IN .30-06. THESE FIREARMS AREN'T PARTICULARLY COMMON IN AUSTRALIA AND ARE ALREADY IN DEMAND AS BOTH SHOOTABLE AND COLLECTABLE FIREARMS.



track I look back and realise a lot of my misgivings at the time were probably unfounded. The shedding process took some time but wasn't as draining or traumatic as I thought it might be. All went to good homes and though I don't really miss them any more, there are days when I think it would be nice to still have some of them around.

When that happens I console myself with the certain knowledge that all collectors and shooters, no matter what their interests may be, are never anything other than temporary custodians of their prizes. Sooner or later everything moves on to someone else, to be enjoyed and appreciated by new owners and aficionados wherever they may be.

As I write, my collection has dwindled to a scant three single-shot firearms, two centrefires and a rimfire. Collectively they give me the flexibility to choose and use a suitable rifle to hunt everything from bunnies to buffalo. That none of them are used as much as they used to be is of no importance. They're all that remain from a period in my life when I could (and did) pick and choose the firearms I wanted at will and easily dispose of them when they'd served their purpose.

I was extremely lucky to be able to collect, shoot and hunt with the firearms which passed through my hands over the years, not only for the experience they gave me but also the material they provided me as a writer. The realist in me recognises such arrangements will only become harder in future, as restrictions on private ownership of firearms seem set to increase.

These days I rarely look at shooting websites or venture into gun shops any more. Generally there's not much there to interest me and anyway, I have all the rifles I need. As a shooter and hunter with close to 60 years of firearms experience, I'm glad for the good years I had but have moved on to other things. The dust from those good old days has finally settled. ●

1 AN UNUSUAL FIREARM FROM STEVENS CIRCA 1870-1895 - A TWO-TRIGGER, TIP-UP SHOTGUN IN 12-GAUGE. IN CASE YOU'RE WONDERING, IT WAS MADE WITHOUT A FORE-END.

2 A NO.20 1894 STEVENS FAVORITE WITH A SMOOTH-BORED .32 RIMFIRE SHOT BARREL. BOYS' RIFLES LIKE THESE REMAIN POPULAR WITH SINGLE-SHOT COLLECTORS.

3 A NO.6 REMINGTON BOYS' RIFLE IN .32 RIMFIRE FROM THE 1902-1933 PERIOD.

4 THIS NICELY UNDERSTATED TRANTER MARKED RIFLE IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THE HIGHLY COLLECTABLE ENGLISH ROOK RIFLE GENRE.

5 THE PEDERSOLI RANGE OF REPRODUCTION SINGLE SHOT CLASSICS LIKE THIS 1885 WINCHESTER HIGH WALL IN .45/70 IS POPULAR WITH BOTH HUNTERS AND RANGE SHOOTERS.



EVEN MODERN FIREARMS LIKE THIS CASED LYMAN CENTENNIAL (1878-1978) NO.1 RUGER IN .45/70 HAVE BECOME COLLECTABLE OVER THE YEARS. THIS ONE WENT TO QUEENSLAND.



Likes father, likes son



TIKKA T1X A VERSATILE FAMILY FRIEND, WRITES MARK VAN DEN BOOGAART

In the spirit of truth in advertising I'm not much of a .22LR rifleman and, as I enter my 39th year of shooting and hunting, with hand on heart I can say I've only ever owned two rimfires. In fact I didn't buy a .22LR until my second decade of shooting. One of those I had for a few short months before trading it, the other I bought for my then girlfriend, now wife, so we could go to the range together, though eventually it also found a new home after years of very little use.

The reason why? Well a .22LR has never really been in my hunting and shooting wheelhouse. I don't regularly chase small game and when I've gone after rabbit, hare and fox I've used a shotgun. The rest of the time a .22LR didn't fit the bill during my years spent hunting medium and large game. So I start this review of a .22LR rifle with firmly fitted, optically calibrated centrefire-tinted glasses. The firearm in question is a Tikka T1x Hunter, fitted with a 3-9x40 Burris Droptine B Plex .22LR and matching Burris mounts, supplied as a package by Beretta Australia.

As with any new item for review, I began Googling with three tabs opened on Sako, Tikka

and Beretta Australia. Cross-checking each of the webpages there are three rifles in the T1x range in the Hunter, Multi-Task Rifle (MTR) and Ultra Precision Rifle (UPR), all being available in either .22LR or 17HMR. There's further model variance in the Hunter range around barrel length and muzzle thread pattern, for those faraway countries where no-one clutches their pearls at the mention of suppressors, though I'm assuming all reflect the same base platform.

I also believe there's a soon-to-be-released Tikka T1x Ace variant, their latest chassis-based practical rifle, though it wasn't available on the Beretta Australia website at time of writing. Looking over the T1x it appears to share much of the philosophy and build quality of the Tikka T3x range, and it's worth saying I'll repeat that observation throughout this review, because it's true.

What I noticed first was the highly presentable and ambidextrous timber stock. With a dark, smooth oil finish it shoulders beautifully and, with the inclusion of a wide flat fore-end, the rifle sits comfortably in an offhand shooting position. In contrast to the smooth stock finish is the

OPPOSITE PAGE: SUPERVISING
HIS SON GAVE MARK A
DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE OF
THE RIFLE AND ITS OPERATION.



FIRST TIME AT THE RANGE, RESULTS SHOWED THE T1X HUNTER HAS REAL POTENTIAL.

lighter, bright checkering which lends the rifle a two-tone effect, the checkering deep and tactile, facilitating a secure connection at the pistol grip and fore-end.

Bringing it all together is the length of pull and at 13¼" (stated) the T1x feels like a full-sized rifle. For me this was real departure from previous experiences with .22LR as many seem to be youth orientated and feel very short and cramped, though not so the T1x. Another interesting fact about the rifle is that (as stated on the Sako website) the T1x Hunter's barrelled action is compatible with T3x Lite and T3x UPR stocks, not something you see every day.

Following in the footsteps of the T3x, the T1x makes use of a free-floating, cold hammer-forged barrel. Tikka refers to the barrel as a crossover profile, in essence slightly shorter and heavier yet still light enough for hunting. The 510mm barrel is capped to protect the suppressor-ready thread. Looking closely it appears the receiver is a slightly different colour to the barrel and while I couldn't find any reference to this, if you look closely the barrel appears darker.

It also uses the Tikka action so as you'd expect it's very smooth and is complemented by a wide ejection port. Incorporating a 45-degree throw, bolt movement does give big hands enough room to comfortably cycle the action. The T1x Hunter makes use of an adjustable single-stage trigger. As a hunter I do like a slightly heavier trigger and found, out of the box, trigger pull to be crisp and light, though not too light to make me second-guess things.

It is a bolt-action repeater making use of a small, detachable polymer box magazine in either five or optional 10-shot capacity (the five-shot is flush mount) and, being a fan of detachable magazine hunting rifles, that's a yes from me. Completing an evaluation of the controls the T1x is fitted with the standard T3x safety, easy to



IT CERTAINLY LOOKS LIKE A T3X CENTREFIRE RIFLE.

locate and operate without having to reset your grip on the rifle (it's also quiet).

Like the T3x (again), the dovetailed action means easy scope mounting, so it really comes down to the type of optic you want to fit with the supplied scope, a Burris Droptine, offered in both centrefire and rimfire configuration. I got to test the .22LR version and while the Droptine is a budget scope, it felt right at home on the T1x.

I was liking what I saw so it was time to visit the range. My usual approach to reviewing a rifle involves two visits, the first being a 'get to know' the rifle scenario, the second to see what it can do. But this time I'd something different in mind so on my first trip I spent a lot more time than usual testing the rifle and, after getting a feel for things, I zeroed it for 50 yards. It performed very well though I expect I could manage a lot better accuracy with further practice and experimentation with different ammo. I also tested reticle increments of the Droptine for shooting out to 100 yards and found they provided an excellent aiming base line.

The reason for the change of approach was I wanted to introduce my son to the Tikka. After completing the necessary paperwork, we headed to the range and spent an afternoon shooting various targets at 50 and 100 yards. We started slowly and worked through the basics then, after overcoming his initial fear of 100 yards being too far away, we progressed from a standard target to a goat silhouette which was gleefully zapped by the new recruit.

As my job for the afternoon was to instruct and supervise, I gained a very different perspective of the T1x. My son, being a tall 12-year-old, was able to comfortably handle the longer stock, while the smoothness of the action and trigger made everything a little easier. One thing I did notice was the bolt needed a firm hand to execute a clean ejection of the casing and at times the slow, unsteady cycling of a new shooter caused the spent case to catch. It wasn't a problem when single loading at the range, but would be worth watching when cycling through the magazine.

It's hard to knock a Tikka rifle. Sure, the standardisation and repetition of manufacturing creates a level of monotony, yet what it produces is an excellent platform you can draw a line under or, like me, use as a starting point to build something which truly suits you. As with every Tikka I've owned and reviewed the T1x performed to a very high standard. They're accurate, functional, reliable and provide top shelf out-of-the-box performance, all of which in this instance meant it was perfect for a slightly nervous young man and first-time shooter.

Better still, those same qualities translate into a dedicated small game rifle for an adult. With that in mind and having never seriously hunted small game, the Tikka T1x Hunter does present a compelling case for a rifle which could be shared between a youth hunter and adult, making it difficult to argue against not having one in your gun safe. ●

SPECIFICATIONS

TIKKA T1X HUNTER

Action:
Bolt

Calibre:
.22LR or .17HMR

Capacity:
5+1 (supplied)

Barrel length:
510mm

Rifling:
1:16½"

Trigger:
Single-stage

Sights:
Scope-ready

Stock:
Checked, oil timber finish

Length:
970mm

Weight:
2.7kg

Test ammunition:
Winchester .22LR
Wildcat

They make an *EL* of a difference!

CHRIS REDLICH MARVELS AT SWAROVSKI QUALITY

How do we decide what's a good glass, one from another? The obvious solution would be to compare the difference. However, evaluating all makes and models side-by-side is often impossible as most outlets don't offer every option, which can make for a difficult decision. When it comes to parting with hard-earned dollars it's important you make an informed choice and, after reviewing numerous brands of optics during the past few years, I've been fortunate to compare, evaluate and pass on a little of what I've learned.

Most European brands are known for high-quality manufacture and, in my opinion, one of those stands out from the rest. So why Swarovski Optik? For 15 years this Austrian icon has impressed me for performance and reliability and, for that reason, I was delighted to compare their EL 10x42 binoculars against my trusty Leupold Golden Rings.

EL 10X42S EXPLAINED

As per usual the binoculars were presented in Swarovski Optik's recognisable olive-coloured packaging. The ELs come supplied with eyepiece covers, objective lens covers, storage bag and carry strap, soap and brush, micro fibre cleaning cloth and, of course, the user manual. Important as it is, I found the supplied booklet to be refreshingly 'boring' thanks to the simplicity of the EL binoculars.

Although devoid of complicated electronics unlike other optics reviewed recently, I still made a point of reading the manual before getting started. It revealed the ELs have a dual dioptre adjustment integrated to the centre focus wheel. This isn't a new concept and I actually assessed a pair of Kahles Helia 10x42s a couple of years ago which share the same design.



Not surprisingly though, the Austrian-made Helia binos are owned by Swarovski Optik as reflected by their obvious and successful similarities. By firstly unlocking the dial then pulling out the centre focus wheel, simply rotate it. You'll notice a slight but positive incremental click until a clear image is achieved for the user's eyes. Once set, pushing the wheel forward locks the dioptre adjustment.

You don't need to be a genius to use the focus wheel (it's in the user manual) but, like most other binos, the centre focus wheel is exactly that. Using the tip of your trigger finger, the wheel moves freely yet firmly to sharpen your target image. Unlike some other brands, Swarovski's generous depth of field from a close focus of 3.3m, enables clear viewing with minimal progressive adjustments to as far as the eye can see.

Swarovski Optik aren't known for producing mediocre glass and, by contrast, you'll notice the difference in lens quality compared to competitors. At 27mm in diameter the ocular lenses provide a no-fuss image even with spectacles, while the generous 20mm eye relief is easily set by three simple clicks of the eyecups.

The 42mm objective lenses are externally coated in what the company refers to as Swarovclean. This treatment is designed to repel moisture and protect the lens surfaces from the harsh abrasion



OUT FIELD IN THE AUSTRALIAN MOUNTAINS IS WHERE THE EL 10X42S COME INTO THEIR OWN.

often associated with hunting environments. Now I don't like to rattle off what sounds like a mouthful of marketing jargon but the lenses and internal prism coatings, aptly named Swarobright including Swarotop (internal) and Swarodur (external), all combine to provide class-leading light transmission for sharp image resolution.

At 10x magnification the 42mm objectives give you a wide 112m field of view at 1000m and, in their sister EL binos with 8.5x zoom, that rises to 133m/1000m. As expected these binoculars give exceptional low-light performance and, once focussed on a selected view, regardless of distance there was never any noticeable peripheral blurring.

Measuring roughly 160mm long and weighing just 840grams, the ELs are as compact as you could expect for 10x42 binoculars and feel much lighter compared to my old Golden Rings. The dual hinge/open bridge design is a simple yet strong arrangement. It enables a full barrel grip while the interpupillary distance can be quickly adjusted from a narrow 55mm to 75mm, suiting a wide variety of eye widths.

As with all EL binoculars, the roof prism parallel lens barrels are made of robust magnesium-alloy and protected by Swarovski Optik's signature olive green rubberised armour coating. Of all the binos I've used, this armour doesn't feel

squishy in the heat or stiff in the cold, it remains stable in all temperatures and provides plenty of grip in wet weather. Furthermore, the specifications state the binoculars will maintain optimum performance in temperatures ranging from a toe-numbing -25 to a blistering +55C.

All Swarovski scopes and binoculars are nitrogen purged for reliable fog and waterproofing and, if you happen to drop them in the drink, they'll handle a submersion depth of four metres. I must say however that despite their impressive survival credentials, if mine happened to fall into a fast-flowing Alpine stream, I wouldn't risk my life by diving in to retrieve them.

Before heading for the hills I knew the supplied single neck strap wouldn't suit my style of carriage, so I prepared the shoulder harness. I also discovered the fitted anchor buttons have no loop attachment for the wide straps on my harness, though Swarovski do provide alternate button mounts for wide straps, which I promptly ordered. On changing the mounts it was evident how deceptively strong these little buttons are. A tiny stainless steel shaft moulded to the mount is what locks your straps to the bino housing and, once I had mine attached, they were ready for field use.



REMOVABLE ROBUST STRAP LOOPS ATTACHED BY STEEL SWIVEL PINS ENSURE SECURE AND SAFE CARRIAGE; SWAROVSKI OPTIK SUPPLY BLANKING PIECES TO REPLACE THE SUPPLIED RUBBER LENS CAPS IF NOT REQUIRED.



THE SWAROVSKI EL BINOS AND ATS SPOTTING SCOPE COMBINATION PROVED INVALUABLE IN DIFFICULT NZ TERRAIN.

OUT WHERE THEY BELONG

It's hard to find fault with something which appears flawless and I've nothing but praise for these binoculars. Through all phases of ambient daylight, the ELs provided crystal clear imagery in thick scrub on deer and native birdlife watching from above, so it's no wonder they're so popular with birdwatchers worldwide. On several occasions during a recent deer hunt I observed and appreciated many beau-

tiful birds which call the tops home, including the striking black cockatoo.

After waiting what felt like an eternity one afternoon (including a well-earned nap under a tree), a hind came bursting through the bush and caught me off guard. She stopped for a brief look then fled the scene, before a red stag appeared out the dark bush in the opposite direction. A quick observation in fading light proved an easy task for the ELs and I chose to take the cull stag for meat and its antlers for my 'trophy chandelier' collection.

THE OPEN BRIDGE DESIGN AND DURABLE RUBBER ARMOUR COMBINE FOR IMPROVED HANDGRIP.

The stag was a direct result of a combined effort between the Swarovski Optik EL binos and Z3 riflescope, both of which gave razor-sharp clarity on the target animal in very low light. More recently the binos paired with my Swarovski ATS spotting scope contributed substantially to a successful chamois hunt, picking out well-disguised targets in challenging NZ mountainous terrain.

CONCLUSION

A purchase based entirely on 'sight unseen' only underlines the confidence I now have in this Austrian icon. I own many optic brands covering the entire cost spectrum and while some are good for the price, they're all relevant to their category and each has a place in the market. The EL 10x42s on the other hand, retailing for \$2840 at time of writing, are by no means cheap glass, more what I'd call competitively priced and a reflection on their exceptional quality and value for money.

Swarovski Optik offer a huge range of binoculars worth exploring, including their premier NL Pure models. Other ELs which spring to mind for hunting use are their 8.5x42, 10x50, the popular EL 10x42RF (rangefinder) and recently released EL 8x32RF model. Despite my satisfaction I suggest you check local stockists for availability and try a pair of ELs for yourself before deciding what would best suit your needs and hip pocket. More at swarovskioptik.com

SPECIFICATIONS

Swarovski EL 10x42

Power:

10x magnification

Objective lens diameter:

42mm

Exit pupil diameter:

4.2mm

Eye relief:

20mm

Field of view:

102.5m at 1000m

Field of view degrees:

6.4°

Field of view apparent:

60°

Shortest focusing distance:

3.3m

Diopter adjustment:

± 5dpt

Pupil distance:

55-73mm

Weight:

839g

RRP:

From \$2840



THERMION 2 LRF 60 SERIES



XL60



XP60



XG60



**MADE IN
EUROPE**

Technical specifications

	XG60	XP60	XL60
Thermal imaging sensor	640x480	640x480	1024x768
SNETD, mk	<20	<18	<20
Display	AMOLED 2560X2560		
Magnification, x	4-32	3-24	2.5-20
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	
Measurement range, m		800	
Video & photo recorder		Yes	
Built-in memory, Gb		64	
Battery life, hours	7+	7+	7

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PULSAR

Thriving!

CON KAPRALOS ENJOYS AN AFFORDABLE JAPANESE OPTION

The gap between European and Asian sports optics seemingly continues to become smaller and smaller. Where once the Euro marques were largely unchallenged, ongoing advances in glass lens manufacturing has seen some excellent products coming out of China, while Japanese optics have always challenged Europe's best.

ZeroTech is a Japanese company with close ties to the Australian marketplace and has produced some excellent optics for shooting and hunting. Their range of binoculars is without peer and coinciding with this month's spotlight on binoculars, they forwarded for review a pair of their Thrive High Definition (HD) in 10x42 specification.

AT A GLANCE

The binos arrived in a handsome black carton with ZeroTech livery in bold orange, a specifications label on the carton indicating these are 10x42s. Inside is a carry pouch containing the binoculars along with a harness, neoprene neck strap and a smaller carry strap for the pouch

itself. A warranty card and cleaning cloth completes the package. Kudos to ZeroTech for such an impressive array of accessories to complement their HD range, which certainly ticks all the boxes for value and gives prospective purchasers further incentive.

UP CLOSE

The Thrive HD 10x42 is of a double-bridge design with a magnesium alloy chassis, to which the binocular barrels and focus dial are attached. The dimensions run at 172mm long, 128mm wide and 60mm deep with a weight of 840 grams (being HD in 10x42 this weight is justified). The barrels themselves are gently tapered from front to back where they meet up with the ocular assemblies.

Holding the unit in both hands, the coating applied to the barrels is of a hard rubber, just enough to give a positive grip without slipping when wet or in sweaty hands. Some others on the market tend to have a softer rubber applied to their external surfaces, however these ones are perfectly adequate and would be far more hard-wearing at that.

The binoculars sit comfortably in the hands with the focus dial within easy reach of the index fingers. To the front of the unit ZeroTech have fitted captive objective lens covers made of rubber, attached to the underside through a loop in the barrel body. Flicking off the cover from each objective lens, the caps stay just below the line of sight and are easily replaced with a firm press.

The oculars at the rear of the unit are very well designed. They're supplied with a standard rubber double cap which can easily be attached to the neck strap or harness. The diopter adjustment is fitted to the right ocular and both eye-cups on the ocular housings are easy to adjust to suit all users, including those with prescription glasses.

The binoculars have two magnesium alloy loops on either side of the barrels to which the neck strap or harness can be attached. The strap





is very well appointed, lined with neoprene in the middle section for added comfort around the neck. The harness is designed to attach to the case/pouch to give easy access to the binos at chest-level, while magnetic closure allows the unit to be removed and replaced quickly and easily. The pouch also contains additional loops and pockets for storing anything else you may need close at hand.

As with any optic you can only see what's there, though premium offerings with high definition lens elements excel in poor or low light conditions. The Thrive HD 10x42s use extra-low dispersion lenses, fully multicoated with a dielectrically coated BaK4 roof prism integral to their operation. Exit-pupil diameter comes in at 4.3mm with field of view at 113m at 1000m and eye relief of 15mm.

IN THE FIELD

Having used and reviewed all manner of binoculars from entry level to alpha-class units, my assessment of the ZeroTech Thrive HD 10x42s would be conducted without bias or comparison. They'd be tested in a scenario I've experienced all

too often, sitting in a deer-blind on the edge of a scrub bedding area known to contain deer. These often illusive creatures leave it to the last minutes of light to emerge from the scrub and, being able to see them against foliage in poor light, is where good binoculars triumph and others fail.

We can go on and on about properties of light, chromatic aberration and colour fringing but, when it comes to the crunch, distinguishing quarry from the background in rapidly-fading light is what defines good binoculars. And I'm happy to report that after three evening sessions in the deer-blind the ZeroTech Thrives performed admirably. In daylight conditions with ample light they were excellent, giving crystal clear and sharp images at all hunting distances. Admittedly there was a touch of colour fringing at the edges of the lenses, though nothing to be concerned about and it certainly didn't affect performance.

For binoculars which retail around the \$700 mark with all the excellent accessories included, the ZeroTech Thrive HD 10x42s would be the perfect 'all-rounder' for the hunter who wants a quality product without breaking the bank. For more on the range visit zerotech.com.au ●

SPECIFICATIONS

ZeroTech Thrive HD
10x42 power:
10x

Objective lens diameter:
42mm

Prism type:
Roof/BaK 4 dielectrically coated

Lens coating:
Fully multi-coated

Lens type:
Extra-low dispersion

Focus system:
Centre

Exit pupil diameter:
4.3mm

Eye relief:
15mm

Field of view:
113m at 1000m

Minimum focus distance:
2.5m

Diopter adjustment:
Right +/- 3

Interpupillary adjustment range :
56-73mm

Waterproof:
Yes

Weight:
840g

Warranty:
Unconditional lifetime

RRP:
\$749 but shop around

Burris brothers hard to fault

BEN UNTEN LOOKS THROUGH TWO AFFORDABLE OPTIONS

Burris is well established in the hunting optics arena and many readers will be familiar with their Eliminator range of ballistic calculator riflescopes. Having been fortunate enough to review a late model Eliminator scope, I was looking forward to laying my hands on their binos to see if they were as impressive. Beretta Australia sent two pairs for review in the Burris Droptine HD and Signature HD, both in 10x42mm.

DROPTINE HD

Aside from the coolest name in recent times, the Droptine HDs are the absolute latest offering from Burris. Available in two colour choices and two configurations, they come in deep tan or dark green and 8x42mm and 10x42mm configurations. The latter 10x42s sent for testing weighed 699g on my digital scales and measure 145mm in overall length.

The bulk of the exterior is wrapped in a dark-green, rubberised material and etched with a cross-hatched type chequered pattern for improved grip, the 'fingertip' areas sporting a

smoother, black rubberised finish. The removable eyepiece dust covers are one-piece and come with slots to enable them to be fed on to the neck strap if required, while the objective lens covers are attached to the binoculars via rubber O-rings.

The unit is supplied in a Velcro-fastened nylon carry bag with the supplied and adjustable shoulder strap fixed to the carry-case. The Droptine HDs also come with a padded neck strap and cleaning cloth. The eye-cups have faint 'clicks' as they're wound in and out, providing a positive 'snap' into three positions: fully in, halfway out and fully unwound (you can wind the cups out to positions in-between these clicks if desired). The focus wheel's coated in the same rubberised material as the exterior and tension on the single hinge allows for smooth adjustment while still holding the desired position. The diopter ring facilitates smooth finetuning to the eye of the user.

In the field these binos were easily focused and collimation was spot on. I used them for several hours chasing goats and not only were they comfortable to use, clarity was excellent and I experienced absolutely no eye strain.



SPECIFICATIONS

DROPTINE HD

HD roof prism:
Yes

Field of view:
100m @ 915m

Close focus:
2.3m

Exit pupil:
4.17mm

Eye relief:
15mm

Nitrogen filled:
Yes

Waterproof depth:
IPX7

Tripod mountable:
Yes with adaptor
(standard 1/4"-20 threaded socket)

RRP:
Around \$300



SIGNATURE HD

Available in 8x42mm, 10x42mm (supplied for testing), 12x50mm and 15x56mm, the tan-coloured Burris Signature HDs in 10x42 are 146mm long with the eye cups wound in and weighed 736g on my digital scales. The exterior is partially wrapped in a cross-hatched, rubberised coating and again the finger-tip areas have a smoother, black rubberised finish.

They arrived in a nylon carry bag fastened with an adjustable 30mm black plastic buckle, while the nylon carry-strap has plastic snap hooks for quick and easy removal. The objective lens covers are attached to the binoculars via rubber O-rings and, like the Droptine, the eyepiece dust-covers are one-piece, removable and also come with slots which enable them to be fed on to the neck strap for retention. These eye-cups also have faint 'clicks' as they're unwound and feature an extra 'stop' so the approximate positions available are fully wound in, one quarter unwound, half unwound and fully unwound. This is bound to suit virtually all users both with and without glasses. The diopter ring took a little more force

to focus which should mean it'll hold your desired position with ease.

The Signature HDs feature a twin-hinge system which allows for a slightly enhanced circular grip many hunters may find preferable (I certainly did). Using these bins I spotted feral goats at around 400m and, using elevation to my advantage, crept into range and easily selected the largest male from the group thanks to the excellent visual quality. I steadied my left elbow just below my knee and cradled the rifle. When the sight picture looked right I squeezed the trigger and, on regaining the goat in my scope, it was lying prone to never move again. A highly satisfying result.

I struggled to find fault with either of these 'Richies' and am constantly impressed by how far your dollar can stretch in terms of optics these days. Both have good light-gathering ability, are comfortable and reliable to use and feature excellent specs. Both are covered by the Burris 'Forever Warranty' which has to give the buyer extra peace of mind. In addition to scopes and binoculars, Burris also offers rangefinders, thermals and sights. More at berettaaustralia.com.au ●

SPECIFICATIONS

SIGNATURE HD

HD Roof prism:
Yes

Field of view:
96m @ 915m

Close focus:
2.5m

Exit pupil:
4.2mm

Eye relief:
15mm

Nitrogen filled:
Yes

Waterproof:
Yes

Tripod mountable:
Yes with adaptor
(standard 1/4"-20
threaded socket)

RRP:
Around \$660

Enough said!

MATTHEW GODSON MARVELS AT GERMAN GENIUS

When it comes to optics, few names carry a reputation to match that of Zeiss. Known for their commitment to precision engineering and optical brilliance, the German giant has delivered yet again with their Conquest HDX LRP (Long-Range Precision) 15x56 binoculars. Whether you're a competitive long-range shooter, serious hunter or devoted wildlife observer, this range promises to elevate your experience with unmatched clarity, rugged build quality and shooter-specific features.

I spent time testing them in a mix of range and field conditions, from morning and afternoon shoots at the range to glassing bushland around my regular hunting property. They're a high-performance binocular which deserve a place in your outdoor kit.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Right out the box the Conquest HDX LRP 15x56 impressed with its solid construction, the housing being magnesium which is a lightweight material yet incredibly strong. The entire body is wrapped in a rubber armour for protection which feels reassuringly 'grippy', even when wearing gloves or in wet conditions.

At just over 1.25kg these are not lightweight binoculars and with 15x magnification and 56mm objective lenses making them the largest model in the range, a little bit of weight should be expected. Yet that weight felt well balanced and manageable both in hand and when mounted on a tripod for testing. The overall design strikes a balance between practical purpose and refined German engineering as every component feels considered, tight and durable, from lens covers to the tripod adapter.





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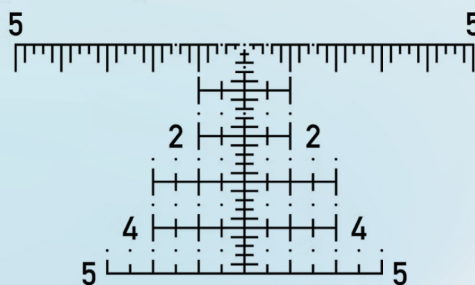
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THE HYBRID T-STYLE AND
TREE-STYLE RETICLE
SYSTEM.



ZEISS HAS INCORPORATED
A LEVER AT THE TOP OF
THE LEFT OCULAR FOR
EASY AND QUICK RETICLE
LEVELING, ALLOWING
OBSERVERS TO
ACCURATELY
ADJUST AND
MAINTAIN A
LEVEL RETICLE.



OPTICAL PERFORMANCE

Let's talk about the glass because that's where the Conquest HDX range really shines. The 15x magnification paired with large 56mm HD lenses delivers exceptional clarity and brightness, even in challenging light (Zeiss claims a 90 per cent light transmission level). While reviewing these binoculars I was constantly impressed by the image brightness and colour accuracy I could achieve in differing conditions, especially when glassing bush edges before and just after sunset.

During normal use there was zero noticeable chromatic aberration, where colours appear blurred or fringed around the edges of objects. Edges were sharp and clear, colours popped and the contrast was clean and high. The Abbe-König prism system used by Zeiss further supports edge-to-edge sharpness which, for a hunter, is ideal for scanning ridgelines or picking out subtle movement in bush or tree-lines.

Close-focus distance is only 3.5m which is impressive for a 15x optic and field of view is wide with 80m at 1000m, which offers excellent situational awareness. For wildlife watching and scouting it's nothing short of excellent, yet where these binoculars truly excel is in long-range target identification and impact observation, especially when paired with its reticle system.

MRAD RETICLE

The HDX LRP 15x56 includes a laser-etched MRAD (Milliradian) reticle in the right ocular. It's a hybrid T-style and tree-style with floating centre dot, providing 10 MRAD of windage (five MRAD left and right of the centre dot) and five MRAD of drop references. If you're one of our SSAA Precision Rifle competition shooters or training for extended range shooting, this feature is a gamechanger. It allows you to quickly estimate impact points, correct shots and call wind with confidence and is a passive rangefinder, spotting tool and coaching aid all in one.

Another great feature is the reticle leveller integrated into the left ocular. It's a small lever which lets you instantly align the reticle perfectly with the horizon, preventing cant and ensuring consistent shot placement. This feature is intuitive, quick and dead accurate. Dual locking dioptre adjustments allow independent tuning of both the reticle and overall image focus and once set they stay locked, a much-appreciated detail for users who don't want to mess around with settings mid-session.

BUILT TOUGH

When it comes to ruggedness and weatherproofing, the Conquest HDX models are built to last, being fully waterproof, nitrogen-filled and rated to withstand pressure up to 400 mbar. That means you can use them in light rain, heavy morning dew and the dusty conditions often encountered during hunting and field use.

The LotuTec lens coating lives up to its claims of enabling clear and unhindered views in all



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IDENTIFY EVERY DETAIL. NONE OF THE BULK

THE MOST COMPACT, BUDGET-FRIENDLY
SCOPE BUILT FOR RIMFIRE AND NEW HUNTERS.

MODEL	RANGE	CMOS RESOLUTION	RRP
A40E	800M	3840 x 2160	\$899
A40EL			\$1199

- Identify pests clearly in the dark.
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PICTURE TAKEN THROUGH OCULAR AT 100M TARGET.

SPECIFICATIONS

Zeiss Conquest HDX
LRP 15x56 power:
15x

Effective lens diameter:
56mm

Light transmission:
90%

Prism system:
Abbe-König

Lens type:
HD

Exit pupil distance:
18mm

Field of view:
80m at 1000m

Close focus distance:
3.5m

Diopter adjustment:
- 4.0 | + 4.0 dpt

Pupil distance:
54 – 74mm

Waterproof:
400 mbar

Weight:
1280g

RRP:
\$3400



COMFORTABLE IN HAND WHILE SCANNING YOUR SURROUNDS.



PICTURE TAKEN THROUGH OCULAR AT 300-YARD GONG.

weather conditions. Water beads roll off instantly and dust wipes clean without leaving streaks on the lens. For anyone who's dealt with smudged lenses mid-hunt or during competitions, this will no doubt be a most welcome feature. Temperature tested from -20C to +63C, they're clearly built to function anywhere you take them, from Alpine hunts to dry and dusty inland areas.

FIELD USE

Using binoculars handheld for extended periods can be tiring, so Zeiss have wisely made the Conquest HDX models tripod-compatible and the pack includes a 1/4" tripod adapter compatible with most video and camera setups. It's perfect for quick integration with modern tripod systems such as the DeathGrip used in testing. Once mounted it provided a rock-solid viewing platform, from which I could easily scan and track movement or analyse target hits without fuss.

When handling the binoculars they're surprisingly ergonomic. The four-position adjustable eyecups are comfortable even for extended sessions, while the interpupillary distance (54-74mm) will accommodate most users. The focusing wheel is smooth and precise with just enough tension to avoid overcorrection and I could easily change and maintain focus using my fingernail.

ACCESSORIES

Included in the box is a padded protective case, neck strap, lens covers and eyepiece caps, all well-made and practical. The case is rigid enough for transport in a range bag or backpack, with the neck strap easy to fit and comfortable to wear.

AND FINALLY

The Zeiss Conquest HDX LRP 15x56 is not a casual optic it's a purpose-built, premium tool designed for those who require flawless image quality, precision reticle features and unshakable durability. At its core is a perfect fusion of German engineering, shooter-centric design and optical brilliance. It's priced at the high end of the market with an RRP around \$3400, but delivers performance which more than justifies the investment. If you're looking to spot bullet traces at 1000m, count rabbits around a warren at 500m or even chart constellations from your porch, these binoculars won't let you down. ●

CHIAPPA

Chiappa LA322 TD Lever Action
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Chiappa LA322 TD
Carbine Straight grip
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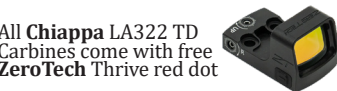
Chiappa LA322 TD Carbine Pistol Grip
\$881 with free red dot



Chiappa LA322 TD Carbine Kodiak
Cub Chrome Black
\$1087 with free red dot



Chiappa LA322 TD Carbine
Deluxe Tactical Grey
\$966 with free red dot



All Chiappa LA322 TD
Carbines come with free
ZeroTech Thrive red dot



Chiappa Double Badger Combo Gun
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Weatherby

Weatherby Sale



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Available in: 223, 243, 257WB, 6.5cm,
270win, 308win, 7mmRem, 30-06 and
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Weatherby Vanguard
Synthetic Blued Sporter
223, 308 or 300win **\$960 \$845**



Weatherby Vanguard Package
Why Vanguard Stainless Synthetic
ZeroTech Thrive 3-9x44 Mil-Dot
Talley Ultralight Rings **\$1265**



Lithgow arms

Lithgow Sale
LA101 - 22lr, 22wmr, 17hmr



Poly Stock
Black or Titanium Cerakote **\$1325**



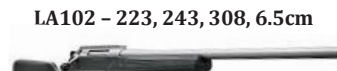
Walnut Stock
Black or Titanium Cerakote **\$1445**



Laminate Stock
Black or Titanium Cerakote **\$1570**



Outback TSPX Chassis **\$1930**



LA102 - 223, 243, 308, 6.5cm

Poly Black or Titanium **\$1570**



Walnut Black or Titanium **\$1810**



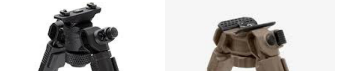
Laminate Titanium or Black **\$2050**



LA105 Woomera - 308 or 6.5cm **\$3445**



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ZERO TECH



ZeroTech Vengeance
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4.5-18x40 **\$299**
1-6x24 **\$549**
4-16x44 MOA **\$549**
4-16x44 MRAD **\$549**
6-24x50 MOA **\$549**
6-24x50 MRAD **\$599**
5-25x56 FFP **\$799**



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BONNIE NICOL CHARTS A JOINT VENTURE BETWEEN HUNTERS AND LABORATORIES TO TACKLE OUR WILD PIG CRISIS

It was July 2024 and Ned Makim, a life-long pig dogger and President of the Australian Pig Doggers and Hunters Association (APDHA), was analysing mid-year results from the inaugural Great Australian Pig Hunt. The competition, developed by the APDHA, wasn't just a call to action for recreational pig hunters across the country. While hunters logged their kills, the APDHA was tracking results as part of a data-collecting initiative it had implemented to obtain a definitive number of wild pigs killed annually, something which had never been attempted before.

Whatever the results the Association hoped this innovative approach would bring a level of recognition to the pig hunting community, which has long had its ethics and effectiveness in the management of wild pigs questioned by conservation groups and anti-hunting lobbyists.

APHDA data yielded astonishing results. In just six months, participants in the Great Australian Pig Hunt accounted for 18,000 wild pigs, averaging around 17 per hunter. Makim wondered if every hunter in the country was taken into account, how many pigs would they have removed? Using the number of registrants as a base count, he estimated there were around 121,103 pig hunters nationwide. Further calculations based on APHDA data revealed the country's pig hunters had potentially removed more than three million wild pigs during the first half of 2024.



AN EAR TIP CAN PROVIDE RESEARCHERS WITH A HUGE AMOUNT OF INFORMATION.





THE DNA EXTRACTED FROM EAR SAMPLES TAKEN FROM *SUS SCROFA* CAN REVEAL THINGS LIKE POPULATION SIZES, MOVEMENT PATTERNS AND LOCAL GROUPS



EAR SAMPLES FROM *SUS SCROFA* AT THE INSTITUTE FOR APPLIED ECOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA.

That number raised serious questions. How many of those pigs could've been carrying illnesses, how much damage would they have done to private and public land and how many more piglets would the sows have reproduced? Makim knew experienced hunters had the answers. "There was an opportunity for the Australian pig hunting community to do something that would absolutely illustrate its value beyond removing a lot of pest pigs during the year," Makim said.

He reached out to Dr Benjamin Allen, an associate professor and wildlife conservation and management expert at the University of Southern Queensland, and proposed combining forces to combat Australia's wild pig problem. Dr Allen was intrigued and when he suggested samples from 500 pigs would be a substantial study, Makim went one better. "We just pulled out the figure of 10,000, asked how that would rate and Dr Allen said it would probably be the biggest wildlife study in the world." And so the 10,000 Ears Project was born.

Wild pigs (*Sus scrofa*) are second only to rabbits as the most destructive invasive animal species in Australia. Introduced as livestock aboard the First Fleet in 1788, only 25 survived the long journey from England. Allowed to roam free in the Sydney Cove colony, their numbers quickly grew and pigs were soon wreaking havoc on the colony's burgeoning farms and were driven further out bush. Wild populations grew exponentially during the Great Depression when farmers,

who could no longer afford to maintain their herds, released them with the intention of hunting them down later as a free-range food source.

Easily adaptable and with few natural predators, *Sus scrofa* have thrived across the country's diverse landscapes, causing upwards of \$156 million dollars in agricultural damage each year and posing a threat to 150 native species of flora and fauna. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry places the current wild pig population at 24 million, almost as many pigs as there are people and today they inhabit 45 per cent of the country's land mass.

In Far North Queensland they've decimated cassowary populations in the World Heritage-listed Daintree Rainforest. Encroaching herds into Darwin's outer suburbs have caused extensive property damage and raised concerns about the spread of transmissible diseases to both humans and domesticated animals. In October 2022, scientists in Western Australia discovered Japanese encephalitis, a potentially fatal disease which can cause inflammation of the brain, in samples taken from two wild pigs in the Kimberley region, the first time the virus had been detected in the state.

"If someone says we're going to trap them, I'll die laughing," said Bob Katter MP, who has openly denounced government-funded pig management plans as ineffectively "replacing other plans" and for costing tax payers millions of dollars. "The only answer is to shoot them."



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Katter has for years advocated for state governments to open up national parks to recreational pig hunting, an activity he's enjoyed since adolescence, in order to save Queensland's most vulnerable species. "If you listen to us shooters, there'll be cassowaries and turtles. If you don't listen to us, you'll be responsible for wiping out their populations," he said.

In 2021 the Federal Government invested \$1.4 million to develop and implement the National Feral Pig Action Plan, a 10-year initiative to deliver long-term suppression of their numbers using new and existing control programs. The New South Wales Government spent \$13 million on its Feral Pig Program, which eliminated 112,888 across the state between 2023 and 2024.

Much like previous pig management plans, both have received criticism for their exorbitant costs and true impact. They've also been disadvantaged by resource constraints, timeframes and regional diversity, which often render generalised control strategies futile. By contrast, APDHA data showed hunters weren't just removing huge numbers of pigs from the landscape, they were spending an estimated \$60.67 per animal, making the Great Australian Pig Hunt the only initiative which actually contributed to the economy.

"The issue with pigs is you can shoot a lot of them from a chopper, you can poison them but if you stop they just continue to breed and their numbers are back in 12 months," Makim said. "The advantage of hunting is its constant and provides a base-level population suppression service."

With support from University of Southern Queensland and University of Canberra, the 10,000 Ears Project has mobilised hunters to become researchers in the field to save Australia's delicate ecosystems from wild pigs. Registrants for the Project receive a kit containing a vehicle sticker, letter of intent and specimen bag and are instructed to snip the tip off an ear from every pig that they take.

For samples to be considered viable, ear tips must be dried out completely and accompanied by detailed records of the pig's gait, breeding age, date of kill and closest town to its last location. The ears are then sent to the APDHA before being prepared and delivered to the student research team at the Institute for Applied Ecology, University of Canberra. Leading that team is Professor Dianne Gleeson, a wildlife geneticist and developer of EcoGene, a leading DNA-based diagnostics service which has contributed to government biosecurity measures across Australasia.

A self-professed 'DNA nerd', Professor Gleeson joined the Project on recommendation from



FOR SAMPLES TO BE CONSIDERED VIABLE, EAR TIPS MUST BE DRIED OUT COMPLETELY AND ACCOMPANIED BY DETAILED RECORDS OF THE PIG'S GAIT, BREEDING AGE, DATE OF KILL AND CLOSEST TOWN TO ITS LAST LOCATION.

Dr Allen and considers it a great exercise for her students who'll be accessioning the ear tips into a manageable collection. "The techniques we'll use will result in fine-scale genetic data," she said. Even the smallest samples contain hundreds of pieces of information which can "reveal things like population sizes, movement patterns and local breeding groups".

If a big enough collection is achieved, researchers could pre-emptively stop pigs from moving into new habitats, make breakthrough discoveries in biocontrol and track diseases across separate mobs, which could change the way large-scale disease containment is handled. "Our research will provide better information for both hunting groups and conservation managers," Professor Gleeson said.

So far the APDHA has received several thousand ear tips and while there's no end purpose, the University of Canberra has agreed to hold them in perpetuity as a training tool in the pursuit of DNA technologies. "This is a long-term, on-going project," Makim said. "We're going to keep gathering data and physical samples and see what pops up."

By the end of the Great Australian Pig Hunt in December of last year, the APDHA's final data



APDHA MEMBERS CALVIN AND ARCHIE HUNTING IN WEIPA, QUEENSLAND.



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report found those 121,103 pig hunters had collectively eradicated an estimated 5.3 million pigs and, left unchecked, another 29 million would've been born. As daunting as those numbers are, Makim is undeterred and says the APDHA has two more years of active in-field research planned and has vowed the 10,000 Ears Project will not stop until that many ears have been collected. "What we have is an absolute belief in our culture and capacity to contribute very broadly to biosecurity objectives, environmental objectives and agricultural management objectives," he said. "We're not inclined to give up."

And it does appear pig hunters are finally receiving positive recognition. In June of this year, at the same time Mk.2 of the Great Australian Pig Hunt started, the NSW Government proposed the Game and Feral Animal Legislation Amendment Bill, which would acknowledge the role of hunting in the preservation of native species and open up more land for recreational and cultural hunting purposes.

At a function celebrating the Bill's progress Makim, along with several other pig hunters, received personal thanks from the Minister for Climate Change, Energy, Heritage and the Environment, Penny Sharpe, and the New South Wales Minister for Agriculture, Tara Moriarty, for their efforts in helping the government achieve

its objectives in wild pig management. It was a momentous occasion and one Makim hopes heralds the beginning of a more accepting future for pig hunting.

"We feel hunters should be consulted a great deal more about wild pig management because no-one knows more broadly throughout the community than a group of hunters about that animal," he said. "The depth of knowledge across the vast number of hunters in Australia is unsurpassed." ●

• *If you'd like to contribute to the 10,000 Ears Project, contact the Australian Pig Doggers and Hunters Association at info@apdha.org.au. Participants will receive a kit and detailed instructions on how to prepare ear tips for analysis.*

CLOCKWISE: THE APDHA CODE OF CONDUCT DICTATES WHEN A PIG IS CAUGHT, IT MUST BE DISPATCHED HUMANELY AND AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. CATCH AND RELEASE MUST NEVER OCCUR; MORE THAN A THIRD OF APDHA MEMBERSHIP JOIN AS A FAMILY UNIT; THE APDHA CONSIDERS THE USE OF DOGS AS AN EFFECTIVE MEANS OF CONTROL AGAINST POTENTIAL BIOSECURITY THREATS AND UPHOLDS THEIR CULTURAL AND RECREATIONAL VALUE IN REGIONAL



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Well worth the wait

DANIEL O'DEA HAILS S&W'S RETURN TO THE LEVER-ACTION

It took a mere 170 years but last year Smith & Wesson found themselves back in the lever-action rifle business. “Back?” you say. “When did they ever make lever-action firearms?” Well technically perhaps not as in the Smith & Wesson Revolver Company (founded in 1856), but an earlier iteration where Horace Smith and Daniel B. Wesson created the Smith & Wesson company (1852) to develop the Volcanic Rifle, later changing the name to the Volcanic Repeating Arms Company. The product was a lever-action design, both pistol and carbine, firing a self-contained ‘Rocket Ball’ round in the years just prior to full development of centrefire ammunition.



DANIEL FIRST SAW THE SMITH & WESSON 1854 WHEN IT LAUNCHED AT LAST YEAR'S US SHOT SHOW.

Without going into all the details, a gentleman by the name of Oliver Winchester became a shareholder and director of Volcanic Repeating Arms. Shortly after Horace and Daniel departed, having sold the patents and assets to the company, Olly would go on to create the Winchester Repeating Arms Company and the rest, as they say, is history. Jumping forward 170 years and the 2024 US SHOT Show gave us the newly-launched Smith & Wesson 1854 lever-action rifle, paying homage to their founder's original patent of the same year for their very first lever-action firearm.

Having been there last year, I was surprised when I saw this new lever gun on the Smith & Wesson stand. Two variants were present in a very modern 'tactical' stainless synthetic model and a stunning collector's edition with high-grade walnut timber, a black blued finish and only 1854 individual units to be produced. Always happy to find new product that's 'Aussie compliant' I gave it a mention in my SHOT Show report last April and, on my return, contacted Grycol International, Australian S&W distributor to make sure I laid my hands on one when they became available here.

Not surprisingly the review rifle wasn't one of the collector's editions (I'm not sure any of those made it to our shores), rather the more practical stainless synthetic version chambered in .44 Remington Magnum. Interestingly, this calibre historically also has a strong connection with S&W. Elmer Kieth, the famous US gun writer with a proclivity for loading the old .44 special round so hot only the strongest-framed revolvers could hold it, petitioned both S&W and Remington to develop a hot new .44 based on his work. Remington agreed to make the round and S&W would build a revolver to handle it, hence the birth of the .44 Magnum.

The rifle is side-ejecting rather than top, making it more reminiscent of the Marlin lever-action design than the Winchester. Side-eject of course is also preferable for scope-mounting as a solid top receiver allows for a fixed mounting interface.



ON THE BENCH WITH THE
SMITH & WESSON 1854 IN .44
MAGNUM; WITH GROUPS FROM
25-50MM AT 50M, 'MINUTE OF
PIG' IS EASILY OBTAINABLE.



SMITH & WESSON 1854 FITTED WITH LOW-POWERED LEUPOLD 2-7X33 SCOPE.

In this case the S&W 1854 comes as standard with a Picatinny rail which interestingly also incorporates a ghost ring-style rear peep sight which lines up with a front post and gold bead.

The matte stainless finish of both the barrel and forged 416 stainless steel receiver offsets nicely against the matte black lever, trigger, hammer spur, mag tube release and scope rail, all of which combined with the black polymer furniture provides a stylish two-tone effect. Both stock and fore-end feature rough stippling to the grip surfaces and a generous soft rubber kick-pad effectively tames any recoil. QD sling points are present on both the toe of the buttstock and bottom edge of the stainless steel fore-end end cap, while M-Lok

slots at 3, 6 and 9 o'clock on the fore-end tip provide for fitment of grips, lights or lasers.

In .44 Magnum, eight of the stubby rounds can be loaded into the magazine tube via a tradition lever-gun side-loading gate for a total of 8+1 capacity. In a neat safety feature, a knurled knob at the end of the magazine tube can be turned to remove an inner tube to dump unused loaded rounds to clear the rifle when the shooting's done. This removes the need to cycle rounds through the action in order to unload, something required with some other centrefire lever-gun designs.

Perhaps not quite big enough to be up to John Wayne or Chuck Conners standards, the 1854 does have a somewhat oversized lever loop. Plenty big enough for a gloved hand (but perhaps not for spinning) it offers a stylish modern look, as does a flat-faced trigger. A generous hammer spur is ribbed for thumb grip and a cross-bolt safety acts as a hammer block. The 410 stainless steel barrel is 19¼" (489mm), has eight-groove rifling with a 1:20 RH twist and a threaded muzzle in 11/16-24 for accessory fitment.

Fitted with effective iron sights but not wanting to rely on my ageing eyes for testing, I fixed a low-powered Leupold 2-7x33 riflescope I had on hand. It fitted nicely in medium height 1" Warne



THE S&W 1854 HAS A GENEROUS 8+1 CAPACITY OF STUBBY .44 MAGNUM ROUNDS.

scope rings, sitting low but still just clearing the ghost ring peep (the peep sight is removable where other mounting options might fowl or prove problematic).

As a pistol round the .44 Magnum does get quite a lift in velocity of at least 300+ feet per second when fired from a carbine-length barrel, likewise providing an increase in muzzle energy making it an effective scrub-gun calibre. In my opinion this is where it's most effective. Sure it'll kill easily enough with good placement out past 150m, but unless you want to start calculating bullet drop, 100m and under is probably the sweet spot for this type of carbine, especially with iron sights. On the range at 50m, groups of 1-2" were the norm with most ammo types, which equates to excellent accuracy in this rifle-calibre combination.

Of course hunting isn't everyone's game and when it comes to general plinking, the fun factor of a lever-gun carbine like this rates extremely highly. The 1854 was easy to shoot, with even heavy factory loads which might test your wrist in a large-framed revolver plunked out quite effortlessly with manageable recoil. Cast lead reloads can also make the fun more cost effective. All rounds cycled smoothly at each stroke of the lever with a firm but crisp trigger pull releasing each shot. With the S&W 1854 you can have a ball just working steel plates or any inanimate targets at various ranges.

Worth noting when shooting the 1854 is the cross-bolt safety is a hammer block, not a trigger block. So if you pull the trigger with the safety engaged, the hammer will fall but be blocked from striking the firing pin and the rifle won't fire. If this was done in error while hunting, a quick recovery is to just thumb the hammer back, safety off and squeeze the trigger again. The rifle does have an effective half-cock position too, which both locks the trigger and blocks the hammer, so perhaps the cross-bolt safety is just

there to keep the lawyers happy.

In summary, the Smith & Wesson 1854 is a fun and effective modern take on a traditional firearm design with many potential applications for use, hard-hitting and quick handling in the scrub but just as entertaining on the range. At time of writing, new Model 1854s are also at hand including new calibre choices in .357 Magnum and .45 Colt, as well as timber versions with Armornite metal finish and a black-over-black Stealth Hunter model. More at grycol.com.au



SMITH & WESSON 1854 FITTED WITH AMOS ARMAMENT SUPPRESSOR.

SUPPRESS IT (WHERE YOU CAN)

As mentioned the 1854 has a threaded barrel so, exploring the full flexibility of the rifle and being appropriately licensed, I had the chance to run a suppressor. Provided by Amos Armament, a Newcastle NSW-based company, it added a whole new dynamic to the package. Commonly incorrectly referred to as 'silencers' such devices far from silence anything, especially when used with supersonic ammunition. That's all Hollywood.

What they do most effectively is reduce the overall level of noise, muzzle blast and felt recoil. Results can vary depending on climatic conditions and ammo used, with subsonic producing the best results. Even a reduction of 10-15 per cent can bring noise recognised as dangerous levels (above 120db) down to something more manageable for the shooter and anyone else within earshot.

Potentially a Smith & Wesson 1854 in .44 Magnum suppressed could present a safe and effective tool for managing pests in semi-rural environments, subject to urban encroachment to farming land. Ballistically .44 Magnum rounds are hard-hitting but limited in range and, when suppressed, unnecessary noise and possible distress to nearby communities can be greatly reduced. Perhaps a good option for appropriately licensed primary producers and contractors.

As both a gunsmith and suppressor manufacturer, owner-proprietor Amos Buresti offers services including firearm restoration and tuning, certified Cerakote application as well as contract shooting services. Specifications provided as follows: 41mm OD 316 stainless steel tube, 200mm long 600g including mount, Monocore baffle design, rated for factory 44M loads, direct thread 11/16x24, Cerakote armor black. Suppressors are manufactured to individual requirement and start from \$1500. More at warboy.com.au



THE 1854 FEATURES AN OVERSIZED LEVER LOOP AND FLAT-FACED TRIGGER.

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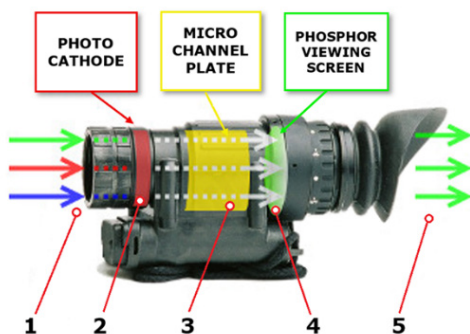
A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO NIGHT VISION DEVICES

Night Vision Devices (NVDs) have revolutionised the way hunters and shooters operate in low-light and no-light conditions and these days, 'true' night vision technology operates alongside thermal technology (covered last month's) in devices like scopes, monoculars and binoculars.

Unlike thermal technology, night vision can't operate in total or near-total darkness, needing a light source to function, most commonly infrared (IR) which is invisible to animals. This additional equipment (usually an IR torch) adds weight to a night vision device, significant if you hunt regularly in dark conditions. And since most NVDs display nighttime images in greyscale monochrome, if a target is camouflaged and stationary, viewers using night vision may not see it, whereas spotters using thermal devices will highlight animals if any part of their body is visible. Night vision technology takes two main forms: analogue (traditional) and digital. Each has distinct characteristics, performance parameters and ideal use cases.

OVERVIEW

Night vision works by enhancing available light to produce a visible image, allowing us to see in conditions which would otherwise be too dark. NVDs come in various forms including goggles, binoculars, scopes, monoculars and cameras. Key components typically include a lens, image intensifier (or sensor in digital systems) and eyepiece. There are two primary categories in Analogue Night Vision (traditional/military) and Digital Night Vision (DNV).



ANALOGUE (IMAGE INTENSIFICATION)

Analogue night vision, often called traditional or military-grade night vision, uses an image intensifier tube to amplify light. These work with a five-stage process as follows:

- 1: Ambient light in the form of photons (like moonlight or starlight) enters through the objective lens.
- 2: These photons hit a photocathode, converting them into electrons.
- 3: Electrons are multiplied through a microchannel plate (MCP).
- 4: The multiplied electrons strike a

phosphor screen, creating a visible image which mimics the original scene but amplified in power.

5: The enhanced image is viewed through the eyepiece, most often in monochrome like green.

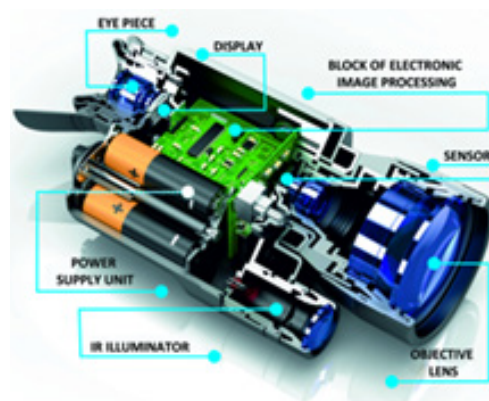
Traditional night vision offers excellent light amplification with high resolution, reliability, no 'lag' and long battery life, though is susceptible to damage from bright light, is expensive and can't record or transmit images without additional gear. As such it's mostly used by military in the form of night vision goggles.

DIGITAL NIGHT VISION (DNV)

This is a newer technology using a low-light sensor similar to those in digital cameras, to capture and display images which are enhanced with digital processing technology. How DNV works:

- Light enters the lens and is captured by a CMOS or CCD sensor.
- The signal is digitally processed and displayed on a backlit LCD or OLED screen.
- Some models include infrared illuminators to enhance visibility in total darkness.

DNV has many advantages over traditional night vision, mainly due to the cheaper CMOS sensors and transmission of digital information, enabling photos, videos, file storage and transfer. Devices can be used in daylight with zero risk of damage to the sensor and are often much cheaper than traditional NV.



AND FINALLY

Analogue night vision remains the gold standard for real-time, low-light performance, especially in professional and military applications. DNV is rapidly improving, offering cost-effective and user-friendly features. Thermal imaging excels in detecting heat, making it an ideal complement for spotting targets.

Yet night vision technology keeps evolving, offering a range of solutions tailored to specific needs and is particularly effective in hunting scopes, often called 'day and night' scopes. These, such as HikMicro's 'ALPEX' range, offer excellent images in day, dawn and dusk and often at half the price of thermal counterparts.

Editorial provided by Roy Baarber, Head of Training at The Night Vision Shop



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- ✓ 400 x 300 @ 12µm, NETD <20mK Sensor
- ✓ Photo, Video, Audio, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, 32GB
- ✓ <12 Hours Battery Life; 620 grams (incl battery)
- ✓ Compact, light Thermal scope for short ranges.



TE 435

RRP \$2999 **\$2699**

- ✓ 35mm Lens
- ✓ 1800m Detection, 450m Identification Ranges
- ✓ 400 x 300 @ 12µm, NETD <20mK Sensor
- ✓ Photo, Video, Audio, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, 128GB
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TU 435 LRF

RRP \$3499 **\$3149**

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TU 650L 3.0

RRP \$5499 **\$4949**

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SAM GARRO RESTORES ACCURACY TO A SHORTENED BARREL

Way back in 1970 while trying to decide on my first all-round high-powered rifle to hunt small to medium game like feral goats, pigs and smaller deer species, I settled on a .243 Win which also provided a range of varying bullet weights from 60 to 105-grain. Shortly after I had the chance to exchange that rifle for a more finely engineered and crafted Schultz & Larsen M68 DL 6mm Rem (.244 Remington). It had rear locking lugs, the smoothest bolt action, cheekpiece and palmswell grip, hairline trigger and a highly accurate cut rifle barrel with 1:9 rifling twist.

It came with a Leupold VX111 3-9x40 tapering crosshair scope, an ideal combination for long-range varmint shooting into the bargain. The only difference between the two calibres was the slightly bigger 6mm Rem case for handling marginally higher pressures and an increase in bullet velocity by 100fps, negligible in the scheme of things.

ACCURACY ISSUES

For more than 40 years it proved highly accurate on all manner of game out to 200m and beyond, using a favoured load of AR2208 36.60gr behind an 87gr SP travelling at 2800fps. But then I started to frequently miss easy shots, which ultimately led me to second-guess myself. The usual rifle checks were carried out, even changing the Leupold scope for a similar one in case the optics were faulty, though in the end it was to no avail as bullet groups on paper remained unacceptable. Then I considered the probability of wear on the barrel after all those years of use, which I couldn't determine without the aid of a bore scope. Nor did I have the expertise to determine how bad the issue might be, so it was time to visit a gunsmith.

Proper maintenance of a firearm after use and while in storage will ensure its longevity. However, wear or damage to internal parts like the chamber or bore where its inner diameter increases from constant or regular shooting over time, will still eventuate. Excess pressure from

maximum or near-maximum loads as evidenced by totally flattened primers will also shorten the life of a barrel.

ATTEMPT TO FIX

The gunsmith confirmed my worst fears by diagnosing the probable cause as rifling damage at the muzzle end. This would require the barrel to be shortened from 57½cm to 55cm and the end recrowned, crucial for the bullet to spiral out on its true trajectory. I reluctantly agreed to the necessary fix even though I had reservations the rifle might never feel or handle the same, also considering the effects a shortened rifling twist may have on accuracy.

At the range using my existing favoured load the best bullet grouping I could achieve at 100m was 3-4" MOA, hardly ideal but better than before. At 200m the widening MOA would be greater and not appropriate to attempt humane shots on game. As the rifle had accompanied me on so many memorable hunts and I'd developed a close attachment to it, I decided to persist and hunt game closer in where I could make shots count, or until I decided on an alternative solution like sleeving the barrel or replacing it altogether.

FURTHER PROBLEM SOLVING

On a recent outing to sight-in rifles with fellow shooters, I aired my dilemma with the 6mm Rem's unsatisfactory accuracy. Mark, an experienced long-range shooter constantly trialling various loads for his custom-built rifles, suggested firing three shots over the chronograph to determine whether the problem lay with the barrel. He explained if the average velocity of the three readings wasn't more than 10 for any individual reading, the barrel was still considered satisfactory and it could be more a matter of reworking some loads to compensate for the partial barrel removal and rifling twist.

This is something I wasn't familiar with or aware of, though I was hopeful of a positive outcome and thankfully the three readings of 2855,



USING A TORQUE WRENCH TO PROPERLY TENSION THE MAIN BARREL SCREW; SAM TRIALLING VARYING BULLET LOADS TO DETERMINE BEST GROUPING.





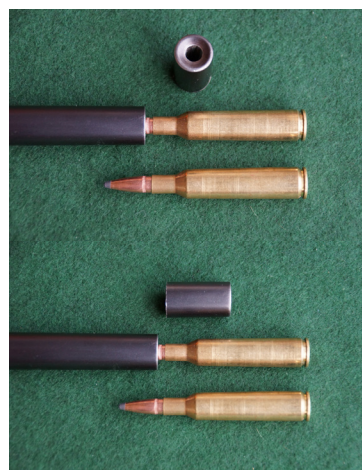
SCHULTZ & LARSEN RIFLE WITH GROUP TARGET RESULTS.

2861 and 2842 averaged out at 2852fps and not more than 10 for any. Furthermore, the bore end was still tighter than the bullet diameter of .244", allowing it to squeeze and spiral out at velocity as intended.

LOADING FOR IMPROVED GROUPING

For this exercise I made six batches of three loads, starting with the ADI Handloaders' Guide minimum of AR2208 (35.5gr) and worked up in increments of 0.3 to 37.2gr, omitting the existing 36.6gr which had already proved unsatisfactory. Normally I'd seat the projectile two thou off the lands to minimise bullet jump, but in this instance they required seating back a little more to 74mm. That way the overall bullet length fits the magazine box, which can often be encountered when striving to attain best or improved accuracy.

To better identify the reloads and avoid confusion, cases with the respective powder loads were marked accordingly with a black marker. Six corresponding targets were attached across a single backing board and positioned at 100m. The free-floating barrel was also checked to ensure it wasn't obstructed or touching the stock anywhere, affecting barrel vibration, and a torque wrench used to properly tension the main barrel screw at roughly 40 inch-pounds and the others less. Tension will vary depending on the calibre, barrel type and stock in question, however over-tightened screws can potentially warp the action while loose ones allow it to move in the stock, again affecting accuracy.



SCHULTZ & LARSEN 6MM REM BARREL WITH SHORTENED SECTION AND MUZZLE DIAMETER STILL TIGHTER THAN BULLET DIAMETER.

Initially four bullets were fired from a cold barrel in powder weight sequence, one of each on a separate target starting from the top left 35.5gr and moving across and down. The barrel was then allowed to cool to ensure shot placement consistency, as continuing to shoot through a very hot barrel will start spraying the shots. The process was repeated until all reloads were spent and each target had a grouping of three.

RELOADING CONSIDERATIONS

It's important to stress that what might work in my rifle may not necessarily do so in another of the same calibre, though it provides a means of trying to address a similar problem. In my experience, different rifles can favour one or more factory ammo more than another. I put this down to the rifle's varying design features like the action, barrel type and length, barrel bedding etc. Some manufacturers use a certain brand of projectile to test and zero-in their rifles, so while other brands should still perform satisfactorily they may not offer the same accuracy.

For the reloader things like primers, powder type, projectiles, case sizing and annealing to soften the brass after multiple firings, bullet seating from the lands and other factors must be taken into account for accurate shooting. It can be a bit involved and time consuming, yet can also be therapeutic and rewarding when it comes together, not to mention reduced cost when properly set up.

TARGET RESULTS

Of the six targets, those using 36.3gr and 36.9gr powder loads printed an MOA of 1½" and ½" respectively. I was surprised to see how only 0.3gr either side of my original 36.6gr had made such a significant difference. With an MOA of half an inch I was more than happy with the result, knowing the rifle will continue to accompany me on many future hunts.

On reflection, we must consider the fact that manufacturers build rifles to exacting specifications with a certain barrel length and rifling twist rate to optimise accuracy. So it stands to reason any variation or change to the original design or configuration is going to alter or adversely affect the projectile's trajectory and the rifle's accuracy.

CONCLUSION

At the time I was of the opinion the barrel fix was as good as the rifle's accuracy would get. It didn't occur to me to consider trialling different combinations of powder loads to what had worked in the past. Sometimes the obvious can escape you, thinking the problem lies elsewhere and it's not until you source new information or a person with the expertise draws your attention to a possible solution (as in this case) you realise a fix is possible and confidence is restored. ●



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ROD PASCOE ON THOSE 'MYSTERIOUS' MARKINGS ON EVERY FIREARM

*Before articles like this are published they undergo a process of proof-reading. And, as readers flip through its pages, they may relax with an over-proof rum or two. But as Senior Correspondent **Rod Pascoe** explains, before a firearm earns its proof it must undergo some stressful testing.*

All firearms are manufactured to drawings and specifications which set out the materials to be used, the dimensions and performance parameters to be met, therefore 'proof' is the process of verifying that these parameters meet the specifications to ensure what we buy and use will be safe and reliable.

Proofing, as it applies to firearms, involves firing one or more overloaded, high-pressure round of ammunition which may be up to 30 per cent above the industry standard for a given round. These high-pressure proof cartridges are used by firearms manufacturers to test the gun's structural integrity and if, after testing, no structural faults are found, the barrel or complete firearm is deemed mechanically sound and ready to enter the distribution chain.

In most cases there are two parts to the proofing process. Firstly the barrel is tested as it usually includes the chamber which holds the cartridge and is subject to extreme dynamics. After surviving these stresses, the barrel will be stamped with a proof mark signifying it has passed the testing. The second and more complete test will include the barrel fitted with the action or frame, as the firing of high-pressure proof loads may show up weaknesses in these parts too.

There's some variation on how the proofing process is carried out depending on where the proofing is done, the type of firearm and its purpose. The military, for example, will perform function proof testing for semi-automatic firearms and machineguns which includes a proof round below the minimum specification to make sure the loading, firing, extraction, ejection and recycling action, especially in gas-operated guns, functions normally.

Apart from withstanding pressure and velocity stresses, all firearms have to function as expected whether they be a break-action shotgun or a bolt-action, lever-action or pump-action rifle, a revolver or more complex self-loading pistol. Again in some military applications, firearms are mounted in aircraft, drones, ships and tanks each with their own (and unique) functional requirements.

Military firearm proofing is carried out under specifications drawn up by organisations such as NATO, which may not necessarily be recognised by civilian authorities. For civilian purposes, proofing is mandatory for firearms made in most European countries and the UK. The governing body which administers proof of firearms is the International Proof Commission (CIP).

The UK was first to adopt compulsory proofing in the 16th century and now they too are signatories to CIP. In the US where the proofing process is purely voluntary, the Sporting Arms & Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute (SAAMI) do have specifications similar to the CIP governing sporting firearms and ammunition. However, even though proofing isn't compulsory, most US manufacturers will still conduct testing with reference ammunition to check firearm function, along with the firing of at least one high-pressure proof round to check structural integrity.

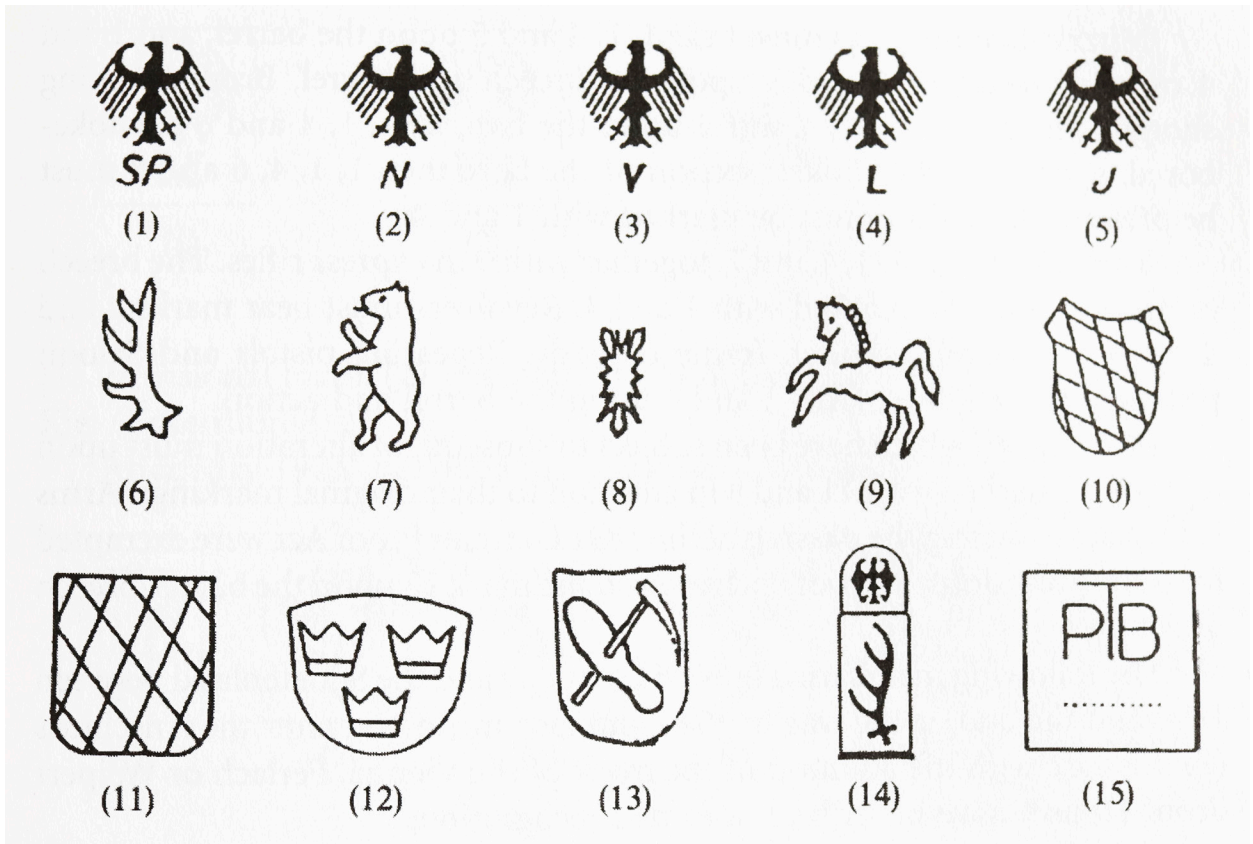
After this process, most companies will apply a mark which is usually their trademark. Because US firearms aren't subject to the same stringent compulsory testing, firearms made there and exported to any CIP member countries will have to be proofed under CIP guidelines before being offered for sale in that country.

When proofing a complete firearm, the whole gun must be placed in an enclosed fixture and triggered remotely for safety purposes in case of failure during discharge of high-pressure ammunition. Proofing a barrel individually is much simpler, though it too must be tested in an enclosed fixture for safety in the unlikely event of failure. In addition, barrels with quick-change or drop-in capability in different frames are usually proofed individually and are stamped in a conspicuous location as verification they've been tested.



This US-made Smith & Wesson revolver was imported into Europe and underwent proofing in Germany. In this case it was performed in 1963 and carries the deer antler symbol of the Ulm Proof House. Both barrel and frame carry the nitro proof mark (Eagle over N).





SOME GERMAN PROOF MARKS EXPLAINED: 1. BLACK POWDER PROOF; 2. NITRO PROOF; 6-13. THE PROOF HOUSES OF ULM, BERLIN, KIEL, HANOVER, MUNICH, MELLRICHTSTADT, COLOGNE AND SUHL. MARK NUMBER 15 IS FOUND ON 'BLANK-OPERATED DEVICES' SUCH AS STARTING PISTOLS AND RAMSET-STYLE NAIL GUNS.

Generally, once a firearm has been proofed it's proofed for the life of the gun, unless major changes have occurred to the parts managing the pressure of a cartridge when fired, for example its barrel and action. A gunsmith restoring or rebuilding a firearm may have occasion to re-proof it, though for the average owner this shouldn't be of particular concern.

Added to that, proof ammunition is highly regulated and generally available only to those who manufacture or remanufacture firearms. While not dangerous in highly specialised, extremely limited use, prolonged firing of proof ammunition would be harmful to the gun and therefore detrimental to both shooter safety and their firearm.

Scattered around Europe and the UK are a number of 'Proof Houses'. These date back to the 16th century, when gunmakers in and around London would bring their products to be proofed and stamped to show their wares conformed to safety standards. This came about as gunmakers occasionally produced firearms which had defects or were made from materials of dubious origin that could endanger users. A proof house in Birmingham was established some time later.

These days, representatives from a proof house will be resident in the larger manufacturing plants and do the proofing there. In Germany, the proof house at Ulm for example has testers

































































































scattered among some of the town's major gun factories including Walther, Anschutz and Krieghoff. Each house has its own identifiable proof mark to signify where the process took place.

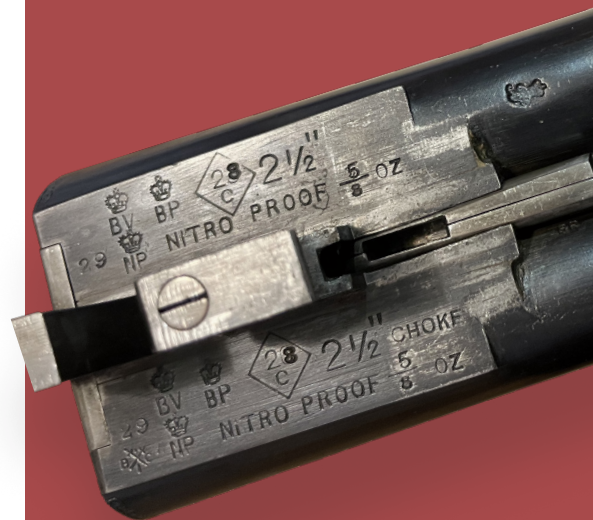
Up until now there's been no mention of accuracy, then the military came up with a procedure for accuracy proofing. These tests evolved during the South African War when long-range accuracy difficulties came to light. It must be remembered in those days most shooting was with the rifle, where battle ranges exceeding 1000 yards were not uncommon.

Yet since the main military infantry weapons today are either semi-automatic or automatic,



THE GERMAN PROOF MARKS ON A WALTHER P1 BARREL. THE THREE CROWNS INSIDE THE SHIELD REFERS TO THE COLOGNE PROOF HOUSE.

The London Proof House	Dates	The Birmingham Proof House
 	1813 to 1855	  
  12	1855 to 1868	   12
 or    12	1868 to 1875	 or    12
 or    NOT FOR BALL 12 or 12B 14M	1875 to 1887	 or    12B 14M NOT FOR BALL
 or    12  CHOKE	1887 to 1896	 or     13 CHOKE
 or     13 1 1/2 oz Max CHOKE NITRO PROOF	1896 to 1904	 or     NITRO PROOF 12 CHOKE 1 1/2 oz Max
 or     12 1 1/2 oz Shot CHOKE NITRO PROOF	1904 to 1925	 or     NITRO PROOF 13 CHOKE 1 1/2 oz Shot
     2 1/2" 1 1/2 oz or 1 1/4 oz CHOKE NITRO PROOF	1925 to 1954	     2 1/2" NITRO PROOF CHOKE 12 1 1/4 oz
     2 1/2" 900kg 3 TONS 65mm .729	1954 to 1989	     900kg 65mm .729 2 1/2" 3 Tons per □"
     65mm 850 Bar 18.5 mm	1989 to 2005	     12 18.5 mm 65 850 Bar
     65mm 18.5 mm SUP STEEL SHOT LINED	2005 to Present	     LINED 65 mm 18.5 mm SUP STEEL SHOT 12



PROOF IT'S NITRO PROOFED

This photo shows the underside of a pair of Watson Bros. of London side-by-side shotgun barrels, serial number 5177. While not all stampings are proof marks, they do give a background to the gun's interesting life since it was built in 1894. For starters, it was initially proofed 'crown over BP' as a black powder gun in Birmingham (why not London I don't know). The 'crown over BV' signifies a view mark and was used as an inspection mark during manufacturing. It was proofed for five-eighths (5/8) of an ounce of shot.

The '29' refers to barrel length in inches, it has 2 1/2" chambers and the '28' inside the diamond is the gauge of the shotgun. If you look closely though, inside the diamond the figure '8' is stamped over a '0', so at some point in this gun's life it was converted from 20-gauge to 28, probably by sleeving the barrel down to the smaller diameter.

I suspect that while the gun was undergoing that gauge change it was also nitro-proofed, meaning it survived the testing of an overloaded, high-pressure proof cartridge loaded with the modern nitrocellulose powder introduced in the late 1800s. That's shown by the proof mark 'crown over NP' and the words NITRO PROOF stamped in the little space left in the metal.

The complicated crossed-swords mark on the bottom left of the barrels with the letters 'B I C', is another Birmingham stamp meaning a change of some sort has been performed on the gun. This would relate to the gauge change, nitro-proofing or both. Invoices accompanying this shotgun indicate the major work was performed in 1951.



MORE RECENT CIP PROOF MARKS DO AWAY WITH THE PROOF HOUSE IDENTIFIER.

long-range rifle fire has all but disappeared, as quantity of fire is seen as more useful than single-shot marksmanship. Accuracy testing for the military is a simple and straightforward process, as generally only one type of ammunition will be used in one type of firearm, so a single sample would normally represent consistency across a large number of firearms.

On the other hand commercial testing for accuracy isn't so straightforward, as ammunition manufacturers may produce a range of different brands and types of any given calibre, which may be fired in a multitude of firearms from numerous manufacturers. This is something for those who reload their own ammunition to think about, which we'll address in a future article. ●





The whites of their eyes

CHAS HARDING DISCOVERS A NEW HUNTING MANTRA

It's midday and the offside is locked to my left leg as we work into a very slight breeze, her pads silently covering the tinder-dry ground alongside my size 10s. We're like synchronized swimmers, one slow step at a time in the zone. Every four steps we stop, look hard at our surroundings and listen while she works her nose. With nothing grabbing our attention we take another four steps and another four until, during one of our 'listening post' halts, I look down at the rifle in my hands and ponder how I came to be at this point.

I'd needed a new hunting challenge, a change from the standard scoped centrefire routine. The long-range hunting and shooting craze had been raging for the past few years and seemed like the immediate future. I'd embraced that concept for steel and paper but for game it raised too many doubts, so I left it to those more skilled than I.

Instead I opted for a complete about face and revisited the past for a different challenge, one where iron sights, lever-action rifles and stalking into very close range were 'de rigueur'. It was in effect bow-hunting with a rifle, real close-quarter stuff with deer the target. I'd prepared my Winchester, a stock-standard .44 calibre Model 92 with the only change being a red 'fireglo' front sight to replace the factory brass bead.

With eyes now north of 70, I needed that alteration to clearly see the front sight and set the sights dead-on at 30 yards, my self-imposed maximum range for a shot. I knew at that distance or closer I could put the 240-grain hunting projectile into the kill zone of a stationary animal every time. I also knew that being right in the deer's backyard, shots by necessity would be from the unsupported position and have to be taken quickly, so while practicing my offhand shooting I also tried to fire within four

seconds. Practice against the ticking second hand was invaluable but, for now, back to real time . . .

We were two steps into our regulation four when I stopped abruptly, as out the corner of my eye I saw what I thought was a branch fall from a tree. The dog, still locked beside me, is also looking in the direction of the disturbance. I focus on the tree but my mind's racing as there's nowhere near enough wind to bring down a branch.

I slowly raise my binoculars for a look and am astounded to focus on a stag's bulging eye and wet nose peering around the tree straight at me. The movement I'd seen was his antler rising from the ground, not a falling branch. We were all paralysed, him staring at our still form trying to identify the cause of his alarm and us, locked in a standing half-turned position, unable to move without causing him to bolt.

I peered, mesmerised, through the eight powers. He moved slightly to take a better look at us as a wide-bladed antler edged around the tree. He was 70 yards away and virtually obscured. Why had I taken on this challenge, I thought? If I'd had my scoped centrefire rifle to hand he would've been in real trouble.

Yet deep down I was quietly pleased. His image, forever etched into my brain, was a trophy equal to any I'd ever hang on the gunroom wall. Still, as he wheeled away seconds later into thick cover with his huge antlers briefly visible, my heart hit my size tens. What a chance missed for my first up-close, iron sights trophy - if only we'd been 40 yards closer. Even the offside looked deflated at the sight of his disappearing rump.

It was about 30 minutes after this encounter and we'd gone a further 250 yards when a black

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THE SILENT RAPPORT ECHOES DOWN THROUGH THE AGES: MAN AND HIS DOG; FIRST DEER TAKEN WITH IRON SIGHTS AT CLOSE RANGE, WINCHESTER MODEL 92 IN .44 CALIBRE.

fallow spiker jumped from his bed in a patch of ferns, ran 20 yards and stopped to look back. He was within range. The Winchester immediately came to my shoulder and as the red bead found his middle front section I fired.

At the shot he immediately bolted over a slight rise and in what seemed like a nano-second had disappeared. The only indication that adrenaline-pumping action had actually happened was the still-smoking empty brass case on the ground next to our six trembling legs. We started towards the rise and I replayed in my mind the front sight at the shot. No problem there, he'd be down. I looked at the dog, she looked at me and as I opened my mouth to say "where is he?" she was gone on the "whe..."

I crested the rise to be greeted by a broad valley of scattered gum and wattles. I searched for the offside but nothing. Concern started to build in my mind until there, in some thick ferns, I glimpsed a hint of yellow movement. We had him. The deer had bolted a few yards into the ferns and collapsed as the dog picked up his scent immediately.

I once again marvelled at the uncanny rapport which exists between a man and his hunting dog, then laid the Winchester across the deer and sat down next to her. After enjoying the moment for



FIVE SHOTS AT 30 YARDS, SLOW FIRE OFFHAND.

quite some time, the work began. Animals lose something in death and this young stag was no exception. On the ground he was no match for that magnificent image as he stood for a split second on full alert, ready to run.

As I made the first cut around the scrotum, I was reminded of an old Scottish gamekeeper's quip from years ago: "Ye'll no' be needin' these nay mair, man!" On the final downhill run to the vehicle I relived the day's events and pondered future encounters, eventually maybe with that missed stag. I had a great new challenge to embrace and my hunting mantra now was to get in close enough to see 'the whites of their eyes'. ●



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DEAR
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REVOLVER
CLARIFICATION

I refer to Geoff Smith's 'Top Shots' reply to Andrew Cooper regarding his old revolver (*Shooter*, May 2025). As a long-time collector of English percussion revolvers I'd like to point out that some of the information is misleading. Firstly, Wilkinson was retailer of the revolver, not the maker, as it was common practice for English retailers to have their name engraved on firearms of this period (1850s).

The revolver was made by William Tranter to his patent of 1853 which protected the lock mechanism and used Robert Adams' patent of 1851, protecting the solid-frame construction for which Tranter paid a royalty. The lock is a clever modification of Adams' self-cocking design, to achieve carefully-aimed fire by pulling the long trigger with the second finger to reach full cock, then pressing the top trigger to fire the revolver. Rapid self-cocking fire was made possible by pulling both triggers together.

The revolver pictured is stamped Adams' Patent No. 20,471Y (20,171 perhaps a misread) which was a serial range given to Tranter to control payment of his royalty for the use of Adams' solid frame. This along with the 50 (for bore) stamped under the barrel would suggest this is a first model Tranter, probably made in the early 1850s. This model was supplied with a separate rammer which slipped on to a peg on the left of the revolver frame (it's no surprise so many went missing). The first model is quite rare, particularly in this bore.

Tranter's firearms have a well-deserved reputation for quality of fin-

ish and reliability and are arguably the best percussion revolvers ever made. They saw use in Australia and were issued to NSW Police, in both revolver and revolving rifle configuration, in the 1860s. They were also the preferred arm for the notorious Hall/Gilbert gang of bushrangers in the same period. The pictured revolver looks down in condition but, given its history, is well worth preserving.

Dennis Lea, via email

• Many thanks Dennis for the extra information and for reading my answer so carefully. I'm sure Andrew will be pleased to be alerted to the rarity of his revolver. At the time of this gun's manufacture, it wasn't uncommon for merchants to contract production of parts and entire guns to other manufacturers. My reply perhaps should have said the revolver was made *for* Wilkinson rather than *by* them, although both Wilkinson Snr and Henry Wilkinson were renowned as gunmakers as well as cutlers.

Geoff Smith

GOING ABOVE AND
BEYOND

I want to thank the magazine and especially John Dunn for all your help regarding the Top Shots query about a replacement stock for my Bayard single-shot .22 rifle (*Shooter*, February 2025). You folks with all your knowledge are worth more than your weight in gold.

Good news is the gentleman you put me in touch with, Stephen Blanch from Port Macquarie, had a stock in great condition. He'd kept it as it was too good to throw out (a man after my own heart). He sent me the stock, I dropped my Bayard in and it fits perfectly, all the cut-outs matched and the stock screw screwed straight into the rifle. Not only is Stephen a wonderful bloke, he wouldn't let me pay for it! Thanks again, you put a great big grin on this face.

Paul Kirkpatrick, via email

BLASER-SHARP

I was reading the April 2025 edition and noticed a couple of things worthy of comment in the Chris Redlich article 'Very highly R8-ted'. I work part-time in the firearms industry, coaching new and experienced shooters, sighting-in rifles for clients and some contracting work.

In my line of work I've been fortunate to shoot some beautiful Blaser rifles and found them highly idiosyncratic and, while I've sighted in thousands of rifles, found it difficult to get the Blaser to group. It was grouping 2-1.5 MOA then once we figured it out, groups went from 2-1.5 MOA to 0.5 MOA. I believe the rifle Chris tested could achieve much better accuracy if addressed with its particular behaviours in mind.

I also noticed in the article 'High praise for high precision' that Chris speaks about the 162-grain Sako Gamehead being a great round for this particular rifle (the 162-grain Sako 308 round is actually Powerhead Blade). I use only Sako cartridges in all my work and they perform well in 90 per cent of the guns we put them through - well-made cartridges. Really enjoy the magazine so keep up the great work.

Mitchell Ottaway, via email

WILMOT HITS THE SPOT

I write to express my gratitude for Barry Wilmot's excellent article in his Reloading column (*Shooter*, May 2025). He got it absolutely spot-on. Wherever possible, all firearms owners should give reloading a go as I'm sure they'd enjoy it.

Barry focused on the two most popular calibres in 22.250 Rem and 30.06 which cover my two favourite rifles, the 30.06 being a Springfield in small carbine and I wouldn't be without either of them. I also used to own a superb Remington pump-action shotgun until that was no longer an option, though I miss it to this day. Anyway, well done to Barry Wilmot and his column - keep up the good work.

Garry Gibbons, via email

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.

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

Fly Shoot National Championships

August 29-September 1, 2025

Madden Range, Belmont, Qld
Program: August 29: Set-up and practice. 30: 500 CF LF. 31: 500 CF HG. Sept 1: 200-yard RF followed by pre-

sentations. Facilities: Camping \$10 per person per night (booking essential), hot showers and toilets. QRA range next door also has accommodation. Contact: Vince Vania 0412 750 850.

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).

Precision Target Pistol National Championships

September 20-21, 2025

Majura Pistol Club, ACT
Program: September 19: Practice. 20: Any Rimfire Pistol 900 Match; Any Revolver Match; Distinguished Revolver. 21: Rimfire Mayleigh Match; Any Centrefire Pistol 900 Match; CMP Service Pistol. Prizes: National medals to third place in all grades and juniors. Facilities: Canteen available Saturday and Sunday, drinks and coffee with barbecue lunch. Contact: Brad Lake mpc@ssaact.org.au

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@ssaqlld.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

Single Action National Championships and Chisholm Trail

September 28-October 5, 2025

Millmerran, Qld
Program: September 28: Long Range pre-shoot; 29: Long Range; 30: Long Range, 1911 Match, Plainsman Match; October 1: Pat Garrett Match, Warmup Stages; 2-4: Main Match; 5: Closing ceremony. See National website for full event itinerary. Facilities: Hot breakfast to buy from Monday, sandwiches and evening meals for sale, on-site cabins for hire. Contact: chisholmtrail@ssaqlld.org.au

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.

Lever Action National Championships

October 4-6, 2025

SSAA Northern Rivers, Casino, NSW
Program: See National website for full event itinerary. Facilities: Saturday night dinner included in fee for competitors, self-help tea and coffee, barbecue lunch at cost. Camping on range with toilets and showers, caravan park 500m from range and motel 1km away. Contact: Don Chesworth drchesworth@inet.net.au or Jim Ellis lever-action@disciplines.ssaa.org.au.

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

SA

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 open (30 shots), Benchrest 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, McLaren Vale, SA
Program: Start time 9:30am: Breech-loading 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 GRFC or Classic; 1500 150-shot GRFC or Classic; 50m Precision 30-shot GRFC or Classic; Multi-target 24-shot GRFC or Classic. Sunday: T&P1 30-shot GRFC or Classic; 1500 150-shot GRFC or Classic; 50m Precision 30-shot GRFC or Classic; Multi-target 24-shot GRFC or Classic. Facilities: Camping available, canteen, barbecue on Saturday night. Contact: Dave McCarthy atm3855@yahoo.com.au

WA

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 / paulled1939@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) 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 small-bore. Nominations on the day or email msr.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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FLOOD OR DROUGHT, THERE'S STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

WORDS:
MARK VAN DEN
BOOGAART



On one of our earliest family road trips, we crossed a blackened line scorched through the paddocks south of Tenterfield in regional New South Wales. A few years later the line was gone, washed away by torrential rain. Back in the late '80s throughout summer we'd pile into our barely roadworthy cars and drive to a local creek. Slowly the water, along with our weekend visits, dried up and now the swimming holes are busier than ever with a new generation of day-trippers making it a place of their own.

Looking a long way back, I remember as a six-year-old my father leading me along Milton Road until he found a safe way down to the flooding Brisbane River. The water was brown, fast and deep and placing me high on a fence which still stands along Coronation Drive, we watched men sandbag the failing riverbank. The point of all this reminiscing is even the world's brightest six-year-old wouldn't have been able to predict the cycle of flood, drought, fire and flood that would follow, with any more accuracy than Dorothea Mackellar's droughts and flooding rains.

At university I studied statistics as part of my Behavioural Sciences degree. I almost failed the subject but remember how time and consequence can make a mockery of prediction. Put simply, the longer



INTRODUCING NEW SHOOTERS AND HUNTERS TO OUR SPORT GROWS OUR NUMBERS AND OUR INFLUENCE.

the projection of time the greater the chance of error. There's a reason why the end is nigh as it's easy to say and nigh is, well, nigh. Then there's consequence. We can create a 'what if' list of potential consequences and even estimate the likelihood they may occur, yet what about those things we didn't see or think about?

When the gun-grabbers were hatching their plan in 1996, was it even possible for them to conceive the rise of gun politics in Australia. Or that the SSAA would be more than 220,000 members strong or the number of registered firearms in Australia would surpass pre-1996 levels? I thought a lot about it back in March when more than 900mm of rain fell in our backyard. Notwithstanding only a few short years ago the dams were supposedly never to fill again, I was more focused on what it might mean for the red deer 'Roar'.

Now I did know it meant this would be my fourth soggy April hunt. Conversely, according to famous Queensland long-range forecaster Inigo Owen Jones, the bigger the flood the bigger the drought to follow. But what does all this rain mean? Could it fundamentally change behaviour, could it mean more deer or less? I really didn't know.

More broadly, as hunters and shooters we face similar questions.

There's little doubt the years of heavy rain have increased numbers. I've seen footage of huge deer herds in the New England area which frankly is very concerning - and I say that as a hunter. Numbers need to be managed and, in some places, managed hard otherwise when Inigo's drought arrives, the consequences of too many deer will likely be

a disastrous bust across the farming and livestock sector. So does the need for deer and other game to be managed create a space for hunters to be a positive part of the solution?

The second question relates to gun politics. I'm writing this a week after the Federal Election. Labor have stamped their authority across the country and, while it's difficult for us to accurately predict what our future will be, it wasn't a positive outcome. Looking back only a few weeks earlier, talk was The Greens might be part of a minority government, yet now they're all but expunged from the Lower House, so does this create opportunity for us?

In both instances, to make things happen we need to act. There's most certainly a role for hunters in managing game numbers and, be it private or public land hunting, we need to acknowledge our role and act in ways which positively influence the wider community.

Equally there's a role for all of us in ensuring our hunting and shooting future. Politically we need to be active. I now live in one of only two Greens-held federal seats in Australia. If like me your voting options are limited, there are still ways to make your voice heard and while it takes some effort, it can be done. Outside of the election cycle there are other actions we can take. Recently I listened to our CEO Tom Kenyon speak on increasing gun licencing numbers. Why? More licenced shooters means more influence. I like it and have already helped two new members join and am looking for more, as can you.

• *Postscript: My electorate of Ryan is now the last bastion of The Greens in our current Federal Parliament.*



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