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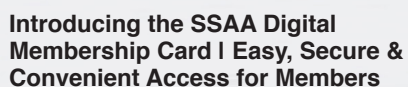


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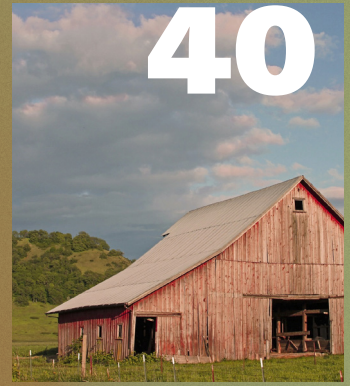
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AUSTRALIAN Shooter

OUR POLICY

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

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REMEMBERING FORMER NATIONAL PRESIDENT BILL SHELTON

It is with sadness we announce the passing of former SSAA National President William (Bill) Shelton who died on October 24. He was 96. For many years Bill was a passionate and highly successful leader of the Association as, in the mid-1990s, the Federal Government's National Firearms Buyback along with the then-newly legislated mandatory 'Genuine Reason' rule created a huge influx of new members across the country. As National President, along with other Board members Bill used this massive growth spurt to turn the SSAA into Australia's premiere shooting organisation.

As President of the New South Wales state branch, he teamed up

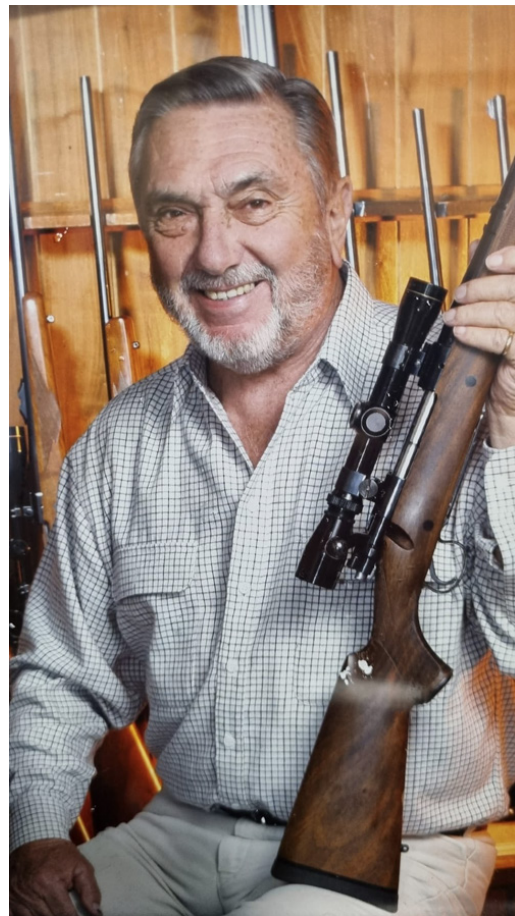
with Executive Director the late Roy Smith, to organise the finances necessary to build St Marys Indoor Shooting Centre which went on to become Australia's most successful indoor range.

A Life Member of SSAA National and Sydney Clay Target Club, over the years Bill toured Australia, opening new branches to benefit local shooters and build an even stronger Association. He also held a great passion for Browning shotguns and was a highly competitive and successful shooter as well as a sought-after coach of juniors and newcomers.

After Board meetings and AGMs over a glass of Rosemont Chardonnay, Bill was famous for regaling the company with tales of the good

times, amusing stories and anecdotes from his shooting travels and, while by today's standards he was probably regarded as 'old school', during his time with the Association, Bill Shelton was undoubtedly SSAA through and through.

BILL SHELTON . . . SSAA
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OPEN SEASON

EU 'GREENS' MOVE TO BAN KANGAROO IMPORTS

WORDS:
MATTHEW GODSON



Continuing my review of Neal Finch's report on Wild Game Harvesting in Europe, let's now explore the powerful political and regulatory influence of the European Union (EU) on wildlife policy, particularly how Brussels (effectively the EU's political capital) shapes wildlife trade and hunting regulations across the continent. Although member states retain legislative control over hunting laws, EU directives and regulations often dictate the broader framework under which national laws must operate. As a result, Brussels is home to a dense network of lobby groups and NGOs which are either supportive or critical of hunting, seeking to influence EU policy.

Among the most prominent animal rights groups in the Belgian capital is the Eurogroup for Animals, a well-funded not-for-profit outfit which campaigns on animal welfare issues across the EU. Eurogroup acts as the secretariat to the EU Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals, playing a central role in shaping debates and policy positions on animal welfare. One of its flagship campaigns has been to end commercial harvesting of kangaroos in Australia, by banning imports of kangaroo products into the EU. The organisation claims up to 40 per cent of kangaroos are shot contrary to legal requirements and also label the harvest as cruel and unregulated.

In 2022 Eurogroup submitted Petition 0408/2022 to the Europe-

an Parliament, citing animal welfare concerns, conservation risks and public health fears. The petition alleged Australian government population estimates for kangaroos were inflated and the commercial harvest posed a threat to species survival. While the petition was ultimately not passed, it remains open for further consideration.

Then in November 2024 Eurogroup released a briefing called 'The Brussels Effect', referencing the EU's global influence in setting regulatory standards. The briefing urged the EU to use this influence to ban kangaroo product imports, based on the group's claims of animal cruelty and ecological harm.

Concerned by inaccuracies in these assertions, Finch arranged a meeting with Eurogroup's Wildlife Program Leader. Drawing on more than a decade of experience regulating the kangaroo harvest in Queensland, he challenged the Eurogroup's evidence and offered to share peer-reviewed data. They agreed to maintain an open dialogue, reinforcing Eurogroup's stated commitment to being evidence-based, though whether this leads to policy change remains to be seen.

In contrast to Eurogroup, the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FACE) is the peak body advocating for Europe's seven million hunters. Based in Brussels, FACE supports sustainable hunting as a legitimate conservation tool and works with the EU Intergroup on Biodiversity, Hunting and Countryside. It shares the secretariat role with the EU Landowners Organisation, highlighting the collaboration between rural stakeholders and hunters. FACE engages actively with EU institutions such as the European Commission and Parliament to promote policies which recognise the role hunters play in wildlife management.

FACE emphasizes recreational hunters are the primary tool used across Europe for managing abundant hoofed species such as deer and wild boar. Unlike Australia, Europe doesn't rely on methods like aerial shooting for large vertebrates. Professional wildlife culling exists but is rare, with most animals harvested by licensed private individuals who operate within strict frameworks. These hunters

also contribute to disease surveillance, pest control and conservation activities.

To build public awareness and support, FACE launched Game Meat Week in November 2024, promoting the environmental and health benefits of wild-harvested, free-range protein. This continent-wide initiative underscores Europe's cultural embrace of sustainable hunting and meat utilisation.

Finch also met with staff from the Australian Embassy in Brussels who handle agricultural trade and policy matters, discussing the Australian government's responses to the Eurogroup's claims and petitions. The embassy actively works to counter misinformation and ensure EU lawmakers have accurate data on kangaroo management.

Finally he met with the director of Raverco, a specialist game meat importer based in Belgium. Raverco handles a wide range of exotic meats, including kangaroo, and faces a potential crisis due to a bill introduced by the Belgian Green Party following lobbying by local animal rights group GAIA. The bill seeks to ban kangaroo imports, which would negatively impact businesses like Raverco without saving kangaroo lives as non-commercial culling in Australia would continue. Finch consistently argues such bans merely lead to greater waste, undermining sustainability and animal welfare goals.

This topic demonstrates how European politics and advocacy have international implications, particularly for Australia's wildlife industries. They highlight the importance of engaging in fact-based dialogue to counter misinformation and build shared understanding on complex environmental issues.

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To find out more about the report *To Explore, Review and Document Wild Game Harvesting in Europe* by Neal Finch, scan the QR code below.





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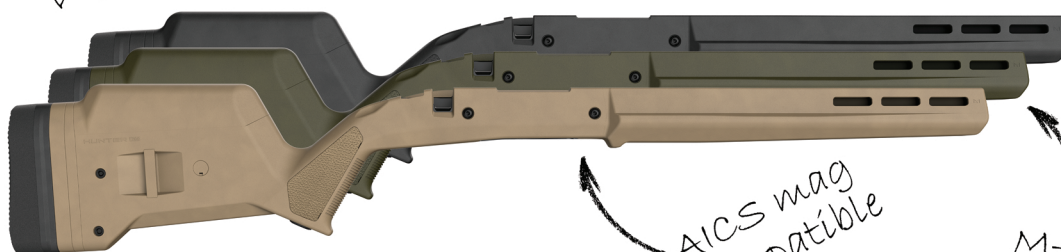


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THAT WITCHES' BREW IS GOOD FOR YOU

WORDS:
SCOTT HEIMAN



In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, one scene features three wily women referred to as the three witches, chanting an ominous rhyme as they add seemingly gross and grizzly ingredients to a cauldron. While this makes for good theatre, in reality the witches' brew may not have been as offensive as it sounds.

For centuries the practice of witchcraft has been associated with the use of herbs, with witches said to have used codewords for ingredients to help keep their recipes secret. For example, it's now broadly acknowledged that 'eye of newt' referred to a mustard seed. Herbalists would often reference

body parts when describing plants and, in this vein, an 'eye' is a seed and mustard seeds are dark yellow, like the eyes of some newts.

While the history of witchcraft dates back to biblical times, humans have been foraging plants for more than a million years. So-called 'early humans' obtained up to 95 per cent of their food from foraging primarily wild plants, fruits, nuts and tubers. And foraging remained widespread before the 19th century industrial boom of agriculture and subsequent rise of supermarkets and seed catalogues.

Fueled by social media there's been a recent resurgence in foraging, particularly among urban dwellers. Do an online scan and you'll soon find weekend excursions into parks and urban fringes on edible weed tours, though many of us never really lost touch with our ancestors' foraging mindset. The bushcrafters, survivalists and herbalists among us will already be familiar with the nutritional value of plants like purslane, dandelions, blackberries, sorrel and prickly pear, to name but a few.

While many people dismiss weeds as being simply 'wild and unwanted', many are edible and quite nutritious. For example, compared with shop-bought greens such as bok choy, rocket, basil and parsley, many edible weeds were actually higher in important vitamins, minerals and nutrients. For example, dandelion is probably one of the most common and recognisable varieties of edible weeds. It's also one of the most nutritious plants ever tested for consumption by humans and livestock by the US Department of Agriculture. The yellow petals and young leaves can be used in salads and the roots as a coffee substitute.

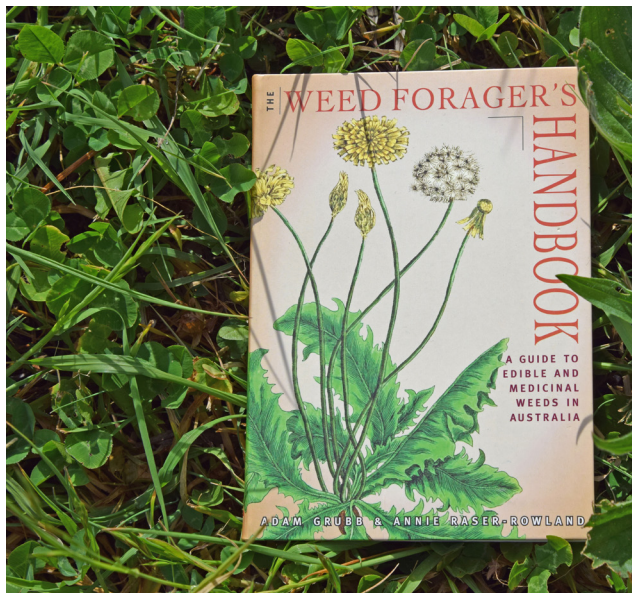
Clover is equally recognisable. The leaves are high in antioxidants and

a good source of vitamins and minerals (including vitamin C, calcium and magnesium), which is why farmers use it as fodder in the first place. Toss the leaves into your salads and boil the blossoms to make tea.

Several seasons of TV survival series *Alone* have seen participants eagerly foraging for plantain with good reason. It has traditionally been used to help heal wounds using a poultice made from ground plantain held in place by a bandage. It's also a great remedy for sandfly bites, just crush the leaf and rub it over the bite. Beyond its healing properties, plantain was called 'waybread' by early Anglo-Saxons as it was such an important food. It's an excellent source of dietary fibre and rich in vitamins A, C and B6. So use the young leaves in salads, add some dandelion and clover and you'll have a healthy meal any doctor would recommend.

Edible weeds can be found all over Australia. Of our country's total land area of about 7.692 million square kilometres, 3.63 million of that has been converted into agricultural terrain and the associated land clearance has introduced all sorts of weeds to the landscape. As with wild mushrooms though, it's vital to be sure of what you're picking and never eat any plant you can't positively identify.

But providing you've done your research, edible weeds can make a delicious addition to your diet at home, in camp or simply taking the dog for a walk. And in an emergency situation, a knowledge of edible weeds will enable you to forage more effectively until you're rescued. Books have been written on the subject of edible plants and a copy should be on your bushcraft and survival shelf along with other titles dealing with topics like knots, bushucker, tracks and scats and bushcrafting.



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DREAM BIG OR DON'T DREAM AT ALL

WORDS:
LAETISHA SCANLAN



Q Can you offer any advice on the best way to 'pattern' a shotgun. What would you say is the ideal distance and is this an accurate way of gauging where your gun is actually shooting?

George G., SA

A Patterning a shotgun is something I've done for as long as I've been shooting and is a great tool for instant feedback. It tells you exactly where your gun is shooting and how your cartridges and chokes are performing. There's been plenty of debate about whether a still target board can truly reflect what happens on a moving clay and, while I agree it's not a perfect match, I still believe a pattern board gives you a solid foundation for understanding your own setup.

Personally, I like to start at around 20m. That's close enough to give a clear view of the centre of the pattern and shows instantly if your gun's hitting where you're looking. It's especially useful when checking gun fit or seeing if your eye is correctly aligned along the rib. From there I usually move back to 30-35 metres, especially for a Trap shooting set-up. At that distance you have a much better idea of how tight your pattern stays and how well your chosen chokes and cartridges perform. For Trap I generally expect the gun to shoot around a 70/30 pattern, which helps keep the target in view above the barrel.



PATTERNING YOUR SHOTGUN PROVIDES VITAL INFORMATION ON ITS PERFORMANCE.

When patterning my gun, I mount it exactly as I would in competition. Consistency is key here. I aim at a clear mark on the board and fire a single shot, making sure to squeeze the trigger smoothly rather than snatching at it, a common mistake which can pull the pattern off centre. If you find it hard to hold the gun steady, it's fine to use a post or rest for support, as long as it doesn't change your natural stance or mount. You want the test to reflect how you actually shoot and not a fixed, artificial position.

I always test both barrels separately and label each shot. It's surprising how often the barrels can shoot to slightly different points of impact and knowing this early saves a lot of confusion later. I also like to fire two or three rounds per setup and look at the overall average, as a single shot can sometimes be misleading.

The pattern board gives you honest feedback. You'll see straight away whether your gun shoots high, low, left or right and how evenly the pellets spread. That information is what helps you fine-tune your set up, choke decision and ammunition load choices. Just keep in mind that what happens on the board won't exactly match what happens on a moving target as your swing, lead and timing all come into play once the clay's flying through the air.

That said I'd never skip patterning, especially with a new gun, when adjusting my stock or even using different ammunition. It's the best way to get to know your gun properly, build confidence in your setup and make sure that when you go out to compete, you know exactly where your shot is going.

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Q Following my earlier enquiry about the cost benefits of reloading, I've taken Paul Miller's advice and bought Hornady 243W dies and Hornady kit with a press and powder scale and all the necessary reloading items to get going (including their quality reloading manual). I just wanted to confirm how I work out the best length of cartridge, including the seated bullet, to achieve best accuracy in my rifle.

Jonathon D., Qld.

A Good for you Jonathon, you're in for lots of fun and education. You'll see in your manual the maximum overall cartridge length (OAL) in the section on loads and technical details for the 243W (in all manuals this'll be 2.710"). You'll also see various lengths for the different bullets being reloaded which will all be below the maximum recommended length. These lengths are those the manufacturer recommends for that bullet, cartridge and load. Bullets come in all sorts of weights and profiles in every calibre and it's these differences which make tuning your loads so interesting.

To make these measurements you'll also need a digital vernier caliper to establish the length of your reloaded cartridge and check how long you can reload bullets to suit your rifle. You'll also need a Hornady overall

length (OAL) gauge, a clever device inserted into your chamber with a separately-bought Hornady dummy 243W round screwed on the end. This pushes the projectile you're measuring through this cartridge neck when chambered carefully into your barrel until it just touches the 'lands', which is the start of the rifling. You then carefully remove the gauge with the bullet intact on the end and measure the overall length of the cartridge.

Then determine if this length is longer than the recommended maximum and will it still feed reliably through your magazine. If it does, it gives you the chance to reduce the length by say 20 thousands of an inch to always avoid jamming bullets into the lands. You can then experiment with different lengths up to this measurement in say 10-thou increments, to find which bullet seating distance works best with your particular powder and primer combination.

Avoid maximum loads and rely on cartridge length to find an accurate and consistent load. It can be more complicated than this, looking for accuracy nodes by varying powder charges as well as COAL, but first try what I've suggested here. Take your time, concentrate, be safe and enjoy the results. Good luck.

Paul Miller

Q I have a revolver made around 1913-1916. It's a Colt Police Positive Special in .32-20 WCF, six-shot double-action with a 5" barrel. The side plate is engraved M.K. Blythe and the serial number is 88002. The person I bought it from has no idea of the history of the firearm so I'm hoping one of your Top Shots can shed some light on its past.

Jim Inwood, via email

A The serial number 88002 suggests it was made in 1911 according to my references. Close to 190,00 of this very popular revolver were made in .32-20 from 1907-1938, with others also produced in .38 special until after WWII. I've a



IT'S LIKELY MERVYN KIMBERLEY BLYTHE ONCE OWNED THE REVOLVER.

strong suspicion the revolver was previously owned by Mervyn Kimberley Blythe, an insurance clerk born on July 25, 1911 who joined the 2nd AIF in South Australia on June 14, 1940 and was assigned to the 2/48th Battalion, serving in North Africa. He was discharged on June 12, 1943 as medically unfit and died in Adelaide at the Repatriation Hospital in October 1973 aged 62.

He most likely bought or was supplied the gun as a young insurance clerk who collected and carried sums of money, and it's also possible the gun went with him to North Africa during his war service. Being 29 at enlistment made him relatively 'old' (my own dad enlisted aged 18 in 1942 and spoke about these 'old' men in the AIF and he also took a revolver of his own on overseas service). This all assumes M.K. Blythe was the owner of the gun, though there may have been other people with that name but his was the only one which came up during my record searches.

Geoff Smith

Q I'm considering buying a Ruger Guide Gun (M77 Hawkeye) in .416 Ruger calibre. Would you be able to provide loading data for that cartridge using the Woodleigh weldcore RNSN and Barnes banded solid bullets in 400-grain weight, as well as the Barnes 350-grain TSX projectiles using powders available in Australia such as Power Pro 200-MR?

Anthony Clarke, NSW.

A The .416 Ruger cartridge is a relatively new kid on the block and, as such, not all reloading manuals list it. It's the old story, not all powder makers provide data for every bullet with every cartridge and likewise, not all bullet makers list every cartridge or powder combination. However, the three .416 bullet brands and types you quoted are available, though most of the current loading data for them refers to other .416 cartridges such as the Rigby, Weatherby Magnum and Remington Magnum.

I've found loads for the .416 Ruger from the *Hornady 11th Edition Reloaders' Guide* which do tick two of the three boxes but listing their 400-grain bullets rather than the ones you specified. This'll provide a starting point at least and the first is Alliant Power Pro 2000-MR, starting at 69.3gr for a velocity of 2000fps and a maximum of 80gr for a velocity of 2300fps. Another load is using Varget powder, which is simply ADI's AR-2208 bottled by Hodgdon for the US market. That load, again for Hornady's 400-grain projectiles, is 60.8gr for a velocity of 2000fps and maximum charge of 68.1gr for 2150fps.

There's no listing for any 350gr bullets in the Hornady manual, though you could start with the above figures and work up gradually, checking for pressure signs as you go. There are other powders listed though their availability here isn't reliable, so I suggest ADI rifle powders would be your best choice. You could also contact Barnes and Woodleigh to ask if they'll be developing loads for the .416 Ruger in future.

Rod Pascoe

SEND QUESTIONS TO:
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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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WORDS:
CHARLOTTE FOX

Karla Pound is an incredible woman, an expedition leader and naturalist who many will know through her Instagram profile @karla_inthewild and her time on TV series *Alone Australia*. Her passion for the outdoors has seen her develop a vast array of skills and knowledge through experiences such as being an exhibition leader, zookeeper, cameleer, working with crocodiles and flying helicopters. Karla spoke to Charlotte Fox about how she developed her skills and brand to having more than 20,000 followers.

Describe 'Karla in the Wild'

I started posting on social media as a hobby and way of documenting a digital diary of my adventures. When I was living in the NT and working with saltwater crocodiles, I had a social media account under my name but wanted to create more of a brand. I think of my online presence as a resumé where people can see what I'm about or a future employer can say: 'I want this girl on my team'.

You describe yourself as an expedition leader and naturalist. What does that mean?

I work with a number of companies as an expedition leader, including National Geographic Expeditions in the South Pacific. I typically look after the Kimberley region in Australia, as well as Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, French Polynesia, New Zealand and Antarctica - we take people adventuring.

My job as leader is to organise where we go, what we do, make sure it happens and goes as smoothly as possible. The job keeps me on my toes where I have to be creative and provide

high-end clientele with the standard of experience they're expecting. I also have a team of naturalists I organise including an ornithologist, botanist, geologist, culture specialist, photographer and videographer.

How did you build skills to lead expeditions?

I developed a love of animals at a young age from my family and got into wildlife from there, including wildlife rescue as a teenager. I studied zoology and did zookeeping for the first five years of my career. As for survival and bushcraft, that knowledge came much later. Bushcraft I got into recently from travelling through remote villages with Nat Geo and seeing how people in Third World countries live off the land. I'd see communities where they live wholly and solely through catching their food every day.

I had my introduction to Australian indigenous culture and bush tucker in 2012 when I started travelling and was living in Uluru and working on a farm running camel tours. A guy named 'Frog' introduced me to eating kangaroo tails and pigeons and animals you could trap. He was nicknamed Frog as he was a great swimmer but terrible runner. We were watching pigeons and he said: "These are really good eating. Fatten them up then call me and we'll catch them and eat them." So I fed them up for a couple of weeks then Frog and I cooked them underground along with a kangaroo tail. I remember thinking this is the coolest thing and I want to get more into learning to live off the land.

A woman with long brown hair in a braid, wearing a green baseball cap and camouflage clothing, stands in a rocky, grassy mountain landscape. She is holding a compound bow across her chest and smiling. The background features steep, rocky mountains under a clear blue sky.

What have you learned from indigenous communities?

When I visit them I spend more time with women, so I experience more skills related to gathering, bushcraft survival and what fruits, berries, seeds and nuts you can and can't eat. I haven't been hunting with men in these tribes and I'd love that opportunity.

Is a nomadic lifestyle in the nature of your work?

A lot of my work for the first 10 years was seasonal where I'd go somewhere remote in the NT or Kimberley and stay for six months. When the wet season came I'd have to move and start a new job, which I love as it meant it was my next adventure. I've been in that mode for so long that even if I do have a job that runs all year, after six months I'm ready to go again as I'm so used to living like that. I've been working on expeditions for three years and when I've completed one, I come back and pick up my vehicle from wherever I left it and visit friends, go bush then go off to work again.

How did you learn to hunt?

I got into bowhunting as it was part of my ambition to be able to live off the land. I also like the primitive aspect of being able to tap into how your ancestors lived. My father would rifle hunt growing up but stopped when we moved to the city, so I reached out to people I follow on social media. They included Adam Kavanagh who'd been on TV show *Naked and Afraid*, as well as Sarah McDuffy (profiled in our September edition).



What do you enjoy most about hunting and shooting?

Feeling that connection to the environment and the process, while knowing where my meat comes from. I like to know an animal has lived a wild life and not been fed grain in a stockyard. It's the holistic experience of being on the land, in tune with yourself and the animal and harvesting meat you know is as organic as possible. And the added benefit of helping eradicate feral species.

And your most memorable hunting experiences?

My most memorable and humbling trip was to New Zealand with Sarah McDuffy and a bunch of other girls. We had two from the US, two from Australia and two Kiwis on the west coast of the South Island. We took a helicopter into the mountains which was way colder than I anticipated. Normally we hunt in pairs but we went solo this time, a first for me. It was a great opportunity for me to hone the skills I've been taught, connect more with myself and really be present in that environment.

What message are you trying to convey on social media?

I'm wanting to encourage women to get more into hunting and use it as a mechanism to build confidence. I also want to help remove the stigma attached to hunting through social media. Because I'm an animal person, I work for National Geographic and I'm female, that's a wonderful opportunity to open people's minds and help close the gap between perception and reality.

How did you amass more than 20,000 Instagram followers?

It's grown organically as I'm not an influencer or content creator. Some people suggested I start a YouTube channel but I don't want that. If I can document my life as I'm doing it and that interests people I'm all for it, but I don't want

social media to change my lifestyle. I'm also quite reluctant in relation to endorsing brands. I have a very small pool of those I work with and their products I generally use.

Do you encounter any negativity from your online presence?

I've encountered some with people questioning how I can be an animal lover and also a hunter. I'm also careful that when I do post about hunting, I give a warning like: "I've been on a hunting trip so the next few posts are about animals I managed to bring home."

You've also been on TV shows including *Alone Australia*. How was that?

That's essentially 10 people dumped in the wilderness. You have 10 items and the clothes on your back and have to survive through building shelters, trapping food, finding water and being in the elements, all while documenting the experience. It's the most difficult test I've ever had but I'd do it again in a heartbeat.

How did you find out about *Alone Australia*?

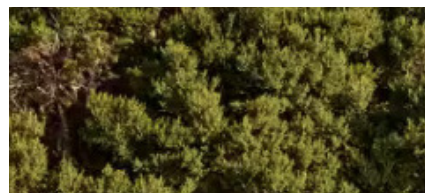
I was contacted via my socials to see if I was interested in applying but was already involved in *Million Dollar Island*, another survivor-based show. When season three came around I was keen to apply and was selected. I loved the idea of the program and wanted to test my skills. I took way more from the experience than I could've imagined including a lot of personal growth.

Did you spend much time thinking about how the others were getting on?

It crosses your mind as you don't know how you did until the show goes to air. That's when we find out where we placed as only the winner knows they've won before then. In scenarios like a downpour you start to wonder how everyone else is faring, if their shelter's been washed out. Or if you haven't caught fish for days, is no-one else catching fish or am I doing something wrong?

You had an eel incident one day. Can you describe it?

It was delicious. The first one I caught was massive and slimy and I was thinking: "I don't even know what to do with this as I've never caught an eel before". I used the lid from a cast iron pot to fry it up and because it's such an oily fish, the skin went crispy and the flesh was beautiful. I wasn't sure if it was tasty because I was so hungry but when I came off the show I tried it again and it was still delicious.



KARLA (THIRD FROM RIGHT) AND THE CONTESTANTS FROM *ALONE AUSTRALIAN* SEASON 3.





Before you tapped out did you feel a tug back to humanity and want to be around people again?

I thought that would be my strength and it wasn't until about week four I started to really feel I didn't want to be alone any more. Because my job is extremely social, looking after people on expeditions, when I return to Australia I go hiking, camping and fishing on my own to recharge.

I was stuck in that habit for so long I'd segregate myself from birthdays, barbecues and other social events. On *Alone*, I realised I'd been so focused on connecting to the land and nature, I forgot to connect with the people in my life. Since finishing the show I've stayed true to my word to reconnect and don't think I've done anything solo since.

On the show you lost a lot of weight, lost hair and were hungry. Is that what made you tap out?

It was out of my control. Apart from the day where I ate fiddleheads and was sick, I was having so much fun. Once I reached day 30 and ran out of food, something changed my mindset. I started to plummet and think: "I'm cold, hungry,

it's raining and I'm sad." I didn't want to feel like that and as I'd lost so much weight by that point, I knew I couldn't win. Yet I took everything out of the experience I wanted and have no regrets.

Do you have a quote that resonates now you've finished the show?

Don't be scared to fail as it's not failure, it's growth.

What does the future hold for Karla in the Wild?

I'm leaning towards bushcraft survival and hunting and spending more time in Australia to focus on those skills. I also want to improve my hunting and start challenging myself in different environments. I feel nature has a path designed for me already, so when opportunities come my way I'm open to them.





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ROD PASCOE

The team at Canberra-based Derraco Engineering have been busy developing more useful tools for handloaders. Since previous reviews in *Australian Shooter*, their range of accessories has grown to make reloading ammunition quicker, easier and, most importantly, consistent. Derraco's products are precision made and involve high-tolerance machining, important for case preparation tools as well.

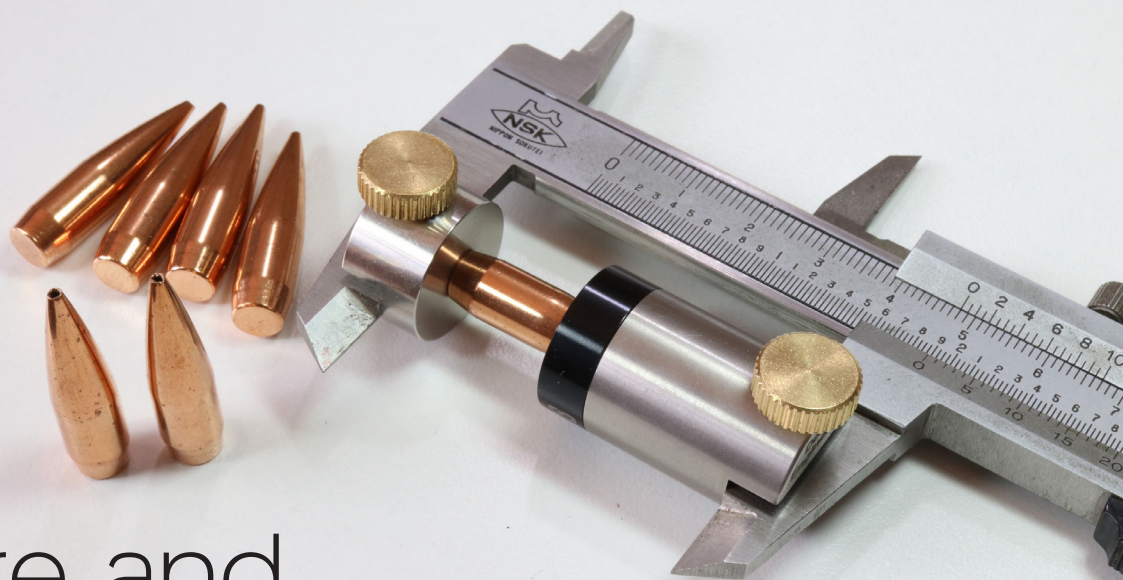
The Reloading Measure Tool kit contains a series of headspace and bullet comparators. This versatile piece of equipment allows you to measure individual bullets to a point on the ogive, or compare the overall cartridge length to the same point, while the headspace comparator measures between a point on the shoulder of the case and its base.

Made of 6061 aircraft-grade aluminium alloy, the headspace and bullet comparator bushings are colour-coded and anodised with a ceramic-like, wear-resistant surface. The five headspace bushings for the bullet comparator cover more than 60 of the most popular cartridges, while there are 14 bullet bushings ranging in calibre from .17 to .45. Different types of bushing holders and anvil bases are available to attach to your calipers by either a single thumb screw or multiple grub screws for a more permanent arrangement.

Another piece of kit Derraco call the Cheap Dies Mate is intended to allow precise micrometer adjustment of seating dies, which have no such inbuilt adjustment as in more expensive competition dies. Simply set to the top of the seating die screw, the adjustment can be repeated



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time after time. Available in metric or imperial graduations, the micrometer when fitted to its bracket will mount on any 7/8" die or directly to the Forster Coax press.

The third and final piece of precision engineering this time is Derraco's six-piece Competition Increment Shell Holder set. Intended to deal with the slightly different rim thicknesses between varying brands of brass, each set comprises a zero datum holder of the industrial standard 0.125" height gap and five more at plus 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10-thou increments. Available for the most common cartridge families, the holders are made of 420 stainless steel and tempered twice at 300C following a vacuum quench. These are tough shell holders and although their colour changes during heat treatment, they won't rust like the ordinary carbon steel version.

You can order direct from Derraco through their website at www.derraco.com and, while you're there, check out their other pieces of precision engineered gear - there's lots more than just reloading tools. ●



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Swede as!

MAREK SMITH TRIALS SOME EXPLOSIVE HUNTING AMMO BY NORMA

Swedish ammunition manufacturer Norma can boast more than 120 years of experience, having built its reputation on precision and consistency using their own high-quality brass cases which are also popular with reloaders. The VermineXtreme line is their dedicated varmint offering, designed to deliver ‘massive shock effect’ and engineered for precision pest control and small-game hunting.

As a recreational hunter of more than three decades, I was eager to assess these claims of accuracy and terminal performance on such game.

The VermineXtreme .223 Rem 55-grain hollow-point bullet features an aggressive open-tip design, optimised for rapid and devastating expansion on impact, ensuring a rapid energy dump without excessive penetration. The design also minimises the risk of pests escaping after being hit. The brand is also available in .222 Rem (55gr), .22-250 Rem (55gr) and .243 Win (76gr).

UNBOXING

The ammunition provided for review came in a 100-round box with loosely-packed cartridges. Other options available are a 20-round box or 900-round plastic tubs which, from what I’ve seen online, contain nine of these same 100-round boxes. On close inspection of the ammo, cases are highly polished with an excellent finish.

RANGE TESTING

For this I’d be using two rifles in a Tikka T3x Lite in .223 with 22" barrel and 1:12" twist rate, as well as a WFA1-L straight-pull in .223 with 16" barrel and a 1:8" twist rate. The latter prefers heavier projectiles and while I wouldn’t normally choose a 55gr projectile for it, I was keen to compare it to other 55gr ammunition I’ve used previously. The Tikka on the other hand loves lighter projectiles, so I was excited to see how this ammunition stacked up against other brands, especially in terms of performance on foxes.

RESULTS

In both rifles I compared this Norma 55gr VermineXtreme HP ammo to the well-known and highly reputable Australian-made ADI 55gr Soft Point. I put three five-shot groups, one with ADI and two with Norma, through each rifle. The target at this range was placed at 100 yards and not metres which I’d typically shoot at.

For both, the Norma groups came in slightly tighter than ADI but at a noticeably slower speed. Also of interest was consistency of the Norma ammunition as, in each rifle, group sizes were almost identical as seen in the accompanying table.

RIFLE	AMMUNITION	GROUP SIZE (MM)	MEAN RADIUS (MM)	FPS	SD
WFA1-L	ADI 55gr SP	40	15	3008.2	38.8
WFA1-L	Norma VermineXtreme 55gr	37	15.6	2938.5	20.5
WFA1-L	Norma VermineXtreme 55gr	37	15.8	2944	10
Tikka T3x	ADI 55gr SP	24	8.8	3223.7	10
Tikka T3x	Norma VermineXtreme 55gr	19	6.5	3162.8	20.6
Tikka T3x	Norma VermineXtreme 55gr	19	8.4	3154.3	11



AT THE RANGE AND READY TO PUT THE VERMINEXTREME TO THE TEST; RANGE TARGET SHOWING SOME PRETTY TIDY GROUPS.





FIELD TESTING

For this I took the Norma ammunition on a couple of outings with three regular hunting mates. Before getting down to business, I fired a quick confirmatory shot at both 100m and 200m from the vehicle at a small orange sticker on a steel target. Both shots hit the sticker on the first attempt, so I was comfortable with zero and ready to go hunting.

During field testing I successfully targeted and shot three predatory foxes. The first was a rapid follow-up shot on the raider hit by a 17HMR round from my mate's rifle. Unfortunately it didn't go down straight away from the impact of the 17HMR but, being prepared, I immediately followed up with the Warwick using the Norma 55gr HP and the fox died instantly.

In search of more targets we moved to another nearby farm in the fading light of early evening and started loading magazines and powering up our thermal optics. As usual I performed a quick scan with my handheld thermal just to check our surroundings and, to my surprise, spotted a red-coat trotting across the dirt driveway we'd come in on a few minutes earlier. Luckily I was ready and picked up my Tikka.



USING A GONG TO VERIFY ZERO; DEAD ON IMPACT AFTER A WELL-PLACED HEAD SHOT.

I ranged the fox at around 170m in open ground, walking away from us, so made a noise to attract its attention. It stopped, looked in our direction and I took the shot. The bullet struck it in the head as it was looking down the barrel, entering its forehead and exiting the back of the skull with no sizeable exit hole. The Norma 55gr HP round had done its job as the target dropped exactly where it stood.

The third fox was about 200m away on the same property a short time later. My mate and I managed to stalk a bit closer as it was sniffing around for food and as I took a sight picture, he whistled it in. The sound grabbed its attention as it started running in our direction. When it was about 80m away I made a noise and it stopped to look in our direction for a split second. I took the shot as it was facing me, aiming for the middle of its chest.

Amazingly it managed to stagger about 5m before dropping to the ground and on close inspection, the round had entered its chest as expected, yet a whole side of its lung cavity was missing with smoke still rising from the wound as we approached. This is exactly the kind of performance I was expecting from this ammunition - good initial penetration followed by explosive expansion.

IN SUMMARY

I'd like to have taken more foxes or even a feral cat for this review but, from both my time at the range and results in the field, I was more than happy with how consistent and accurate this ammunition was and its performance on game, especially with my Tikka T3x. Needless to say I'll continue to use Norma VermineXtreme on future hunts. And with how well it's performed so far, I'll be looking to buy this ammunition in the larger bulk packs, as those prices are better value than the smaller 20-round options. Not only did I find it an excellent factory round but, as a reloader, I'll definitely be hanging on to this brass for future use. ●



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Back to square one

JULIAN NUSKE TAKES US ON A SHOOTING JOURNEY OF REDISCOVERY

JULIAN TAKES AIM ON THE LONG-DISTANCE RANGE.

I hadn't used a firearm since I was 12 years old. Back then it was under the tutelage of my father who'd take us shooting rabbits and occasionally clay targets with my uncle in Bendigo, though I was usually only able to have a few shots at the clays. It was great fun and instilled a healthy respect for firearms, camping and genuine father-son camaraderie, though unfortunately this all came to an abrupt halt after the Port Arthur tragedy.

Now 50 and having been recently employed at the SSAA National office in South Australia, I was excited to begin the re-education process surrounding firearms, their safe usage and procedures. Not to mention the enjoyment of being involved with the vast amount of 'boys' toys' now on offer which I never got to experience as a teenager and, I'm delighted to say, having my first reintroductions on the range at Monarto.

My how things have changed from those formative years. I thought, generally speaking, it would be similar to what I'd experienced in my youth, being able to shoot .22s, shotguns and maybe even a .223 which, with the enthusiasm I have towards my new vocation (which is high), would've been outstanding. Yet I was afforded an even greater opportunity, with the unexpected bonus of listening to and asking questions of experienced shooters on the day, who were all more than happy to share their knowledge.

My SSAA colleagues Matthew Godson and Travis Allen had arranged for us to meet Peter Fritz, a precision shooter from the Monarto club, for a rundown on what's available in the discipline of

Precision Rifle and test a few firearms and scopes at the same time. His rifle was something to behold, completely customized and very heavy at more than 11kgs and, while he told me the specs, I wasn't ready or prepared to take notes (I will next time). Suffice to say he as a marksman and his firearm were hugely impressive and, if you'd like to learn more about Peter and his discipline, you can find a video online at SSAA TV.

We were there to test three rifles, not as firearms necessarily for precision shooting, though from my limited experience they'd be a good starting option, more as potential hunting rifles for bigger game. Before we started the range rules were read out by 'Fritz' and, as a novice, I was impressed by the safety and confidence he instilled. I was equally engrossed on watching them put into practice and, as such, feel I should point out some which I deemed highly reassuring.

Firstly, a Range Officer must be present at all times when there are two or more shooters using the range and must be easily identifiable by the wearing of a SSAA Ranger Officer vest. To me this seemed a good rule, put into practice to make sure all the others are followed by the letter.

Shooting isn't permitted unless all red flags are flying as required throughout the range. Again, a commonsense approach which easily points out to all the range is 'live'. Further to this, no handling of any firearm is permitted on the firing line while there are people downrange. When moving around the range all firearms must be in an upright position, unloaded, action opened, magazine removed where possible and

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There are many important rules to be adhered to, though as a beginner I thought it useful to at least point out these few, which not only put my mind at ease but would impress any newcomer to the sport. Safety's not only paramount in this sport, it allows spectators and shooters with any apprehensions to feel at ease, as it's taken extremely seriously. Believe it or not this adds to the enjoyment of the experience.

The first rifle to be used was a .308 Browning X-Bolt Max Competition with a Meopta scope (3-18x 56 SFP). I watched closely as Travis and Matt followed the rules and prepared the rifle for the first shot. Travis had it ready to fire, sighted it downrange, appeared to be comfortable and ready to go then . . . nothing. What happened? Several checks ensued including removing the bolt and checking the magazine and safety switch, resetting and still nothing.

After several minutes of head-scratching, even though it was checked over and over, the

rifle refused to fire. Then our precision expert for the day pointed out the firing pin had been removed. This is by no means a reflection on the supplier, rather I saw it as a clear safety practice they obviously employ in their showroom firearms. There'd been a genuine oversight when sending it, though I'm confident we'll review it in the near future.

Undeterred the boys moved on to the SIG Cross 24" .308 with Zeiss LRP S5 (2-25 x 56) scope. It was at this point I noticed the need for a product being used by everyone on the range except me, namely 'smart' earmuffs. I was using earplugs which, to be fair, worked well but didn't allow me to hear them speaking. They were able to communicate freely but with the added advantage of having the sound of a shot suppressed without having to change a thing. Definitely a 'must-have' for shooting and I'll be buying a pair before my next outing.

The SIG Cross was set up and, after my colleagues had fired a shot or three, it was my turn. The first thing I noticed was at 6.1kg it was heavy



yet nowhere near the weight of our instructor's rifle. I also had some trouble picking up a clear view through the scope. It was difficult for me to stop a 'black halo' from appearing and disappearing as I sighted up to take my first shot, something I put down to inexperience.

I then fired three rounds (not quickly) at a target placed at 100m. I hit the target twice with the two shots which landed being reasonably close. At this point I should point out this is not a rifle review, rather the sharing of a novice's journey which will hopefully help me become an engaged and learned contributor to the SSAA.

Next we had a look at the Solus 22" Competition rifle in 6.5 Creedmoor from Aero Precision with a Leupold Mk.5 HD 5-25 PR2-MI scope. Now this was fun. I put a few more shots through this one and was both surprised and delighted at how much I enjoyed it. I was aiming at a steel target at roughly 325m, took three shots (again, in my own time) and hit it once. I was also able to make better use of the scope which certainly enhanced the experience.

We then moved to a 500m steel target which moved if you hit it and fired a few shots each (I honestly felt this would be impossible). With expert help from our precision shooting guide to sight-in the scope for a shot at half a kilometre, I was actually ecstatic to land three hits in a row. Not in my wildest dreams did I think I'd be waking up that morning and, by the end of the day, be hitting a target (three times no less) at 500m. After the whole experience I've caught the bug.

Now comes the research to figure out the most suitable rifle/scope combination to take the next step in my shooting adventure. It's never to late to try something new in life, create fresh experiences and, most of all, have a lot of fun doing it. I'm enthusiastically looking forward to shooting more in the months and years to come. ●

• In our next edition I'll chart my introduction to those all-important optics from an expert in the field.

LOOK AND LEARN . . . 'FRITZ', OUR RO FOR THE DAY, SHOWS HOW IT'S DONE; TRAVIS MAKES READY UNDER FRITZ'S EXPERT EYE.

A good read and a good feed

DEREK NUGENT ON THE VENISON LOVER'S BIBLE

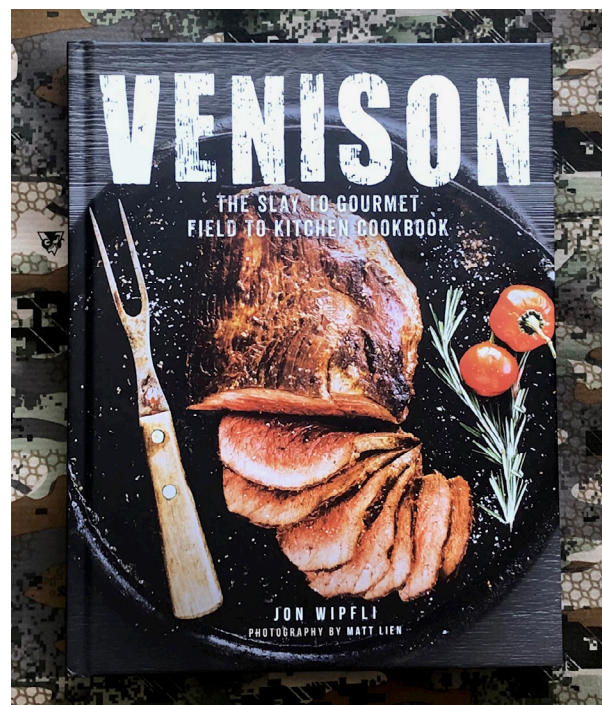
Despite what our woke detractors may say, hunting is a pursuit which provides a host of benefits to society in general and the individual in particular. As an industry, licensed firearm owners (about 900,000 of us) contribute approximately \$2.5 billion annually to the national economy - around \$1 billion directly and \$1.5 billion consequentially. This money is spent on the myriad of small businesses through which we acquire the firearms, ammunition, accessories and sundries to facilitate and enjoy our time in the field.

In addition, it's boots on the ground which helps cull feral marauders to the benefit of our rural communities and endangered native species. This is a tangible public service as the Federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry estimates the cost of vertebrate pest animals to the Australian agricultural sector is around \$1 billion a year. Furthermore, an estimated three billion native animals fall prey to feral predation annually.

On an individual level there are also the undeniable mental and physical benefits of time spent enjoying the solace of the great outdoors and satisfaction of a successful hunt. On this point, the sage and insightful words of ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle come readily to mind. He once reasoned that "if some animals are good at hunting and others are suitable for hunting, then the gods must clearly smile on hunting", a logic I'm sure most of us would endorse.



THE MEAT OF KINGS: FIELD HARVESTED FREE-RANGE VENISON.



NATURE'S LARDER

To my mind one of the standout benefits of time spent afield has always been the harvesting of game meat, thus the acquisition of venison has always underpinned my deer hunting. We eat what we shoot. Trophies are fine things to have but the satisfaction of bringing home an Eskey full of prime, free-range venison is hard to beat - and it's good for you.

Compared to beef, lamb or pork, venison is leaner meat with a finer texture. It's higher in moisture and protein, contains a more diverse range of amino acids and is lower in calories, cholesterol and fat. Depending on where you shop and the cuts you favour, you can expect to pay \$30-\$80 a kilo, which makes field harvested venison an attractive economic consideration as well.

Interestingly, while the term venison is today applied exclusively to deer meat, historically this wasn't always the case. Originally the term derived from the Latin 'venari' meaning to hunt or chase. European aristocracy, particularly the Normans, used the words 'venerie' or 'venery' to describe all game suitable for hunting ('the chase'). So venison was a generic term applied not only to the meat of a deer but also that of wild boar and other 'beasts of the chase'. The modern usage of the term represents an evolutionary endpoint in the lexicon of hunting.

Regardless though, once grassed, harvested, processed and in the freezer, an array of culinary opportunities open up in terms of preparing venison for the table, which brings me to the point of this article. Being a traditionalist I prefer my game recipes on paper, ready to hand in books as opposed to floating around the ether on the internet. To this end I have both editions of SSAA's

excellent *Field to Fork* cookbooks. Recently however, I was fortunate to acquire a volume dedicated specifically to venison recipes which I now consider the perfect culinary addition to the library of every venison harvester and cook. It's a publication with broad appeal which I can see being equally well received by both the novice and experienced hunter or chef.

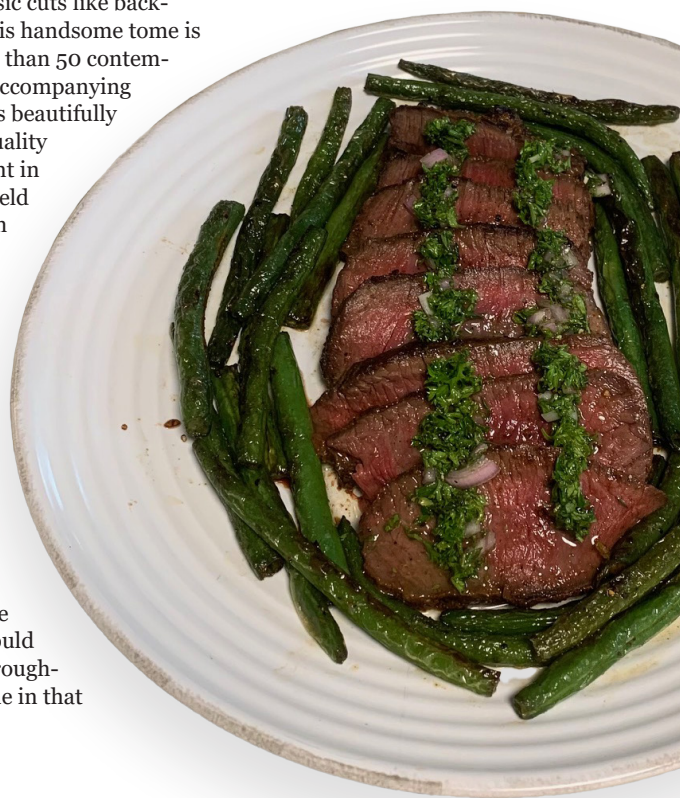
FIELD TO KITCHEN

The book's entitled *Venison: The Slay to Gourmet Field to Kitchen Cookbook* and is marketed as a contemporary approach to venison cooking sure to appeal to hunters who love the kitchen as much as the field. As the title suggests, this publication takes a 'paddock to plate' approach to sourcing and preparing venison. This is what I really like about the book and why I believe it would be universally popular with, and well received by, all venison hunters regardless of their level of experience or expertise. The book is the product of Minneapolis-based catering service Slay to Gourmet, which specialises in wild game meats. Written by experienced chef and outdoors man (hunter) Jon Wipfli, the book describes and illustrates all stages of game meat harvesting from the hunt, through field stripping and meat processing to meal preparation.

The author provides insights into ethical hunting practices, efficient meat recovery and processing techniques, along with inspired restaurant

quality dishes featuring classic cuts like backstraps, steaks and roasts. This handsome tome is 176 pages and features more than 50 contemporary recipes for venison, accompanying accoutrements and sides. It's beautifully illustrated with a range of quality photographs which document in detail every element of the field to kitchen journey covered in these pages.

It retails around the \$40 mark and can be had through either online sources or traditional bricks and mortar bookshops, so a quick online search will confirm your most convenient option. Sir Francis Bacon (no pun intended) the 16th century English philosopher and statesman once said: "Some books should be tasted, some devoured, but only a few should be chewed and digested thoroughly." I think he'd place this one in that category. ●



THE FINISHED PRODUCT: BLACKENED SIRLOIN FROM PAGE 132.



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I'm dyeing to go hunting!

YOUNG JAMIE HEIMANN HAS A GREAT CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEA

Last Christmas, dad bought me some packets of grey, green and brown fabric dyes as a present. I know he gave me the gift as he wanted me to experience tie-dyeing like he'd done in his childhood when he made his own hunting shirts. I'd already had some experience with tie-dye when I was younger using DIY kits with mum's help and a couple of times at school, though hadn't tried the 'real deal' of doing things from scratch. Obviously, given the colours, I was making camo which didn't come as a surprise as almost every piece of clothing dad owns is either green or brown. As for me I'd grown out of my old bow-hunting camo, so needed something to wear to go hunting with the family.

In preparation for camo tie-dye we went to a local department store for a few cheap white tops made of cotton and linen (dad had won some white T-shirts in a pub raffle so he gave me those too). I also had a leftover bandana from an old craft kit so decided I'd use that to make a cute little dog bandana for our pup Buddy.

I figured this was going to be fairly straightforward so started by filling a laundry tub with hot water, then dissolved the gunmetal grey tie-dye powder as instructed on the packet (I thought that would make a good dull base layer). I left the clothes in the solution for an hour or so but, when I came back, the grey had formed a blue tinge, not quite what I'd expected. I had a plain white singlet which hadn't yet been dyed and when I compared the white top with the tie-dyed version under UV light, both still shone like a star. The dyeing hadn't done much to dull the coloration at all and I didn't think I'd achieved what was needed in the base layer of a camo hunting shirt.

I had to rethink the whole thing so would go back to nature and find natural sources of dye. Time for a forage with Buddy around our neighbourhood. Luckily we found dandelions, gazania, red-hot poker, California poppies and other plants with a yellow-orange coloration. I'd use these for the base colour with some eucalyptus leaves from the backyard, as well as turmeric powder, onion skins and tea bags from the kitchen.



Because tie-dye involves colour layering, I thought about what else I might need during the process. I took a beetroot with its leaves from the veggie patch which would create a purple colouration, begonias for red/pink, charcoal for grey and, of course, I still had the packet dye in grey, brown and green from dad.

Unfortunately it turns out the dye dad bought was specialised for polyester and we hadn't paid enough attention to the instructions, so the dyeing process really hadn't worked on the cotton and linen (the natural materials hadn't stuck either). What happened was when we put the shirts through the wash, even with the setter, everything except for a bit of beetroot stain washed out and I was left with greyish clothes which still shone like fire under UV light.

So back to the shops only this time we actually studied the dye labels and found the one for cotton. The brand came in lots of colours too including olive, avocado and chocolate, everything I needed to make the clothes camo. Now back to the laundry tub.

JAMIE AND DAD SCOTT BLEND IN USING THE FINISHED PRODUCT; BLENDING IN FOR A BIT OF BUNNY-BUSTING; HANGING THE GRASSLANDS CAMO SHIRTS OUT TO DRY; DIFFERENT SHIRTS FOR DIFFERENT SURROUNDINGS.



TECHNIQUE

Firstly I put the clothes back into water with the setting agent (soda ash). I left them there while we went for lunch and when we came back I removed them and wrung out the excess water. Now it was time to make the designs.

I had an old tie-dye pamphlet from an arts store which demonstrated various techniques to make different patterns. Based on what I'd read, I mixed and matched techniques including spirals, scrunching, rolling and other methods. With that done, I tied-off the clothing with rubber bands and added dye into different sections, working on a wooden board so as not to colour the floor. While some of the colours ran into each other, I didn't mind as that helped make everything look more natural. Then I hung them out to dry for 48 hours.

Once dry I unravelled the clothes, making sure to pick up all the rubber bands so they wouldn't be eaten by our puppy or birds in the garden. On examining the designs, I could see the clothes had worked out much better than I'd imagined, my favourite pattern being the swirl which I'd achieved by twisting the T-shirt from the middle to the sides. Dad preferred the lines which I'd made by folding the clothes from the edges on a diagonal, just as you'd make a paper fan. As for mum, she liked the blotchy pattern which I'd made by pulling small sections of fabric away from each other before fastening them with bands.

And a really interesting thing happened when I put the finished clothes under UV light. The cotton T-shirts had dimmed a lot by comparison to the shiny white ones we'd started with, though there's still work to do on some of them. But the dyeing process had transformed the linen shirt entirely, as under UV light it had become really dull and non-reflective. I compared it with my still-white singlet (I forgot to dye it) and could see a very clear difference. This is something dad does with all his camo clothing from time to time to check it's still working.

So what do I think about my tie-dyeing experience? It was fun, a good experiment and overall I reckon I'll prefer the linen shirt when I go hunting, though even the cotton ones will come in handy. I also learned it's important to read the instructions before you go ahead and undertake a new task. The whole exercise was a useful life lesson and one I should probably keep in mind when it comes to school exam time! ●

Gundogs impress in Tassie

A private property in the picturesque Ross area of our island state was the setting for a highly successful Retrieving Trial hosted by the Working Gundog Association of Tasmania. Dogs in the two stakes contested worked impressively as judges and their assistants put both canines and handlers through some testing duck-hunting scenarios.

'Marks' are set up when the dog and handler, on collecting a shotgun loaded with blank shells, move to a point when they watch a 'dokken' (artificial duck) being fired into the air at varying distances and across a selection of obstacles. These include dams, creeks, gullies and associated heavy vegetation in which the dog is required to retrieve the duck as swiftly as possible and deliver it to the handler. Marks can be set up in multiple configurations including single, double, triple, simultaneous double and walk-up marks.

'Blinds' involve the handler placing their dog in a concealed location before moving to a firing point, then firing in the direction of a dokken which has been placed in a spot across the same type of obstacles. They then call their dog to heel and send it out on the retrieve. Again, judges can set up blinds as standalone, single and double or in combination with various marked retrieves.

Winner of the Advanced competition was the duo of Kerry Armstrong and her Murray River Retriever Koa, while victory in the Open category went to Paul Hennessy and his Labrador Retriever Evie. Newly-elected Tasmania branch president Edwena Adcock presented the awards and thanked all involved for their outstanding camaraderie and willingness to assist.

WGAA Tasmania has made significant progress in assisting new members and coaching them to work successfully in their dog/handler teams. This work has only been possible thanks to SSAA assistance and the dedication of a solid band of enthusiastic members. Future events on the calendar include Spaniel and Hunt Point and Retrieve Field Trials. If you're interested in helping or competing in this fascinating discipline, contact gundogs@discipline.ssaa.org.au



THE IMPRESSIVE MURRAY RIVER RETRIEVER KOA IN FULL FLIGHT; KERRY ARMSTRONG RECEIVES HER ADVANCED CATEGORY AWARD FROM JUDGE KARL BRITTON; JUDGE JIM JEFFREY PRESENTS THE OPEN STAKE WINNER'S PRIZE TO PAUL HENNESSY (RIGHT).



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Good for hunters and collectors

OLD GUNSIGHTS & RIFLE SCOPES: IDENTIFICATION & PRICE GUIDE BY NICK STROEBEL, REVIEWED BY SAMUEL B. MANN

Though I prefer old scopes for my hunting rifles, collecting them to put in a box has much to recommend it. You can look 'at' them and 'through' them and, not requiring a licence, have as many as you like. With close to 600 pages and more than 750 photos and graphics, this book covers iron sights sold in the US since smokeless powder and most scopes ever known there up until 1985, as well as sections on scope mounts and accessories. It includes a chapter on optics and histories of important makers along with a 16-page 'gallery' of glossy colour photos.

I discovered this book about 15 years ago and you could say it helped change my life, as it became one of the main references for my own book* and I still refer to it regularly. It was published in 2008 and my later adventures on eBay made me think the author's European-scope valuations were full up, probably because the Global Financial Crisis knocked the stuffing out of many things as that year progressed.

Yet it seems to me those numbers are now close to what we might pay for old European scopes in Australian dollars. His US valuations seemed closer to the mark back then but might be a bit low these days, the valuations being what he deduced people would pay for things, not judgements of true merit. Some strange beasts have high estimates just because they're rare and while I admire the old B. Nickel and early Swarovski scopes, I'm amazed he valued them above the Zeiss/Hensoldt models of the 1960s and '70s.

Maybe because some people buy old scopes just to save money, he discounts any with mounting rails by \$50, probably because finding mounts for them will be neither easy nor cheap. Likewise, earlier iterations of any lines which later changed to 'constantly centred' reticles are similarly marked down, though it surprises me he'd nothing to say about the mechanics of that

transition in his 'optics explained' chapter. He appears to have taken the drawings and theory in that section from Bausch & Lomb's *Facts about Hunting Sights* and, since B&L had then eschewed any kind of internal adjustments, perhaps his understanding of such mechanical matters was lacking.

Despite his set against railed scopes, Stroebel says any German example which comes with provenance of being used for wartime sniping is worth three times the normal value. Ghoulish as I find that I was amused on once seeing a Zeiss ZF39 for sale, so claimed yet in absolute mint condition. Such 'mintiness' is remarkable in its own way but with no holes or marks of any kind on the mounting rail, it was hard to believe it could have served as a sniper scope or been used at all.

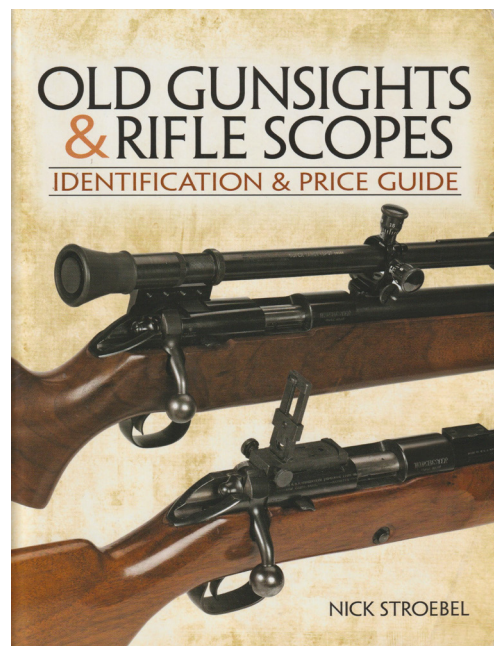
Among the illustrations are several old advertisements and these may be where he derived some of the text specifications. While ads are by nature puffs, they can be seen as primary sources for information that's hard to find elsewhere. The claims of some fields of view and constant eye relief in variables have me head-scratching though, as it's been common for eye relief to reduce markedly as magnification is increased.

There are mistakes, of course, and sometimes the ads are at odds with Stroebel's text. He writes that Bausch & Lomb plunger mounts came after the 'daisy-wheel' flat-spring type, though my observations of ads and patents found online suggest plunger mounts dated from at least 1949 and the 'daisy-wheel' arrived around 1963.

All in all though this is an excellent book, of value to both collectors and shooters looking for scopes to match older-style rifles. His listings of reticle-movement scopes may also help identify something to put on a big rifle for dangerous or wary game, when the user can't afford vulnerable internals or tunnel vision.

• *Old Gunsights & Rifle Scopes: Identification & Price Guide* by Nick Stroebel, Gun Digest Books 2008 (may be out of print as copies for sale online range from \$90 to \$800).

* *Light at the Start of the Tunnel: Are rifle scopes off the rails?* by Samuel B. Mann (Bunduki Books, Australia 2017).



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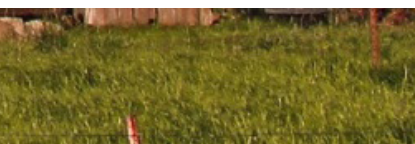
A Brisbane 'barn' bounty



**BLADE JOHNSTONE ON THE
RIFLE FIND OF A LIFETIME**



GOOD AS (ALMOST) NEW,
THE RIFLE AFTER BLADE'S
RESTORATION PROJECT.



For our annual trek from Brisbane to Bourke in New South Wales to hunt feral pigs, my son has been borrowing my 'go-to' rifle, a Browning BBR .243 Ackley Improved and my grandson a .222 Tikka. Not really a problem as I'd a nice old .22-250 Ruger Model 77 Mk.1 yet for some reason, after the last trip I'd an itch for another .243, thinking it might be a more versatile calibre in thick scrub and longer shots across open paddocks.

Nothing flash as it would be a bush gun used off a motorbike or from a 4x4, so it was fate when a Tikka LSA 55 in .243 popped up, though the advert said something like 'fair condition, as is, needs TLC'. Still, I thought it was worth a look but in more than 50 years of shooting I don't think I've ever seen a dirtier firearm. It was filthy and had rust on the outside of the barrel but I gave the bore a quick scrub and it looked OK, so I took a punt.

Before long it was on the workbench and I'm shaking my head as I didn't remember it being this bad, until separating the metalwork from the stock I received the first pleasant surprise from this rifle. After the kerosine, Hoppe's No.9 bore cleaner, elbow grease and compressor had stripped away the grime, I discovered all the screw heads were in mint condition. The feed ramp looked unmarked, bolt face the same, trigger adjustment screw still had the factory sealing paint on it and I could see no evidence it ever had scope mounts fitted (it has original factory sights). This rifle looked like it had hardly been used before being put away somewhere.

It had filigree rust and speckle pitting between the back and front sight, so I polished and cold blued it, same with the triggerguard purely to treat the rust. Another revelation was the low serial number for a firearm circa 1969, while the barrel is engraved 'Stirling, Tikka, Finland, Made in Finland' (the barrel on my Tikka .222 is engraved: 'oy tikkaloski.ab Made in Finland'). The barrels on both rifles are also engraved 'Bofors Steel'.



THE TIKKA HAS ITS ORIGINAL FACTORY SIGHTS; THE WOODWORK AND CHEQUERING CAME UP A TREAT.

Now to the woodwork and again, as the grime was removed, came pleasant surprises. No dings or scratches, chequering was good, the butt had a mottled appearance (not unsightly) and the original butt pad which said 'Ithaca' was also in good condition.

So back in the 1970s there was an Australian dealer called Fuller Firearms, who marketed Stirling ammunition and Nikko Stirling riflescopes and were an agent for Tikka. But why the Ithaca butt pad? The Ithaca Gun Company of New York, established in 1883, is a well-known manufacturer of shotguns in the US and also imported and distributed many firearms from Europe and put the Ithaca name on them. So I'm guessing the Ithaca butt pad was fitted at the Tikka factory instead of a Stirling one.

Reassembled and now presentable, the Tikka had the fine lines of a thoroughbred just like its Finnish relation Sako, with the wood-to-metal fit really quite good. But could the rifle shoot well enough? Down to the SSAA Belmont Range in Brisbane to find out. Three shots in an inch and two just outside at 100m, using the same loads as for my .243 AI with an 87-grain boat-tail projectile answered that question. The scope was a Kahles 6x of similar vintage to the rifle, the factory-set trigger was on the heavy side but broke cleanly and, with the trigger adjusted and bedding, I think this rifle will shoot into a 10c piece all day long.

I'm genuinely stoked with how my 'barn find' turned out and can only hope other shooters have the same good fortune to resurrect an old gun and give it a new lease of life, after what must've been 50-plus years in storage. ●

The AS Team

CHRISTMAS WISHLIST

The team here at *Australian Shooter* has compiled a shortlist of some of the best products of 2025 to ask Santa for. Thanks to the generosity of our suppliers, a few lucky SSAA members just might be getting an early Christmas surprise this year!

No need to apply, your SSAA membership automatically puts you on our nice list.

Merry Christmas everyone!



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5

6

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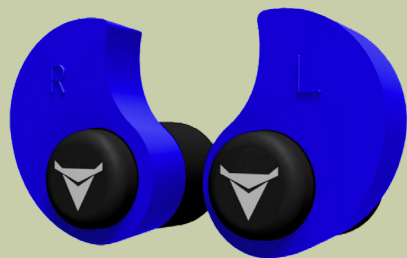


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8

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Think twice



ROD PASCOE TESTS AN ATTRACTIVE COMBO BY MAGNUM SPORTS

Sydney gun shop Magnum Sports launched an interesting rifle/scope deal earlier this year. Now while there's nothing unusual about firearms retailers putting together a package, Magnum's new proprietor Aubrey Sonnenberg has chosen the versatility of Howa's 1500 barrelled actions. He's paired that with an SCSA metal chassis and topped it with a Nikko Stirling riflescope, to cater to the hunting and ever-growing precision target shooting markets - and all at a spectacular price. *Australian Shooter* was keen to give the package the once over.

Howa 1500 barrelled actions are available in various calibres, lengths and profiles and the original trigger has been swapped for an H.A.C.T. two-stage, fully adjustable system pre-set at the factory. Currently the barrelled actions in the package are available in either stainless or blue, though 'blue' is actually an attractive dark Cera-

kote. The .223 Remington options offer a choice of a 20" Sporter or 24" Varmint profile barrel, while for the .243 Winchester and .308 Winchester you can choose from either a 22" Sporter or 24" Varmint.

All listed rifles cater to both target and hunting applications. With the growing number of target sports now including divisions for off-the-shelf production rifles, the combination of Howa barrelled action and Nikko Stirling scope offers an excellent entry-level platform for competitions such as Practical Rifle Series (PRS) or SSAA Practical Rifle competitions. But it's the rifle reviewed here that's the masterpiece of this package deal, offering a 26" blued and threaded varmint-weight barrel in 6.5 Creedmoor. It's not exactly a carry-around-the-bush sporter, it's a serious target rifle using one of the most popular long-range cartridges, but more on this special piece of kit later.



The stock in the Magnum package or, more correctly, chassis is made by Sydney-based firearms manufacturer Southern Cross Small Arms. Their Tactical Shooting Platform (TSP-X) is designed, made and tested in Australia and is compatible with AICS magazines. One MDT 10-round polymer magazine is supplied in the package, with the chassis itself machined from 6061 T-6 aluminium and with light grey anodised coating.

The forehand allows for the barrel to float freely and incorporates a special recoil lug clamp design. There are 15 slots, five on each side and five under the handguard, to fit M-Lok compatible accessories. There are also QD sling cup mounts on the chassis. There are additional spacers for the butt to extend length-of-pull with comb height adjustable also and, importantly, it doesn't get in the way when removing the bolt from the action.

The 20 Minute of Angle (MOA) Picatinny tapered base and a pair of 34mm scope rings, to handle the larger than normal tube of the Nikko Stirling Diamond 5-30x56 scope, are supplied by Tier-One of the UK. The rear ring even has a level bubble to help shooters avoid canting the rifle. While the photographs feature a bipod, this is an optional accessory although Tier-One also offers one which suits the package.

The first focal plane scope is a perfect match for this rifle and has an MRAD XTR reticle graduated in milliradians (or mil-rads). Windage and elevation adjustments in radians are becoming more popular as MOA graduations are slowly fading out of the shooting lexicon. The primary advantage of using MILS over MOA in scope adjustments comes down to the simplicity in making range and windage calculations, especially for shooters who work with metric systems and particularly at longer ranges. One radian



LARGE ELEVATION AND WINDAGE TURRETS WITH EASY-TO-READ GRADUATIONS ARE VITAL IN THE FIELD; A 5-30 MAGNIFICATION IS A DESIRABLE RANGE FOR TARGET SHOOTING AND HUNTING; RETICLE ILLUMINATION AND PARALLAX EASILY ACCESSED AND ADJUSTED.



ADJUSTABLE COMB AND FIVE LENGTH-OF-PULL SPACERS SUPPLIED.

represents one metre at 1000m or 10cm at 100m, each click of elevation and windage adjustment on the Nikko Stirling FFP representing one centimetre at 100m.

In a first focal plane scope the reticle is positioned in front of the magnification lenses, so the size of the reticle changes proportionally with that of the image as you zoom through the magnification range. FFP scopes are better for situations where accurate holdovers, range estimation and adjustments are needed at all magnifications (especially for long-range or tactical shooting). The mil-radians graduations on the reticle also change in size, so the shooter can calculate hold-off or hold-over at any power setting. Reticle patterns also allow you to size targets, judge distances and calculate wind brackets.

The side-mounted parallax focus adjustment comes down to 15 yards, meaning you can do your dry-fire practice indoors or tracking tests on the wall. There's a huge amount of internal elevation and windage travel in the scope's turrets. The windage adjustment has a dust cap that's pulled out for adjustment then snapped back in once set. Some shooters prefer to aim off

from a known windage setting so, by loosening the turret with the supplied key, zero can be set then aligned to 'o' on the turret. Incorporated within the parallax knob on the left of the body is the battery compartment and adjustment for the illuminated reticle.

The scope has a bright, 56mm light-gathering objective lens and the optics in general are better than I anticipated. The ZeroStop feature on the elevation turret allows you to return quickly to, and stop at, a pre-set zero. There's the option of installing the supplied power throw lever to adjust magnification quickly, even when wearing gloves in cold or wet conditions. There's an extra elevation turret with graduations but no numbers to allow shooters to customise the turret for their particular application.

As mentioned, the reviewed rifle takes the 6.5 Creedmoor cartridge and has a 26" varmint profile barrel, bringing the unit up to almost 7kg. This isn't for long hunts on foot and, in Aubrey Sonnenberg's mind, the rifle fits perfectly into one of the National Rifle Association of Australia's latest disciplines, Sporter Class. According to the NRAA, this match is specifically intended



FIFTEEN M-LOK SLOTS CONVENIENTLY LOCATED ON THE FORE-END; MAGAZINE RELEASE CAN ALSO BE ACTIVATED FROM INSIDE THE TRIGGERGUARD; HOWA'S SHORT-ACTION AND SCSSA'S CHASSIS MAKE A STURDY COMBINATION.



ALIEN 2: THE SEQUEL

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ISSUE 24

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to allow commercially available, shop-bought sporting, hunting or varmint repeating centrefire rifles to be used on NRAA ranges, as a way of introducing new shooters with existing compatible rifles to the sport. Like all target disciplines there are rules, though the underlying principle is you can shoot on NRAA ranges matches ranging from 300 to 1000 metres/yards.

So it was under these conditions I put the gun through its paces and I wasn't disappointed. The rules only allow a bipod for support and not a bench rest, while the match is shot from the prone position with a rear bag under the butt permitted. Not having too much experience with chassis stocks, I found the rifle very comfortable to shoot and once eye relief and comb height was set, it performed exceptionally well. At time of writing I'd only shot at 300, 400, 500 and 600m with factory loads and in varying light and wind conditions. For a brand new rifle which hadn't been run in I thought groups a tad over half a minute were highly acceptable.

While running in the barrel I used some loads I have for my other 6.5 Creedmoor rifle and these performed exceptionally well. So much so I'll continue using the Nosler Custom Competition 140-grain projectiles and 40.7 grains of VihtaVuori N-160 powder in both rifles at all distances. One change I did make was to swap the supplied 10-round magazine for a smaller MDT three-shot mag to act as a floor plate in the action for manual single-loading of ammo.

The scope performed as expected. Precise tracking was a given as was the return to pre-set elevation and quick, easy-to-adjust parallax and



HANDY FIVE-SHOT GROUP ACHIEVED BEFORE THE BARREL HAD BEEN RUN IN.

windage settings. Brightness at all settings was astounding and on an afternoon of overcast and diminishing daylight, detail on targets at long range was excellent. With the aid of electronic targets, precise shot-to-shot tracking is possible and gives instant feedback. The range of illumination intensity settings enhanced the reticles through the entire magnification range.

Magnum Sports' Howa/Nikko package has been well thought-out and provides an excellent, value-for-money way of breaking into some of the long range precision shooting sports, as well as offering the hunter a robust and accurate combo. The blued rifle packages retail for around \$2199 and \$2299 for the stainless options. ●



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Double your odds

JIM DICKSON APPLAUDS THE BIG GAME HUNTER'S 'INSURANCE POLICY'

When hunting game the most efficient gun to ensure success on an ongoing basis is a best quality side-by-side double-barrelled rifle, stocked to fit the person using it. Because only when it's stocked to your individual measurements can you achieve the handling qualities and accuracy you find in a fitted best quality game gun on birds.

A perfect example of this are the two British hunters who had fitted doubles made in .22LR for shooting waterfowl on the wing at ranges beyond a shotgun's reliable killing pattern. They took bag-loads far beyond shotgun range in a classic display of precision wing shooting.

Remember that with proper form, a shotgun is always pointed at the bird while it's being mounted and a shot fired as the gun is shouldered still should hit the target.

That same unerring accuracy without taking time to use the sights is the only thing that can save a hunter's life in a sudden surprise attack. Cape buffalo have been known to double back on their tracks and ambush pursuers at point-blank range, sometimes even attempting to strike from behind. Northern Territory water buffalo and domestic cattle gone wild have also used this tactic, as have other breeds of dangerous game. In thick cover it can be a deadly form of attack with a high chance of success.



You may also encounter an ambush by a wounded animal or one simply nursing a grudge when you least expect it, so it's at such times you have two shots which can be delivered exactly where your eyes are fixed. However, if you have the misfortune to be carrying a scoped bolt-action rifle, you have one shot with a gun not as well suited for accurate placement when shooting without sights. A double rifle with its stock fitted to the shooter's individual measurements can be fired accurately out to 100 yards and beyond without using sights, simply by handling it like a fitted shotgun. But you don't shoot dangerous game that far with any sort of rifle, you get as close as you can before firing.

The ability to fire two shots as fast as you can pull the rifle down from recoil is another advantage which can't be overstated, as this can be the difference between success and failure. A bolt-action is inherently slower to operate - sometimes it's fast enough and sometimes not. Then, depending on which way the animal is heading, a wounded beast might make it into thick brush where it has a better chance of a successful counter-attack, so affecting that one-shot kill is essential.

When a firing pin or other vital part breaks and renders a single-shot or bolt-action useless, you could be left with just a club to face an enraged marauder, good odds for the opponent but not so

THE WESTLEY RICHARDS .577 NE REPRESENTS THE ULTIMATE BIG GAME RIFLE; THE FAMOUS WESTLEY RICHARDS HAND-DETACHABLE BOXLOCK (ALSO CALLED A DROPLOCK). PHOTOS: WESTLEY RICHARDS.



much for you. These things can happen but with a double you have essentially two single-shot rifles in one, meaning you substantially increase your chances of survival. There's also the design to consider. A bolt-action rifle has a mechanical lifespan which seems long but is decidedly limited compared to the mechanical lifespan of a best quality round-action, boxlock or sidelock double.

Barrels wear out and have to be replaced the same as any other rifled barrel, though the actions will last into the millions of rounds fired. This is the result of precise hand-fitting of parts far beyond the capabilities of machines. The wear and stress is spread out evenly instead of just in the high and low spots of machine-made parts which wear unevenly, compounding the problem and hastening parts failure.

The exacting fit and finish achieved by highly skilled workers results in reduced wear and stress, to the point some guns at shooting schools

with five million rounds put through them had no measurable wear whatsoever. That's the kind of longevity and reliability I want, not a mass produced machine-made option with a five or ten-thousand round life expectancy.

Extractors are another critical component prone to breakage in bolt-actions, as they're relatively thin and highly stressed in use, in sharp contrast to the thicker examples in doubles. I've never seen one break and don't have to wonder why, as these oversize parts have virtually no stress and are virtually unbreakable. Obviously if a hunter's bolt-action extractor breaks when facing dangerous game, you're back to having the rifle turned into club again.

Gun weight is a significant factor in mitigating recoil and recovering rapidly for a second shot. Too many doubles are built underweight for ease of carrying, with little or no regard for how that'll slow down a potentially vital second shot. Re-

PAUL ROBERTS WITH A FINE ELEPHANT HE TOOK WITH HIS .470 DOUBLE.



member that rapid second shot is one of the double rifle's reasons for being. And those modern, slim and 'elegant' stocks with raised cheekpieces are another factor. The wood shouldn't be cut away after the cheekpiece but remain solid, like the old eight-bore and four-bore rifles for weight and to spread recoil over a broader area.

I've heard good reports about the effectiveness of mercury recoil reducers in the stock from the best quality gun trade in Britain. Paul Roberts of Roberts & Son used to make the Rigby doubles until he sold the name and also held a Kenyan professional hunters licence when it was still allowed in that country. He fits mercury reducers to 9.3x74R doubles to bring recoil level down to that of the 8x57 JRS, so European hunters can have two fast shots at running boar with the more powerful 9.3x74R, just as they can with the smaller 8x57.

And there's another reason I dwell on recoil. If you don't shoot enough with your gun, you'll nev-

er be as good with it as you need to be. The cumulative effects of successive heavy recoil blows add up fast and limit the number of shots you can fire in a day. Sure the ammo's expensive but, with a dangerous game gun, you have to balance this with: 'How much do I value my life?'

I should point out the 'plainer' doubles offered by famous British gunmakers were best quality mechanically, even if they lacked those top-of-the-line features sold as 'best' guns. There's a good reason explorers and hunters from the glory days of the Empire used best quality guns and not cheaper ones. There were no qualified gunsmiths in the wilds of darkest Africa or other remote areas of the Empire they hunted and explored. Your gun had better work without question or you may not be coming back. When your life could depend on the gun in your hands, you want the best there is and that's a traditional best quality double. ●

TOP: CAPE BUFFALO IS WIDELY REGARDED AS THE MOST DANGEROUS AFRICAN BIG GAME; JIM'S WIFE BETTY FIRING A WESTLEY RICHARDS .577 THREE-INCH DOUBLE-RIFLE.

BOTTOM: GILES WHITTOME TOOK THIS ANTELOPE WITH HIS .500 NE WILKES DOUBLE-RIFLE.

NON SOL PRE PRE



PAUL MILLER'S IN AWE OF THE SOLUS HUNTER

THE SOLUS WAS A
PLEASURE TO CARRY
AND STABLE TO
SHOOT OFF A STICK.

I was reading a review of a telescopic sight made in Europe by one of the world's premium scope manufacturers. The article was in an English magazine and the reviewer in typically British style said he'd decided to 'break with tradition' and start with the conclusion. He went on to say it was the finest hunting scope he'd ever used, then explained why it was so sensational despite its considerable price-tag.

The point of this aligns perfectly with my feelings about the Aero Precision Company from the US and their new Solus Hunter Lightweight rifle. Now I'm not going to say flat-out it's the finest hunting firearm I've ever seen or reviewed as that's a personal thing. But it's certainly up there as an example of a remarkably well-built and ridiculously accurate rifle, for those with the budget and desire for such a fine example of a thoroughly modern US design.

Aero Precision is better known historically as a maker of rifles with the AR15 platform and accessories for such. Based in Takoma, Washington with its production facility at nearby Lakewood, the company sets quality standards inspired by its early days in aerospace manufacturing.

When dealing with aerospace products you can imagine how fine the tolerances must be. There's no room for error in terms of the quality of materials used and absolute precision required in the manufacturing process. A look at their website shows a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility which makes the old saying 'you could eat your lunch off the floor' seem entirely credible.

The vast number of CNC machines and ancillary apparatus are immaculately laid out and produce rifle actions, aftermarket triggers, barrels, chassis, pistols and now complete rifles along with all the spares to support them. So let's jump in and see what this technology brings to a highly effective rifle that's only been in existence for a little over three years.

ACTION

The Aero Solus' light action is based on the hugely popular Remington 700 footprint which makes it easy to accessorize. The action has been cleverly scalloped and whittled away where possible without sacrificing strength, with a view to making it as light as possible in its hunting guise. It'll be available in more robust versions for target shooting but this one's their attempt at a premium hunting rifle and they've definitely succeeded.

The action is made from 416 stainless steel. These Solus actions have an integral 20-degree rail machined in but, in the interests of saving weight, the mid-section is removed to essentially leave two separate Picatinny bases. The 60-degree-lift bolt has a detachable head and three lugs. This short bolt lift facilitates speed of cycling and, depending on your scope's objective diameter, allows for lower mounting if required. The bolt body is fluted which also saves a little weight in a design said to better remove any gunk which might accumulate while hunting. The bolt works very smoothly with its oversize knob and fed cartridges perfectly every time.

The rifle came with a synthetic 10-shot magazine, perfect for those who need that amount of firepower, though I'd add to this a five-shot mag for ease and balance of carrying (and because I rarely fire more than two shots in the field). I'd also prefer the look of it with a shorter magazine and while that may sound a bit shallow, the appearance of a rifle is important to many shooters, including me.

TRIGGER

Solus make their own custom triggers for the aftermarket and this one is their TriggerTech version, easily adjustable for sensible hunting weights from 1-2.3kg. This rifle was set at the lighter end and I saw no reason to fiddle with it, as it felt superb and let off as crisply as you could



want, another important contributor to fine accuracy at the bench and confidence in the field.

BARREL

Aero says the barrel is their Helix 6 Precision match grade with the core made from 416R stainless steel. This one's button rifled, hand-lapped and wrapped in carbon fibre using their own proprietary process. It's 20" long in 308 Win with capped muzzle threads for the attachment of a silencer where legal or, more commonly, a muzzle brake to tame recoil of some of the more potent 308W factory loads available today.

This is undoubtedly the best carbon fibre-wrapped barrel I've seen to date, which lends a thoroughly modern and hi-tech look to the rest of the firearm. It dissipated heat extremely well when firing numerous loads off the bench and undoubtedly contributes to the stellar accuracy this rifle produced.

STOCK

The rifle we have for review is a prototype stocked with an AG composite adjustable 'Hunter' model, while the one now available in Australia is stocked with a Grayboe Phoenix which can be seen on the Nioa website. It's an equally adjustable stock with the difference being the solid full point of comb in front of the adjustable cheekpiece and scalloping in the stock below the comb. The method of comb adjustment is also different but should be equally effective. Made of 100 per cent carbon fibre, it's light and strong and makes a perfect support for the Solus' lightweight action.

The barrel's fully floated in the stock as you'd expect, again a great contributor to consistent accuracy over time. We've said before these carbon fibre stocks seem to absorb recoil and this is definitely the case here. Premium loads provided for review were pushing large 30-cal projectiles and the stock composition and clever ergonomic design certainly tamed recoil. The full pistol grip offered great control and aligned my trigger finger perfectly.

PERFORMANCE

My first range session was in ordinary conditions and frankly I wasn't at my best either. But the rifle impressed so much from a manufacturing point of view, I took it for another run and was glad I did. In the second session everything came together and the Solus proved it could shoot better than I can - what a difference a day makes.

To say I was impressed is a major understatement after enlarged one-hole, two-shot groups at 100m with Federal Gold Medal 175gn Sierra MatchKing and less than half-inch, two-shot

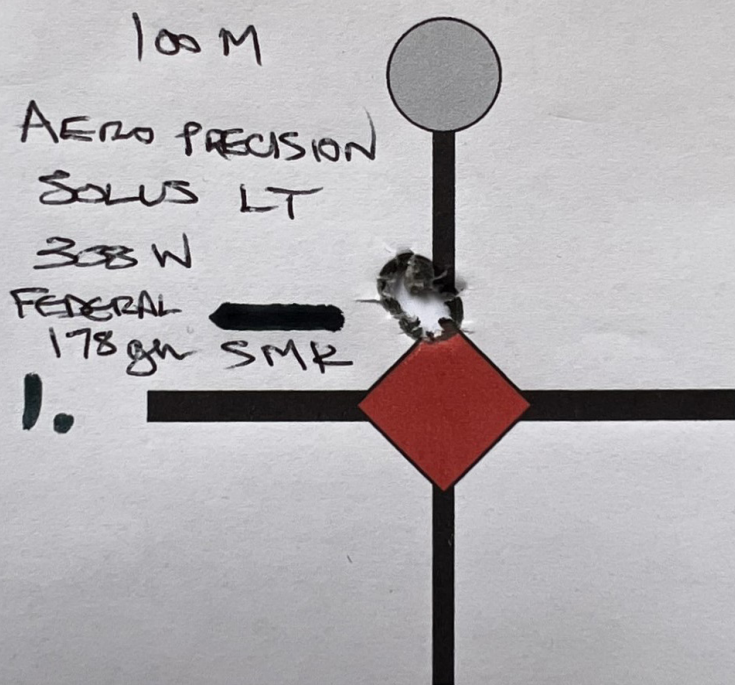
ACCURACY FROM THE BENCH WAS AMAZING AND LEUPOLD GEN 2 DIALS A GAMECHANGER; REMINGTON CORELOKT 180GN TIPPED PREMIUM HUNTING AMMO SHOT HALF-INCH GROUPS AT 100M; THE RIFLE LOVED FEDERAL GOLD MEDAL 175GN SMK MATCH-GRADE AMMO.



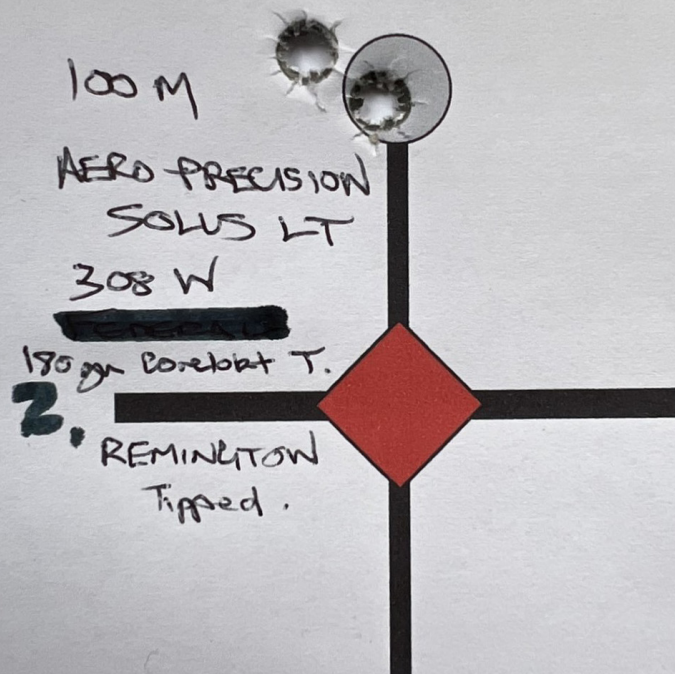
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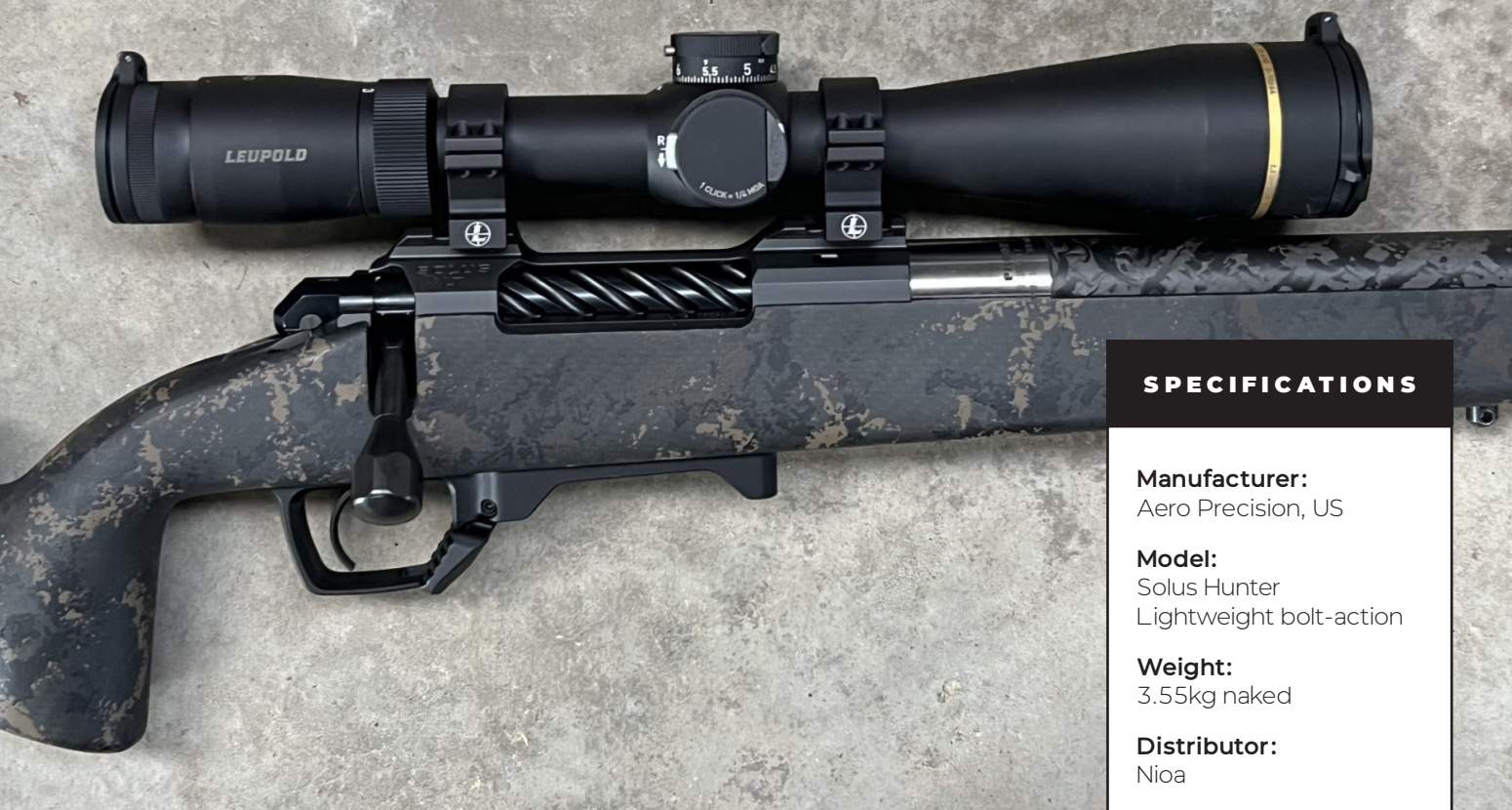
Distance:



Group A



Group B



THE SOLUS CUSTOM ACTION HAS BEEN TRIMMED DOWN AND THE BOLT FLUTED TO SAVE WEIGHT.

groups with 180gr Remington Core-Lokt tipped ammo. Once again more proof of how well Core-Lokt tipped hunting ammo shoots in our review rifles (better than my best reloads). These group sizes held all the way to the maximum 500m at the Hilltop Range in the NSW Southern Highlands.

With a two-inch orange aiming spot sprayed on a white-painted steel plate, I was able to shoot groups of about 2.5". For me that's another eye-opener on what seriously well-made modern hunting rifles are capable of with quality factory hunting and match-grade ammunition. Some readers may question two-shot groups but I find that's an effective measure and saves on expensive factory rounds. The third shot never makes the group smaller and it's also a measure of accuracy for me in the field, as I don't often fire a second shot at the same target.

I took the Solus to the NSW Southern Tablelands around our favourite hunting spots with high hopes of a nice deer or some large feral pigs. Sadly not an animal was seen (isn't it often the way) but the rifle carried beautifully with the optically excellent and top-of-the-line Leupold VX6 4-24 scope and mounts. The Leupold CDS (compact dial system) was spot-on with the factory ammo provided as it had been tuned at the Nioa factory range before dispatch.

The Gen 2 quick-hand detachable turret covers

were super-easy to use. They do away with all the fiddly adjustments with wrench and small screws which can be dropped or lost in the field, when removing turrets with the previous model Leupold - a great innovation. The whole outfit felt perfectly balanced and was a delight to shoot over sticks or a bipod from the ground, even though targets later in the day were distant rocks rather than deer and pigs.

Time constraints for returning the rifle meant I couldn't take the Solus on a second hunt. Yet I've no doubt this rifle and scope combination will perform perfectly on game at any ethical shooting distances, with a decent rest and game accurately ranged and the Leupold dial set. Assuming the shooter is up to the task, this Solus rifle with its immaculate construction and super-sensitive trigger will do its part.

So what I said at the start of this review holds true. The combination of state-of-the-art manufacturing with quality components, like the Helix 6 carbon-wrapped barrel and excellent TriggerTech trigger, all housed in an ergonomically designed carbon fibre stock really puts this outfit into the custom class category. This is a serious rifle at a serious price for the committed hunter but is it worth the price? I believe it is - and possibly then some. More at nioa.com.au

SPECIFICATIONS

Manufacturer:

Aero Precision, US

Model:

Solus Hunter
Lightweight bolt-action

Weight:

3.55kg naked

Distributor:

Nioa

Stock:

Grayboe Phoenix carbon fibre for Australian market, adjustable length of pull around 32-35cm, adjustable comb

Barrel length:

20"

Barrel:

416 stainless steel wrapped in carbon fibre, threaded with end cap

Sights:

Integral Picatinny bases
20MOA

Chambering:

308 Winchester, 1:10 twist barrel

Trigger:

Single-stage TriggerTech 'Field' 1-2.2kg

Warranty:

Five years

Price:

Around \$5500



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Fallowed ground

BILLY ALLEN'S AT ONE WITH NATURE IN THE GRANITE BELT

The pre-dawn chill gnawed at my hands as I crouched in the stillness of Queensland's Granite Belt, breath curling in the frosty air. It was one of those winter mornings where the world feels raw and quiet, like it's holding its breath for the sun to kick things off. I'd come for venison, a lone hunt through the scrub and granite-studded hills, but as I settled in with rifle slung over my shoulder I felt that familiar pull of the wild, something vast and untamed, bigger than just the chase.

I dressed in the dark of the early hours, pulling on my boots and checking my gear before murmuring the Hunters' Prayer of Saint Hubert under my breath, an old habit from years past. It's a simple thing, asking for a steady hand and a clear heart to take only what's needed with respect. "Lord, guide me through this," I whispered, the words fading into the rustle of gum leaves in the breeze. It's not just about the shot, it's a quiet anchor and a way to step into the hunt feeling right with it all. Then I set off hoping for a yearling fallow deer, the kind I reckon makes the best venison.

The Granite Belt's a unique spot for hunting. Rolling vineyards and orchards give way to wild patches where fallow deer roam, remnants of long-ago escapes. The frost crunched underfoot that morning and the air smelled of damp earth and eucalyptus. I'd scouted the area the day before, spotting trails etched into the undergrowth by recent activity.

Now as the sky softened from black to grey, I glassed the valley with my Swarovski 10x42 range-finding binoculars, picking out shapes in the morning mist. A small group of does and yearlings, heads down, feeding quietly about 300 yards away and among them a male yearling, evidenced by a pizzle barely noticeable through my binoculars, perfect for the table.

I dropped low and started my stalk, moving slow and deliberate through the scrub with the wind in my favour, carrying my scent back. At about 200 yards I eased up to the last tree between the deer and me, its trunk solid enough to brace against. I rested my Kimber Hunter .270 Winchester there, the rifle's light weight settling into my shoulder. Through the binos I confirmed the range at 198 yards, close enough as the yearling was broadside now, still unaware with ears flicking as he grazed.

I chambered a 130-grain Remington Core-Lokt from the good old green and gold box, reliable stuff, nothing fancy yet proven over years of hunts like this. I steadied my breathing to let the crosshairs settle on his vitals, the mist thinning as the sun cleared over the ridge as I squeezed the trigger. The .270 Win's report

FALLOW DOES LEAD THE YEARLING
ACROSS THE PADDOCK IN EARLY
MORNING SUN.





GOOD OLD GREEN AND GOLD BOX OF REMINGTON CORE-LOKT AMMO FOR THE .270 WINCHESTER.



FALLOW HERD JUST BEFORE THE STALK WAS COMPLETED AND SHOT TAKEN; BILLY WITH A FALLOW YEARLING TAKEN ON A MORNING HUNT WITH HIS .270 WINCHESTER.

rolled across the valley, sound bouncing off the granite outcrops as the yearling dropped clean to a solid hit. Does scattered with yearlings in tow, vanishing into the scrub.

Though I was sure he was instantly dispatched from the shot, I gave him 15 minutes on the ground then made my way down. He was a fine young yearling as I'd hoped, lean and tender (my favorite for venison). I knelt beside him to offer a quiet thanks, not a big gesture but something I do before field-dressing. The cold air bit at my fingers as I worked but the meat would be prime, a hard-earned prize from the morning's effort.

Yet it's the sunrise I remember most. I'd paused mid-stalk to watch it, the horizon igniting in gold and spilling light across the ridges. The granite glowed amber, the mist turned rosé and for a moment I just stood there with rifle in hand, struck by it all. Majestic's the word though that barely covers it. It's the kind of thing that makes you feel small yet tied to something ancient. A hunter's life is full of those moments if you're paying attention.

The trek back was heavy with the yearling's weight slung across my shoulders, yet it's a good ache that lingers like a badge. At the shed I hung him up to let the cold air set the meat. There's a straight line from field to freezer that's hard to beat: Simple, honest, the way it's been forever. Out there it'd just been me and the land, the magpies calling and light bending through the trees with no urban noise, no fuss, just the hunt.

Over a cuppa later I replayed the mist, the stalk, the shot. It's not about preaching or proving a point, it's in the quiet crunch of frost underfoot, familiar weight of a rifle in your hands and the sound of its report rolling through the hills. Call it nature's rhythm or something more but it's why I keep coming back to places like the Granite Belt. There's wild venison in the freezer now, the best kind, and a morning etched in my bones which I don't take for granted. That's the hunt and it's worth every frozen step. ●

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Jinxed!

THOSE WILY FOXES SEEM TO HAVE THE HEX ON JOE NORRIS

Ever since I was a boy I've had a fascination with foxes. I don't know why but it may have started when they raided my nanna's chook pens or perhaps when we had rabbits taken from our traps. Even though I was born in Australia I grew up overseas, both in South Africa and Papua New Guinea, as my father was involved in construction and that's where the work was. In later years he started his own earthmoving company in PNG so as a young man I spent 15 years there.

We'd return to Australia on holidays sometimes or between overseas work contracts dad had. At those times we'd either return to Alexandra where dad was from or perhaps Mansfield where mum came from but, either way, we had the opportunity to trap rabbits and go yabbing and generally enjoy being Aussie bush kids again.

We used to trap rabbits, sell meat to the butcher and dry the skins on a hoop of wire to sell to hat-makers. This provided us with pocket money and a means of buying Wasp air rifle pellets for our underpowered air rifles (I think they were Gecado 16s from memory). After carting as many traps as we could carry and setting them on the farm we'd permission to trap on, we'd get up before daybreak and check them before eagles took the rabbits.

Once we found just legs in some of the traps where something had taken our rabbits and, after examining the surrounding ground, we deduced we had a fox raiding our line. This went on for a few days before we came up with a plan to deal with the raider. We weren't old enough to have a .22 rimfire and our airguns were far from powerful enough to kill a rabbit, let alone a fox.

We found a rabbit burrow under construction so likely didn't have more than one entrance, yet it was deep enough that the 'digger' was home. We set a trap in the entrance and several others around it, just outside the reach of the first trap's chain. Next morning we were delighted to see the offending raider securely held by two rabbit traps. I think that's what started my fascination in trying to outwit the cunning fox, so I never miss the chance to hunt them when I'm in the southern states.

Some years ago I started teaching myself taxidermy and hide tanning and was after some

A COUPLE OF REDCOATS
JOE TOOK WITH HIS
COUSIN'S RUGER IN .17HMR.





TWO PREDATORS TAKEN NEAR GLEN INNES (NOTE OLD BULLET HOLE IN THE DOG'S EAR).

fox skins to tan. A mate from work put me in touch with a farmer friend of his near Ardlathan in NSW, so I travelled from central Queensland to hunt and camp on Barry's farm. I spent several days there spotlighting, stalking and whistling foxes but just couldn't seem to find one, in fact it got so bad I thought they were playing games with me.

I'd finished hunting one Sunday morning, packed my rifle away and was enjoying a cup of tea while listening to Macca on ABC radio. I was sitting in a fold-up deckchair with my feet on the bull-bar of the ute when a fox brazenly walked through camp as if I wasn't there. My rifle was packed away with bullets and bolt separately as required, so I knew there was no chance of pulling everything together in time to take a shot. All I could do was watch incredulously as it trotted up to my vehicle, sniffed then walked off into the long grass and scrub, never to be seen again. That was one of only two foxes seen on a trip of more than 3000km!

And that's typical of my fox-hunting luck. I've been invited to properties having trouble with redcoats only to find they've disappeared before I arrive. I don't dislike foxes and actually think they're quite good-looking animals, more cat than dog. Yet I just don't seem to have any luck hunting them and even though in the southern states they're relatively plentiful, they always seem to be scarce whenever I'm around.

Occasionally I'll strike it lucky and manage to connect with one or two, though that's the exception to the rule and, if my friends decide to go spotlighting, they won't take me as they claim I'm jinxed. I managed a shot at a fox one morning in the back paddock of my uncle's place. I wanted

some winter skins and it certainly qualified as winter that day, with heavy frost and clear skies.

Foxes had been coming around the house regularly for weeks, so I set myself up with a good view of the gully and open paddock they often travelled through. The rifle I had was a 465 Brno in .22 Hornet with Leupold scope. I'd loaded it with solid projectiles so I wouldn't destroy the skins of any animals I managed to shoot. Eventually a likely candidate did come sauntering across the paddock but wasn't coming to the house and stayed about 100m away, sniffing around in the bottom of a gully.

I may have been a bit impatient and took a shot instead of waiting. The bullet hit exactly where I wanted, just behind the front leg as the target was broadside to me, the intent being to take out the heart/lungs without too much damage to the hide. The fox took off with blood streaming from both sides of its chest, so I knew it wasn't going far and confidently went to retrieve it from where it had disappeared in the grass.

When I reached the spot I found a wombat hole with blood disappearing into the burrow but, even lying my full length on the ground, I couldn't see the fox. I found some fence wire and tried to drag it out by shaping a hook on the end. By pushing it into the hole as far as possible then twisting it I wouldn't snag it on the fur but all to no avail. Once again the jinx had rubbed my nose in it. I redeemed myself some days later by taking a pair from the same paddock using my cousin's Ruger .17HMR, so did have a couple of skins to take back to Queensland.

Most of the foxes I've collected over the years have been by catches while hunting something else. Some time ago I shot a dog and vixen together while targeting fallow deer near Glen Innes in NSW. The remarkable thing about this, apart from actually taking a fox, was the dog had a previous bullet hole through one of his ears. Naturally I wasn't using a rifle meant for skin shooting, so their beautiful winter coats were ruined by the 150grn projectiles from my .308, leaving me with just two tails.

We occasionally see foxes in central Queensland and I'd sometimes take them when I was a professional roo shooter out at Longreach and surrounds. Yet once you move away from sheep country they're not that common due to dingoes targeting them. Often I've been whistling foxes with friends and have done quite well (or at least they have). But I find that during winter it's much harder to attract them with a whistle and I don't really want summer skins to tan. So hopefully next time I have the chance to hunt foxes in the southern states the jinx cuts me some slack. ●

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RED FOR DANGER



LEON WRIGHT CULLS SOME LAMB-HUNGRY PREDATORS

With duck hunting season approaching I'd been busy preparing. Just the usual - checking decoys, making sure I'd enough ammunition, doing a bit of scouting to check on the local duck population before eventually building a makeshift hide in my usual spot on a quiet billabong, just far enough into the bush for it to remain undetected.

Yet while spending most of my time getting ready for the upcoming season, I'd let other obligations slip. Until this point I'd been honouring other commitments which involved keeping the ferals in check on a number of private properties I have access to, all of which has me sweet with the owners on whose properties I do most of my duck shooting.

Then a gentle reminder arrived in the form of one of those owners bearing some farm-fresh eggs and a hint that foxes were starting to threaten his lambing ewes. I'd been to the property a short while earlier after a fox was becoming a real nuisance. I shot a sizeable specimen in the paddock next to the sheep and all fell quiet for a while but, according to Peter, he was now seeing them prowling his paddocks in broad daylight.

My farmer friend is one of those guys who, if he sees a couple of rabbits hopping about, is facing a 'plague'. So I assured him I'd be there in quick time and, true to my word, my mate Blake and I arrived shortly after dark the following night. With everything ready I had a quick look through the handheld thermal while Blake set up the

shooting rest and loaded the rifle. It was to be a straight-out pest control exercise and I was using a Tikka T3 in 22.250 Rem topped with a Leupold 4-12x50 variable scope. Nothing fancy with the ammunition just 55-grain factory loads.

With the aid of the thermal it was easy to track loitering foxes hanging around the sheep with one wandering through the paddock in front of us, heading south in the direction of lambing ewes in the adjacent paddock. With everything sorted we moved into position and quickly caught up with the fox. Stranded in the beam he hesitated just that little bit too long as the 'whomp' of the bullet striking home signalled the demise of the first redcoat. A second was quick to follow as it was skulking around the ewes and a third soon



LEON'S FAVOURITE RIFLE FOR LONG-RANGE SHOOTING IS A TIKKA T3 IN 22.250 TOPPED WITH A LEUPOLD 4-12X-50 VARIABLE SCOPE.

THIS ONE FELL TO
LEON'S BRNO .22 RIMFIRE
AFTER BEING LURED INTO
SUITABLE RANGE.



after, the cheeky sod sprawled out on a mound of dirt to watch the sheep.

The following week was duck opening and while I was wandering around a dry swamp next door to my mate's property, checking out a couple of local dams, I came across another fox which had probably just left there. I was quick to add it to the tally, which I think took the total to seven removed from nearby lambing ewes that were close to the farmhouse.

The Thursday morning after duck opening, a guest and I were doing a bit of dam-jumping with the idea of increasing my guest's bag of ducks to take back to the city. He'd been hunting with my two brothers on billabongs near the river and, like the rest of us, had done poorly on opening day.

This property was another where I was expected to keep foxes under control, though it had been a while since my last visit. The big dam we were about to hit was more or less in the centre of a wildlife corridor and, like most wildlife corridors, ferals were making good use of it. So I wasn't the least bit surprised when my shot on a flock of rising ducks flushed a fox from the 'roo grass on the other side of the dam.

As luck would have it the fox, hell bent on putting as much distance between itself and me, practically ran over the top of my waiting colleague who'd been alerted to its presence by me yelling it was heading his way. Quick to make good on the opportunity, he dropped it with a single shot as it drew level with him. It'd been a while since he'd shot a fox and was rightly chuffed with his efforts.

I must be a glutton for punishment as a short time later my wife came home from a Parish Council meeting with a request from another member, asking if I could give him a hand to deliver a load of wood to a customer. The following day while making the delivery, he asked if I was interested in fox hunting as he had a property and they were proving a nuisance among his sheep. His place bordered a large stand of native pines and there always seemed to be foxes wandering in from there. When I expressed my interest he told me the property was fenced off, handed me a key and told me I was welcome to visit whenever the urge arose.

A week or so later I did just that. It was a bit late in the year to do any serious fox calling but I thought I'd give it a go anyway. There's something which draws rabbits and foxes to native pines and sandhills and there never seems to be a shortage of them, especially the latter. When

THE FIRST OF A FEW FOXES LEON TOOK FROM AMONG THE LAMBING EWES; WITH A NUMBER OF FOXES AMONG HIS LAMBING EWES, LEON'S FARMER FRIEND WAS HAPPY TO LEARN OF THE DEMISE OF SEVERAL.

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LEON'S HUNTING GUEST TOM OSMONT WAS PLEASED TO TAKE THIS WELL-CONDITIONED FOX WHILE HUNTING DUCKS.

Running directly away was a bad move on his part

my grandparents first came to this district they worked on one of the nearby stations. I've fond memories of my dad and I hunting rabbits out this way when I was a mere slip of a boy, so it was good to be here, even if only for a walk through the native pines.

With the wind dictating the direction I was going to hunt, I mooched along to a likely spot, settled down in front of a stump and started working the predator call. With no takers, which surprised me, I moved down another couple of hundred metres and this time raised a rather well-fed specimen that appeared from nowhere. With the fox assessing its bearings, I worked the call ever so softly and on it came. I was using my Brno .22 rimfire with a Leupold variable scope set on x3, so waited until it was just 20 metres away before firing.

While wandering the sandhills I spotted another sniffing around in a stand of 'roo grass. It wasn't interested in the predator call so I moved to the edge of the grass where the fox had disap-

peared, probably seeking a warm spot to rest up for the day. With the scope on x3 I was confident taking a running shot if I flushed it and that's exactly what happened. Running directly away was a bad move on his part and at a 15 metres it never stood a chance.

With the morning wearing on I decided to call an end to my hunt and come back in a couple of days to try the same patch. True to my plan I was back 48 hours later, this time in the afternoon and armed with my Beretta under-and-over and a belt full of BBs.

Perched in a handy spot just above the stand of grass I started blowing my tin whistle. My pathetic wailing must've sounded pretty good as a fox came trotting towards me immediately. It was a sorry-looking specimen, suffering from mange and succumbed easily when it ran into the load of BBs coming the other way. That's all I took that day though considering I'd caught up on the home front, I know the whereabouts of a sizeable sambar stag I plan on trying to collar next. ●

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Give it the once-over

CON KAPRALOS ON CLEANING YOUR RIFLE BORE FIRST TIME

I'm pretty confident in saying more pages and social media 'feeds' regarding cleaning of firearms and what, when, why and how have been created than any other firearm maintenance topic. While shooters and hunters exist at opposite ends of the cleaning spectrum with many in between, it's probably best I don't try to re-invent the wheel, so to speak, but stick to what happens when we fire a bullet down the bore of a rifle and why cleaning your rifle bore is important.

Most barrels are made from chrome-moly steel or stainless steel using a number of processes which I won't go into. The creation of a barrel and its bore will obviously leave tooling marks, with external marks being easily removed while internal marks can be dependent on the bore and chamber profiling process. Nevertheless custom-made barrels, which cost more, will tend to be hand-lapped to smooth out any such manufacturing imperfections prior to installing on a rifle, mass produced barrels probably not so.

Barrel 'break-in' is another hotly debated topic and there are many so-called experts out there all offering their two-cents worth. I only take the advice of a good friend who's one of Australia's leading gunsmiths and personally break-in all new barrels using a modified method which isn't too time consuming. But if you don't break-in a barrel it's no big-deal, each to their own.

So to the matter in hand. When we fire a bullet (projectile) down a rifle bore we are in effect pushing a copper-covered slug through a bore using a propellant, generating heat which produces carbon. Copper from the bullet will slough on to

A CARBON REMOVER SUCH AS THE ONE SHOWN FROM KG IS VERY EFFECTIVE.



the bore surface, including the grooves and lands, as well as the bore being coated in carbon and any other residue from burning of the propellant.

Thus, in Sara Lee analogy, 'layer upon layer upon layer' is what we get. Each layer, microscopically thin in dimension, is still fouling and impedes the progress of the next bullet and the next and so on. How many rounds does it take without removal of the fouling before accuracy tapers off? That I'll leave to the individual and what each hunter and shooter wishes to achieve. Target and benchrest shooters are fairly fastidious in maintaining their gear in peak condition and will have detailed logs on how many rounds a particular barrel has seen. Hunters on the other hand may not clean a barrel for a year or more and this is perfectly acceptable as long as accuracy isn't compromised.

However carbon, powder fouling and copper are the three items which will eventually need removing and knowing a bit about their chemical properties may assist in making your cleaning process a little less frustrating.

Carbon - one of the building blocks of all things animate and inanimate - is easily enough removed from a rifle bore using a hydrocarbon-based solvent, thus we use a solvent con-

Two dry patches
through the
fouled bore



Patch with KG
carbon remover
applied



Clean patches
following application
of carbon remover

taining soluble carbon to remove the elemental carbon left over from burning of the propellant.

My initial rifle cleaning regimen is once I've passed a couple of dry, clean patches through the bore to remove loose or particulate fouling, I pass patches soaked with a suitable carbon solvent through the bore - in one direction - until most of the carbon fouling has subsided. You can let the carbon solvent sit a few minutes before passing the next patch and so on but this initial solvent application removes the most important barrel contaminant first-up.

Carbon-removing solvents are available specifically for firearms but many use automotive brake cleaning aerosols which perform the task well, though care must be taken to ensure exterior barrel and stock finishes are protected from exposure to cleaning solvents not tailored to firearms applications.

A FEW DROPS OF COPPER SOLVENT ON A PHOSPHOR-BRONZE BRUSH - AND THE TELL-TALE "COPPER-BLUE" COLOUR IS PLAIN TO SEE; EVEN NYLON BRUSHES WITH A BRASS CORE WILL GIVE A 'FALSE-POSITIVE' WITH A "COPPER-BLUE" COLOUR EMANATING FROM THE SOLVENT ACTION ON THE BRASS.

COPPER

Copper in the form that bullets are furnished from is in the form of Cu^{+++} (the cuprous form). To remove Cu^{+++} from a rifle bore it must be chemically converted in some manner which basically involves converting it from its solid Cu^{+++} state to its Cu^{++} state (cupric form). Most



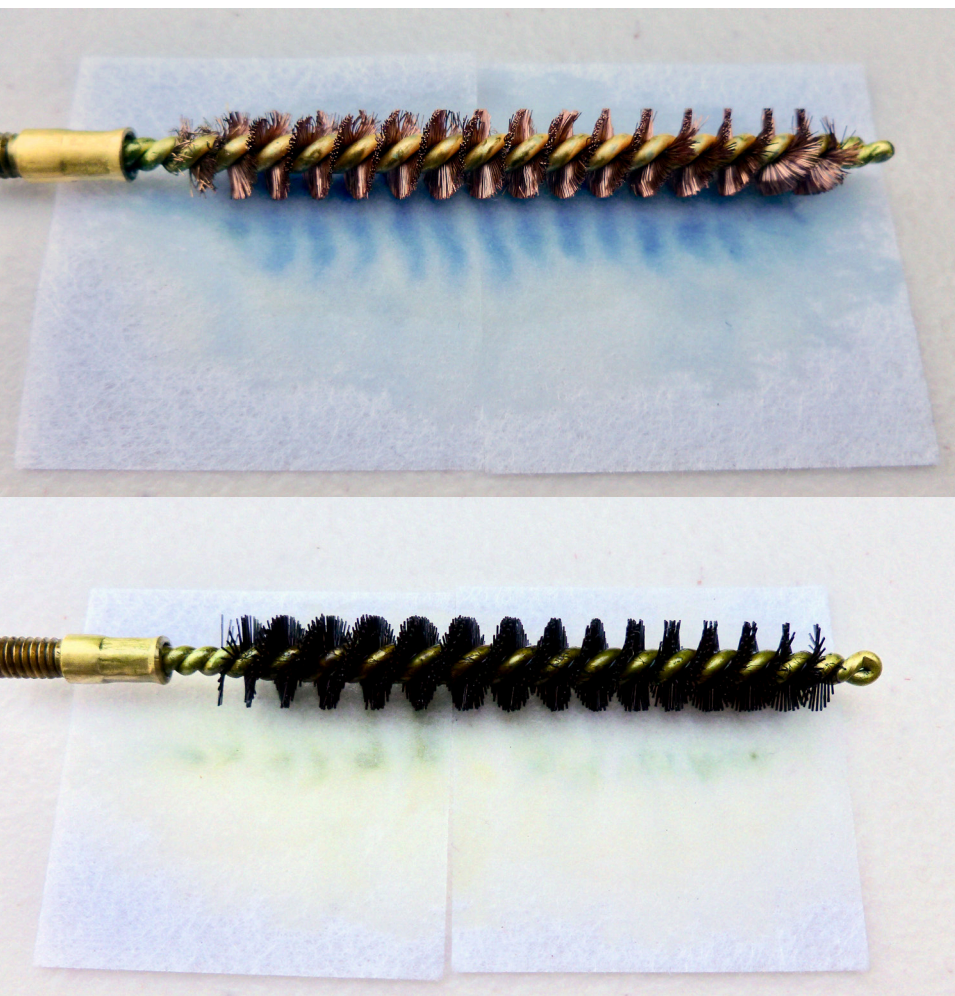
A BRASS .30-CALIBRE JAG (TOP) COMPARED TO A NICKEL-PLATED .30-CALIBRE JAG (BOTTOM). NOTE - THE NICKEL PLATING IS STARTING TO WEAR ON THE EDGES OF THE NICKEL JAG AND THE BRASS CORE CAN BE SEEN. TIME TO REPLACE WITH A NEW JAG.

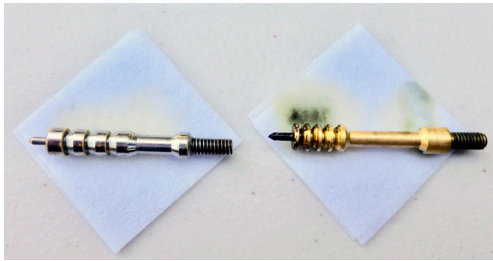
copper solvents perform in this way and produce the tell-tale 'copper-blue' patches we're used to seeing when cleaning rifle bores. However, some technically advanced solvents dissolve copper by chemically converting the Cu^{+++} (cuprous) form to a soluble cuprous form without giving these copper-blue patches. These solvents very aggressively strip copper fouling from any rifle bore and can even dissolve copper fouling in 'real-time', hard to believe but true. There are a few copper solvents available which act in this way and which one you choose is totally up to yourself but, as always, personal protective equipment in the form of glasses, gloves and an old dustcoat or apron should be worn when using carbon and copper solvents for firearm maintenance.

CLEANING EQUIPMENT

Most brushes and jags for firearms maintenance are made from brass or phosphor-bronze, of which copper is a major constituent. Using any sort of copper solvent with a jag or brush that contains brass/bronze and you will get a 'copper-blue' colour on your patches when swabbing out your bore, widely referred to as a 'false positive'. You may have a perfectly clean bore but when patch after patch come out 'copper-blue', that's the copper solvent dissolving the jag or brush! To avoid any false positives, nickel-plated jags and nylon-brushes are available which don't dissolve when exposed to copper solvents.

I use phosphor-bronze brushes when I need to remove recalcitrant copper and powder fouling and am fully aware the brush will be acted upon by the copper solvent. However, the phosphor-bronze brush does 'scrub' a tad harder than the nylon variety and is a better bet. As a tip, phosphor-bronze brushes can be cleaned and the effects of the copper solvent neutralized by washing them in shellite. I use a small bottle of shellite and can clearly see all the Cu^{++} fouling in



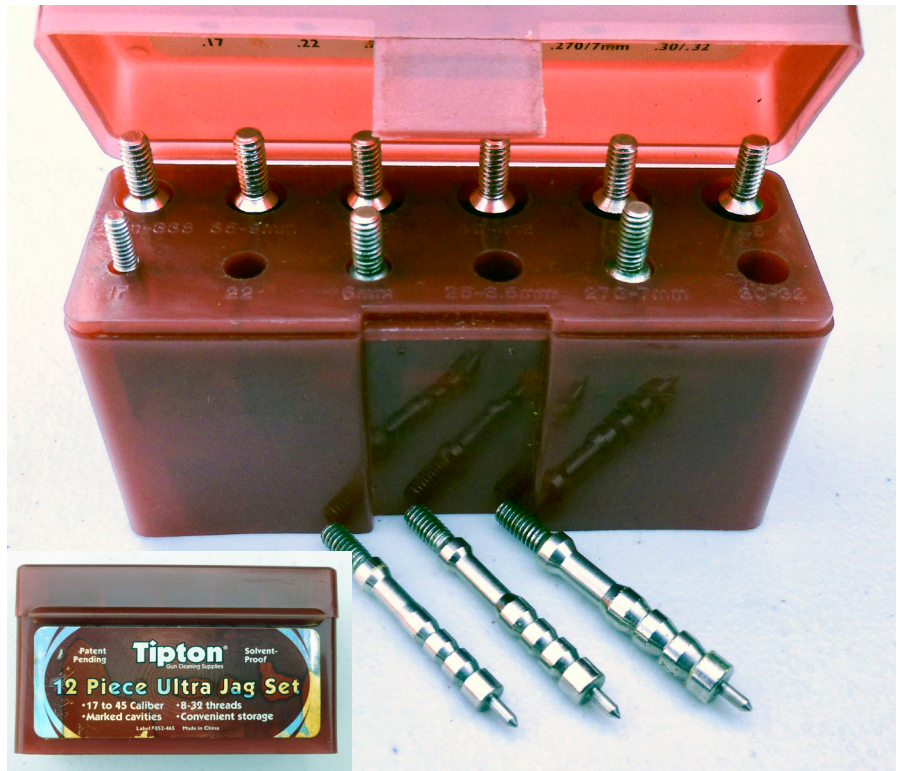


A FEW DROPS OF COPPER SOLVENT ON A NICKEL-PLATED (LEFT) AND BRASS (RIGHT) JAG - TRACES OF "COPPER-BLUE" CAN BE SEEN AROUND THE BRASS JAG, EVEN AFTER A MINUTE OR TWO POST APPLICATION.

the bottom of the bottle. The cleaned brushed can then be air dried and stored for next time.

For general cleaning I opt for nickel plated jags and nylon brushes with a nickel-plated core. The latter can be tricky to source but when I do find them I buy in bulk, opting for 6mm brushes to cover .243/6.5mm calibres and .30-calibre brushes to cover from 6.5mm up to .30 calibre rifles. Nickel-plated jags are easier to find and I use the Tipton brand. These brushes and jags eliminate any false positives, so if your patches come out clean (no blue or black) your bore is clean.

It's not rocket science but knowing some of the 'actual' science behind what happens when you send a bullet down the rifle bore makes cleaning a little easier to understand.



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DEREK NUGENT SAYS BEING PREPARED SHOULD BE SECOND NATURE



One of my favorite reads in this magazine is Scott Heiman's regular Bushcraft and Survival column. Clearly drawing on first-hand experience, I find Scott's insights to be both astute and persuasive and his advice sensibly pragmatic and sage. His column 'Blood . . . and lots of it' (*Shooter*, April 2025) struck a particular chord with me in respect to the awful potential of not being fully prepared for all possible eventualities and emergencies in the field. It also prompted me to take his theme 'the life you save might just be your own' and apply it to another SOS scenario.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

My light bulb moment in respect to the adequacy of most first aid kits occurred in 2013 when I had a mishap with a chainsaw while clearing saplings on my property. The clutch failed and as a result I ended up with a nasty cut above the knee. There was indeed 'blood and lots of it'. Fortunately I was there with my then 11-year-old son Joseph and I can say I've never been more proud of him for the way he reacted to the emergency.

Rather than falling to pieces at the sight of blood streaming down my leg, he listened carefully to my instructions and set off cross-country to fetch the neighbours. The cavalry arrived soon after and to cut a long story short, one operation and five weeks off work later I was good as new. On reflection I now realise how lucky I was to escape unscathed as, had the cut been deeper and a little higher, I'd have been at risk of potentially fatal blood loss.

My first aid kit proved adequate but only just and consequently has now been upgraded to military standard, including dressings to cover the biggest of wounds and tourniquets (as advocated by Scott). Interestingly, the upgrade was my son's work as during his stint in the Army he qualified as a combat medic, so knew exactly what was required. The other question I ponder is what

would've happened if I'd been alone and unable to extricate myself from the situation? Hence the stimulus for this article, for while I'm sure all hunters carry a first aid kit afield, how many also have the means to summon help should an injury render them incapable of 'walking out' unaided?

The sort of scenarios I'm envisioning here are real and not necessarily too uncommon, the fall which at best causes a nasty strain and at worst an immobilizing broken limb. A potentially venomous bite from an Eastern Brown, Taipan or another of our deadly snakes, or a head wound which impedes cognitive function and rational decision-making. Becoming 'lost' and separated from your hunting party or being stranded by an unexpected turn in the weather, heat stroke, illness or any one of a hundred other similar circumstances.

What each has in common is the fact 'rescue', or at least the intervention of another party, is required to prevent a bad situation from becoming far worse. So consideration needs to be given to what a hunter might carry to attract attention and summon help if and when required. Fortunately modern technology has literally 'come to the rescue' with a variety of portable, hi-tech devices which are reliable and relatively cheap in terms of what price you place on your safety if not your life.

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Our lives are awash with gadgetry these days, some of it puerile by nature and application but most of it capable of augmenting things for the better and this applies to all outdoors persons. Take the mobile phone. Everyone has one and it's a sensible addition to the daypack of every hunter. As a case in point, during the Covid 19 pandemic my boss needed to contact me to come into work to plan a school response to various impending government mandates. Never mind it was a Saturday and I was deer hunting at the time!



THE OUTCOME OF A
FALL - YOU'RE NOT GOING
ANYWHERE ON THAT ANKLE.

Nevertheless, because I had my phone on me it didn't matter I was 60km from town and halfway up a ridge line, I was still in contact with the outside world. The kicker is I was literally about 10 seconds away from pulling the trigger on a young doe for the freezer. Duty called however, so I abandoned the hunt and reported to school in full hunter's rig (including rifle). It made for an interesting story in my retirement speech and to this day I still maintain the Education Department owes me a deer.

The point is mobile coverage is good and improves every year so, in most areas, should you need assistance a simple phone call to friends, family or emergency services would see you sorted. If you carry a sufficiently modern iPhone there's also the inbuilt emergency SOS feature which allows you to call emergency services or text for help via satellite, even without cellular coverage or Wi-Fi. Android phones have a similar feature which is usually activated by a button combination depending on the model.

Now I don't profess to be an expert in mobile phone capabilities, so best to do a little online research (or consult your kids) about how to use this feature. A satellite phone is also another practical if expensive alternative, particularly if your safari regularly takes you well off the beaten track, though you can rent them in the short-term as a cheaper option.

A second category of potentially lifesaving technology is the versatile UHF CB handheld radio. These devices have been around for years and, as with most technology, have become increasingly versatile, reliable and cheaper. Members of my hunting crew have carried them for years to great effect. They're available both online and from bricks and mortar retailers in a bewildering array of iterations, from single units to combo packs offering multiple options and accessories.

Reputable manufacturers include Oricom, Uniden and GME which are stocked by businesses like BCF, Anaconda and Repco to name but a few. They're readily available with an array of differing features at value for money prices and I use a set of 5-watt Oricom radios which include an LED torch function and FM radio. Yet they do have limitations and transmission range depends very much on the environment and terrain. In fact they work best when you have line of sight to whoever you're communicating with.

Having said that, I've had instances in ridge country when I've been able to pick up the conversations of council road crews working many kilometres away. In general the transmission range is optimized in open spaces without obstructions like hills or buildings. Range is affected by concrete structures, heavy foliage



or by using indoors or in a vehicle, yet they're a valuable tool and I wouldn't be without mine. Just make sure everyone knows how to use them, what frequency you'll be on and consider carrying spare batteries.

More recently a third category of device has appeared and gained much popularity, particularly as prices have dropped in response to advances in technology. I'm talking about Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) which had their origins in maritime EPIRBs but over time have evolved into a range of small, lightweight devices perfect for those venturing into the great outdoors.

PLBs are designed to alert search and rescue to your position should you run into serious trouble and I stress 'serious' trouble. They're intended to be used in only the most dire emergencies and there are significant penalties for misuse. Once activated the PLB will transmit a signal via satellite to emergency services. The quality of the signal is affected by terrain, vegetation and buildings, so it's important to deploy your PLB correctly, preferably in a clear open area.

A SELECTION OF HI-TECH OPTIONS FOR SUMMONING HELP.



TWO READILY AVAILABLE PLB EXAMPLES.

Once activated it's vital you stay where you are as emergency services will use the signal to target your location. Rescue time is of course dependent on factors like weather, terrain, accessibility and availability of rescue resources. In Australia it's mandatory to register your PLB with AMSA (Australian Maritime Safety Authority) which will quickly call your emergency contacts and advise them of the situation. As with UHF radios there are a myriad of manufacturers offering PLBs and a correspondingly large range of retailers. Features and price points vary significantly so personal preference would be the decider in terms of what to buy.

OLD-SCHOOL OPTIONS

But what happens when technology fails? As noted there can be issues around signal strength, coverage and reception, with batteries and battery life also crucial factors in the effectiveness of hi-tech 'rescue' devices. Similarly, what if the unfolding emergency has resulted in loss or damage to your phone, UHF radio or PLB. Never fear as there are some traditional 'old-school' alternatives, a bit of bushcraft if you will.

The name of the game here is attracting attention. Most outdoors people understand there are certain things which stand out in the bush with movement and noise, unnatural colours or flashes of light, fire and smoke being chief among them. With this in mind there are several simple pieces of kit which can be easily carried and readily deployed to great effect in an emergency.

Fire is mankind's oldest tool and the ability to make it at will is a genuine life skill. The sight of a fire in the hills at night, or a column of dense smoke billowing above the trees is bound to have landowners either investigating themselves or on the phone to emergency services. Assistance would be quickly to arrive and no, I'm not

advocating starting a major bushfire, moreover a well-positioned signal fire.

To this end I carry multiple methods of fire-starting with matches in a waterproof container, a lighter and flint and steel which is incorporated into a folding knife I carry on my belt. I'm also never without a good quality whistle, the piercing repetitive blasts of which in the stillness of the bush would certainly attract the attention of potential saviours.

Unnatural colours and flashes of light are another tried and proven method. A piece of blaze orange material or survival blanket can be waved to attract attention or secured to a tree for the same purpose. The flash of a mirror or reflection from a survival blanket will also alert searchers on foot or in the air. Even after dark, light can be used to advantage and aside from that of a campfire, tying a breakable Cyalume (chemical glowstick) to a length of nylon cord and swinging it in a circular motion will also be seen from the ground and the air (in the military this is called the 'buzz saw').

All these options are low-cost, readily available, easily portable and do the job without having to rely on the sometimes uncertain performance of hi-tech devices. Another simple, pertinent and prudent precaution, particularly if hunting alone, is to ensure someone is aware in advance of your plans, location and timings.

WHY TAKE THE RISK?

Whether out in the field for a few hours or a few days, it's commonsense to be prepared for all eventualities. In my mind simply carrying a small first aid kit and snakebite bandages isn't sufficient. If you're unfortunate enough to be immobilized by an injury or otherwise stranded in the bush, you're relying on your own wits and preparedness to save your skin.

These days the variety of cost effective hi-tech devices which either by coincidence or design can be used to summon help in an emergency are legion. In most regards they're reliable, lightweight and easy to carry and in fact it's no effort to take both a mobile phone and PLB. Though not discussed here in any detail, a good quality torch with strobe function is also an easy carry and guaranteed attention-grabber at night.

Complementing or backing-up your devices with some old-school know-how is also ridiculously easy - a lighter, whistle and survival blanket and you're good to go. In the end it's each individual's choice as to what safety equipment they opt for but I say: 'Why take the risk?' As Scott so eloquently put it: 'The life you save could be your own'.



SIMPLE OLD-SCHOOL BACKUPS TO MODERN TECHNOLOGY.

The awesome foursome

TOM KENYON OFFERS HIS TAKE ON A COMPREHENSIVE SHOOTING QUARTET

When I started shooting I spent lots of time reading magazines and dreaming of the guns I'd buy 'when I grew up' and it always came down to the same four firearms. I still read shooting magazines, still dream of the guns I'll buy and, while some may debate whether or not I have in fact grown up, I now own my dream four (and a few more). They've stood plenty of shooters in good stead and I'd go so far as to argue these four should be pretty much everyone's first four firearms.

.22 LONG RIFLE

This is easy as just about every shooter owns a .22. They're great for learning, cheap to shoot, quite accurate and, at close range, pretty hard-hitting. They're perfect for shooting rabbits and I've spent hours plinking at targets, spotlighting and walking fields and hills with the venerable .22. You can pick up a decent second-hand example for a few hundred dollars, and for years I used a second-hand Sportco repeater I took hundreds of bunnies with. It was reliable and accurate and cost just \$75. But I've shot lots of others, from expensive target rifles to cheap and cheerful entry-level models and had a heap of fun. I recently bought my daughter her first rifle and it was a good old .22

You'd be surprised what I've brought down with a .22. Rabbits of course but also feral cats, foxes, kangaroos, crows and sheep (not hunting but sometimes these things have to be done). I've even taken pigs at almost point-blank range after chasing them into the lignum and being charged, in hindsight not my brightest moment but hey, we were all young and stupid once.

One of my cousins, with no other option, even dropped a water buffalo with a Ruger 10/22, a crazy story from the Territory in the 1970s and never to be repeated. I wouldn't recommend using it for much more than rabbits, cats and foxes at appropriate ranges, though it can be a surprising little cartridge when it needs to be.



.223



.223 REMINGTON

Another incredibly versatile round and a great introduction to centrefire rifles. Accurate, hard-hitting with little recoil and, as far as centrefire cartridges go, relatively cheap to shoot. It's ideal for cats and foxes out to reasonable ranges and plenty of roo shooters use this cartridge. I've used it to take deer, goats and pigs (with good placement) and bear in mind there's no minimum calibre for deer in my home state of South Australia.

Closely related to the 5.56mm NATO round, it's no real surprise they hit hard when you consider the 5.56 was designed as a combat round. I often think as shooters we tend to 'over gun', and by that I mean choosing a bigger calibre when a smaller one would be just fine with careful shooting.

It took me a while to buy a .223 and, when I did, it was also my first left-handed rifle and I love it. Quite a few foxes have fallen to it already and I'm hoping plenty more to come. Another advantage of the .223 is its low recoil, meaning it's a great step-up for new shooters when they decide to advance from the .22.

.308 WINCHESTER

Just about everything I can say about the .223 I can say about the .308 only bigger, further and harder-hitting. It's accurate and has great reach at practical shooting ranges. Sure you can choose calibres which go further, hit harder and shoot flatter, yet the .308 will deal with anything Australia has to offer and is readily available. Furthermore, you can buy a decent second-hand one at a reasonable price, though if you're looking for new, almost every centrefire rifle comes chambered in .308 and you're spoilt for choice. And for my fellow southpaws, there are plenty of left-handed options too.

My cousins in the Territory use theirs to deal with pigs by the dozen along with plenty of water buffalo. And if you've ever watched Outback Jack on YouTube, you'd have seen him dispatch camel after camel with a good old .308. Brumbies, goats, donkeys and tens of thousands of deer fall to .308s in Australia every year, so for bigger game at longer ranges you can hardly go wrong. I've only just bought my first one and am looking forward to joining my cousins for a few days of NT hunting next year.



.308

12-GAUGE SHOTGUN

There are plenty of things to target with a shotgun and the most versatile round is the 12-gauge. Again it's readily accessible, comparatively inexpensive and incredibly versatile. The 12-gauge just continues to deliver results for shooters everywhere. Clay targets, ducks, rabbits and pigs with solid slugs, goanna when hunting with traditional owners and so many more have fallen to the 12-gauge. In South Australia, the government is having deer culled from helicopters using 12-gauge shotguns, which may not be ideal from our point of view but clearly shows what it can do.

You can buy a well-priced side-by-side second-hand to start you off and, if you want to spend a bit more, the options are many and varied. These range from lever and button release to beautiful over-and-under target shotguns. Of all firearms, shotgun owners seem far more prepared to spend money on their guns than most others, with some of the high-end prices just eye-watering. So if you're putting together four starters firearms, a 12-gauge should definitely be on your list.



And there you have it, my suggestions for the first four firearms you should own. Of course your list will depend on what you shoot and where, though I'd be surprised if there were four more versatile options out there.

If you've followed closely, you probably worked out that I didn't go down this path when starting out, as circumstances and finances got in the way. In fact for years my four rifles were (in order of acquisition) a 'sporterised' .303 (\$50), Sportco .22 (\$75), .338 Winchester Magnum (donated by a friend who no longer shoots) and a .177 air rifle to teach my children.

I've been swapping them over the past year or so to finally have my starting four. The .303 will go to my brother as his first rifle, the Sportco was replaced by a new .22 after it finally expired, one of the two air rifles will go and, as for the .338, that's coming to the NT with me because, well, I just like it. ●

DEAR SHOOTER

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE
I write to address some anomalies in John Maxwell's article 'New player in the Aussie munitions sector', (*Shooter*, September 2025). The article suggests ARES Armaments are a second entrant to the munitions manufacturing market when in fact there are four independent players in this space.

He states that in the specialist Military and Law Enforcement (M/LE) arena, specifically in specialised projectile manufacture, "no-one is doing it" (here in Australia), yet Outer Edge Projectiles have been doing this with Australian Munitions et alia for more than 15 years and we're far from the only ones. There are quite a few more players than that.

ARES CEO Jason Murray is quoted as saying most of 'our' time is committed to dealing with 'red tape' but the real issues are much larger than this. No Australian bank will fund an Australian firearms or munitions enterprises as a matter of policy, even those solely dedicated to supporting M/LE agencies! Same with Australian insurers. We have to be privately funded and underwritten by overseas entities.

These policies are endorsed by our Federal Government . . . hypocritically demanding financial depth, insurance coverage and 'supply chain sovereignty'.

Despite these challenges, many would be surprised to learn Australia is already at the worldwide forefront of new small arms ballistic technology. We might be small scale compared to the US or Europe, yet are far more flexible in our capacity to adapt to new technologies. We don't have outdated, multi-billion-dollar investments to protect. Legacy bullets have been around for 145 years - technology has moved on significantly since then.

Steve Hurt, Outer Edge Projectiles

WE AIM TO PLEASE

Just a quick word to pass on my thanks for a great read with the August and September editions of *Australian Shooter*. Both contained interesting and wide-ranging subjects which may have been slightly lacking in previous issues. Here's hoping you're able to keep it up.

David Ashby, via email

ENVY OF THE CLUB!

Just a line to thank *Australian Shooter* and John Dunn in particular for the superb Top Shots information on my Alexander Henry falling block rifle. When I took it on its first visit to the SSAA range at St Marys, I was able to fire the rifle as the previous owner had worked out a formula using Trail Boss powder behind a 449-grain projectile. Needless to say I was the envy of the club! Again, thank you for the invaluable information.

Peter Semier, NSW

GREAT INFORMATION

Thank you very much for publishing the Top Shots Q&A from Peter Semier regarding the Alexander Henry falling block rifle (*Shooter*, October 2025). I'm fortunate to have a rifle with rack number 96 which, after reading the extensive information supplied by John Dunn, I now know was in service with the NSW Naval Brigade. Please pass on my thanks and appreciation to John for providing such an informative response to Peter's question.

Paul Sandilands, via email



THAT'S EXTRAORDINARY!

I've just renewed my SSAA membership for the 61st time and my wife Mary has been a member for 48 years, 38 with her current name and 10 years under her previous name. We were wondering how many other couples in the Association would have a combined membership of almost 110 years.

I frequented the Springvale range when I joined in 1965 and my most recent visit was a month ago. The late '60s saw me mostly at the former Tynong North range east of Melbourne, while Mary and I have shot together at Springvale, Little River and Wodonga.

James Murphy, Vic.

• If you or someone you know can beat that, let us know at edit@ssaa.org.au

SEND LETTERS TO:
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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.

Gallery Rifle National Championships

February 27-March 2, 2026

Riddell Range Complex, Runnymede, Tas.

Program: Friday 27: 9am Registration and practice, 12.30pm Rimfire supplementary events. Feb 28-March 2: 50m Precision, 1500 Match, Timed and Precision 1, Multi-Target (Gallery Rifle C/F, Classic Rifle C/F and Open C/F will be contested over these days). Facilities: Limited canteen, limited camping at 770 Woodsdale Road. Contact: Andrew Judd 0418 374 008.

Rifle Metallic Silhouette National Championships

April 3-6, 2026

SSAA Majura Range, ACT

Program: April 3: Dawn to 8.30 practice and weigh-in, 9am 40 shots Rimfire Hunting Rifle followed by 40 shots Centerfire Hunting Rifle. April 4: Dawn to 8.30 practice and weigh-in, 9am 80 shots centerfire. April 5: Dawn to 8.30 practice and weigh-in, 9am 80 shots rimfire. April 6: Dawn to 8.30 practice and weigh-in, 9am 80 shots Air Rifle. Prizes: Medals all grades including juniors, two-gun medals and team trophies. Facilities: Camping on range with water and showers, canteen all weekend. Contact: David True 0423 043 663 or dtrue222@gmail.com.

ACT

Gallery Rifle State Championships

January 14-15, 2026

SSAA ACT, Top Range

Program: 9am start Wednesday 14: T&P1 30-shot GRCF or Classic, 1500 150-shot GRCF or Classic, 50m Precision 30-shot GRCF or Classic, Multi-target 24-shot GRCF or Classic. Thursday: T&P1 30-shot GRCF or Classic, 1500 150-shot GRCF or Classic, 50m Precision 30-shot GRCF or Classic, Multi-target 24-shot GRCF or Classic. Please note - pistol calibre rifles only. Facilities: camping available. Contact: Mark Lovell gallery.rifle@ssaaact.org.au

Early Australia Day Rifle Metallic Silhouette State Championship

January 16-18, 2026

SSAA Majura Range, ACT

Program: Friday 16: 8.30am practice and weigh-in, 9am 80 shots air rifle. Saturday: 8.30 practice and weigh-in, 9am 80 shots rimfire. Sunday: 8.30 practice and weigh-in, 9am 80 shots centrefire. Prizes sponsored by RDT Products for all grades including juniors. Facilities: Camping on range with water, power and showers, \$10 per person per night, juniors free. Canteen all weekend. Contact: Mark Lovell 0401 867 839 or mnl1@live.com.au or David True 0423 043 663 or dtrue222@gmail.com.

Black Powder Cartridge Rifle Silhouette State Championships

January 19, 2026

SSAA Majura Range, ACT

Program: Dawn to 8am practice and weigh-in for Black Powder Smallbore Cartridge Rifle match, 8.30 Black Powder Cartridge Rifle match. 1pm practice and weigh-in, 2pm 40 shots Black Powder Cartridge Rifle. Facilities: Camping on range with water, power and showers, \$10 per person per night, juniors free. Contact: Mark Lovell 0401 867 839 or mnl1@live.com.au or David True 0423 043 663 or dtrue222@gmail.com

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MUCH TO LOOK FORWARD TO - TOGETHER

WORDS:
MARK VAN DEN
BOOGAART



A few months ago my son and I celebrated our seventh 'Christmas in July' hunt and even though we missed the New South Wales snow, it was still mightily cold in the Pilliga. Ours was a great camp with six adults and four young people, including my boy, enjoying the expanse of the Pilliga scrub. Watching suitably attired youngsters running around kicking up dirt, throwing sticks and holding earnest conversations about calibres, rifles and video games around the campfire, gave me both hope and drive for the future.

Of course pigs and goats were harvested, with old friend and newly-minted hunter Graeme taking his first game animal as well as putting himself in a position to try his luck on a few more. I even managed to shoot some poor quality footage of Pilliga deer, something I've been on the lookout for since the drought broke almost a decade ago.

Looking back over the year, my hunting world turned a little during 2025. From the outside looking in, we expanded our camp layout by introducing a second tent and gazebo. From the inside looking out, the change was driven by my son's desire to have his own tent. From now on we'll travel with two small ones rather than a single large family unit, which of course means I now have a spare family tent.

The other was it would be my son's last as a follower. Starting back in late 2024 we began the



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: A YOUNG HUNTER IN THE MAKING.

process of securing him a Junior licence. The good news is after successfully navigating the bureaucracy he's now licenced and ready to go and with that, the aim is to have him comfortable with a centrefire for next June.

The benefit of Christmas in July is it opens up the chance of a second helping. As you read this we'll be enjoying a (hopefully) white Christmas in England as, after several years away, we're returning to visit relatives and maybe join a hunt or two. Christmas whether white or just dull, cold and grey will bring a fitting close to a year of red deer, fallow, sambar, pigs, goats and buffalo. During my time in England I'll be looking for birds in the air and deer under the pines with friends I haven't seen for some time.


My cold-weather gear will service me well and the tweeds may even be on show if I have to go native. There's also a slight change of French bacon and a visit to Chapuis Armes along with some ground work for a sometime-in-the-future hunt in Spain. When I return next month it'll be time to reset the trail cameras for red deer, but that's just the start of things to come. Supporting my son on his own shooting journey will be the true focus, as will helping others continue to develop their skills and confidence as hunters.

My own goals for 2026 are threefold. Firstly I want to take deer, goats and pigs with my double rifle. Sure the 9.3x74R is a heavy hitter and crowd-pleaser, though its limited accuracy past 100 yards will still make it a challenge worth pursuing. The second is to further expand my hunting connections, as I've come to realise it's as much about the people I hunt with as it is about the game, so next year I'll be catching up with hunting friends both near and far.

The third is I want to build a long-range hunter, which is in direct contravention to my double rifle dreams. I already have the firearm and ammo so it's just the scope I need to consider. I'm looking for hunting accuracy out to 500 yards, meaning plenty of range time in 2026.

To bring this end-of-year ramble to a close, it's worth saying Christmas reminds us of the joy of giving and, with that in mind, I'll return to one of my oft-repeated themes. We can all give, we can all help foster more hunters and shooters and we can lend our voice and time to advocate for hunting and shooting.

We're stronger together and, in the cold hard light of politics, unity is a powerful lever so here's to a safe and happy festive season, a grand hunting and shooting 2026 and I hope that, like me, you'll enjoy your own version of a white Christmas.



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