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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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YOU ASKED.

OUR SSAA CEO HAS THE ANSWERS.

In October of last year, SSAA Inc (national) announced SSAA Queensland had been suspended for non-payment of fees in line with the constitution. There were a lot of questions about this decision and also about how the SSAA membership works. Our CEO Tom Kenyon addresses some of those questions in this month's National News.

WORDS:
TOM KENYON



The SSAA (web)page says “When joining a SSAA State or Territory association, you will be part of Australia’s premier shooting body” – which it clearly isn’t. I thought I was joining the national body?

When you join as a member of SSAA you are actually joining your state or territory association (Full Member Body – FMB). That state or territory then joins the national body so, while you’re part of the SSAA national “family”, you are not a member of SSAA Inc (national). Once a state or territory refuses to pay the membership fee set by the board, its membership is either suspended or cancelled. In this case, SSAA Qld has been suspended.

Division in the ranks at a time when government want to take away our rights, we have people in our community working hard to create disunity when we need unity more than ever.

We agree. We are really disappointed it has come to this.

What a lot of sh*t, Qld SSAA is still running, no need to end your membership, we are covered and still members. These are just scare tactics, I called Qld myself.

There are no scare tactics. Members of SSAA Qld are still members of SSAA Qld. What has changed is the status of SSAA Qld’s membership of SSAA Inc (national). From 1 January 2026, SSAA Qld members will no longer be able to compete in national championships or be selected for national teams. SSAA Qld will have no voting rights at any national forum such as SSAA Inc board meetings or the SSAA Inc AGM or other General Meetings. SSAA Qld members will not receive copies of *Australian Shooter* nor discounts on SSAA merchandise or publications. SSAA Inc (national) is simply trying to inform members of the SSAA Full Member Bodies of decisions SSAA Inc (national) has made. We have tried to be open and transparent about what has happened and what this means for SSAA Qld and its members.

Why didn’t SSAAQ pay their fees? What’s the history?

It’s hard for us to speculate about why SSAA Qld did what they did, but we think it fair to say they wanted to provide more and more services to members by themselves. In the end, SSAA Qld did not want to pay the affiliation fee that SSAA Inc (national) set (\$7.11 pls GST per member) and after six months, their membership was suspended. The board sincerely hopes SSAA Qld will take the necessary steps to have the suspension lifted.

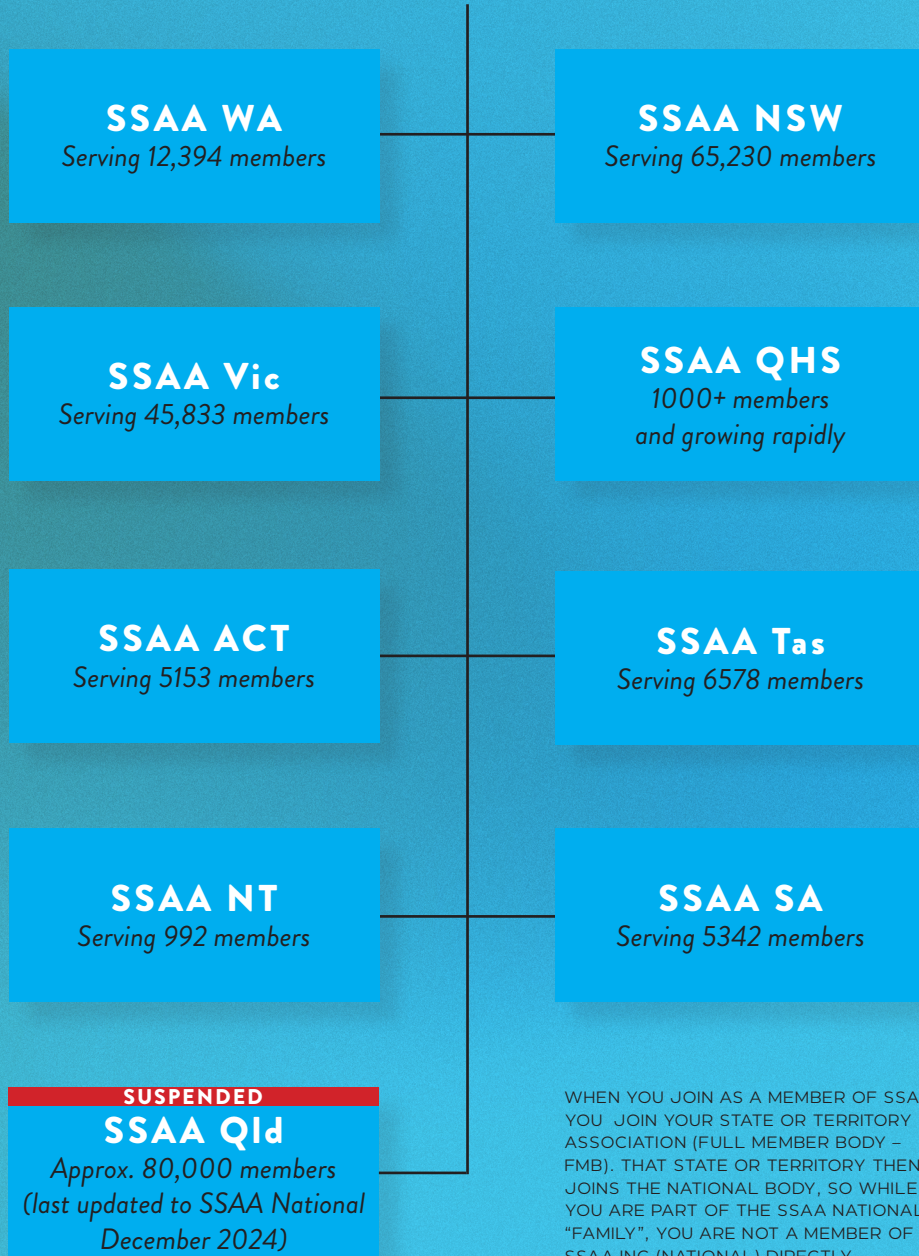
Would be easier to pay the \$970k of our fees we paid to the association and this will all end, I wouldn’t be joining any club yet, Qld may just pay up. They legally can’t withhold \$ for fees when they can’t provide the full services the fee is for!

We would love SSAA Qld to resume full financial membership of SSAA Inc. That’s why we suspended their membership rather than expelled them. We believe it’s really important to work together around the



SSAA National

Nine members



WHEN YOU JOIN AS A MEMBER OF SSAA YOU JOIN YOUR STATE OR TERRITORY ASSOCIATION (FULL MEMBER BODY – FMB). THAT STATE OR TERRITORY THEN JOINS THE NATIONAL BODY, SO WHILE YOU ARE PART OF THE SSAA NATIONAL “FAMILY”, YOU ARE NOT A MEMBER OF SSAA INC (NATIONAL) DIRECTLY.

country for the future of shooting in Australia but that's a decision SSAA Qld need to make for themselves and we don't know how long that might take. In the meantime, we are providing a way for Queensland shooters to remain part of the broader SSAA Inc (national) family.

This is not the fault of local Qld SSAA branch members, so why are we being punished by SSAA National? Why can't National let Qld members keep attending national titles while this is sorted out? Seems spiteful towards branch members.

SSAA Qld has not been paying membership fees on to SSAA Inc (national) since January 2025. Part of the membership fees contributes towards the cost of running national titles and subsidising the travel costs of Australian teams. In fairness to SSAA Qld members, they were allowed to compete in national titles until the end of 2025. After that date, you have to wait for SSAA Qld to decide to resume its financial standing or join another SSAA organisation that's in good standing, such as SSAA Queensland Hunting and Shooting. Just like any club or association, if SSAA Qld wants to be a member, it needs to pay the set membership fee just like every other state and territory.

If I was a lifetime member prior, will my status transfer to QHS?

If you joined as a life member before 1 January 2025, you are recognised as a life member of the SSAA nationally (including SSAA QHS). If you are in this category, please contact our membership office on (02) 8805 3900 or membership@ssaa.org.au to make sure we have up to date contact details for you. If you paid as a life member after 1 January 2025, your life membership will not transfer over as the necessary fee was not paid to the National Association (SSAA Inc) by SSAA Qld.

QHS Limited was started two weeks ago and registered as a business in SA, what the hell is going on? As a lifetime member of the SSAA (National, because that's



where my money went, and what my card says) I sure hope that transfers or something? Also – what does this mean for those of us with pistol licenses?

SSAA QHS was formed with the assistance of SSAA Inc National Office which is located in Adelaide. SSAA QHS is primarily run by Queenslanders Steve Knight and Richard White. And Christine. See previous answer about life memberships but the short answer is yes it transfers in almost all cases.

Does this affect our genuine reason. Do we have to change or pay again to stay legal?

No, you do not need to pay again. If you remain a member of SSAA Qld, you will still have your genuine

reason. SSAA QHS has applied for status as a genuine reason. Once this is approved, you will be able to join at a time that suits you and be a member of an organisation which is a full member of the National Association with all the benefits that come with it.

Does QHS have firearms insurance?

Yes, it does. SSAA QHS is part of the National Association and members have access to SSAA Mutual Firearms Protection - \$25,000 cover for \$35.

I joined SSAA and paid for insurance, is it still covered?

SSAA Qld provides public liability cover and firearms cover (at extra cost). This remains in place as long

YOUR MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE PAID TO SSAA NATIONAL WHERE FIFTY PERCENT ARE IMMEDIATELY PAID BACK TO THE MEMBER STATE, WHILE THE OTHER FIFTY PERCENT NATIONAL SPENDS ON PROVIDING MEMBER BENEFITS. ANY CHANGE IS GIVEN BACK TO THE STATES THROUGH A PRO-RATA BASIS TO SPEND ON RANGES, ETC.

as you are a member. SSAA QHS provides Public Liability Insurance and firearms cover (at extra cost). You are covered by this as soon as you join. The only difference between the two is the way the public liability insurance/cover is provided. SSAA QHS is part of the national insurance arrangements which secures insurance cover through an insurance company. SSAA Qld provides public liability cover through a mutual association.

If we swap to QHS do the fees we've already paid transfer over?

Unfortunately, no. That's what caused the problem in the first place. SSAA Qld stopped paying affiliation fees to SSAA Inc (national) and has been suspended. You can either wait until your membership renewal rolls around and Join SSAA QHS then or join both.

So on the membership portal, are we new or renewing? I asked to be included for the original magazine months ago but never got that. I don't like the new Qld magazine.

The best thing to do is to ring the national membership office on (02) 8805 3900. They will be able to talk you through the process and will even try to make sure you get your old SSAA membership number back.

When my membership expires, do I join the new one? Does this affect me shooting at my local range?

It depends on what you need. If you're a member of SSAA QHS and there is not currently one in your area, you will need to also join another organisation which gives you access to ranges or visit as a non-member. If you don't need to shoot at a range, you can join SSAA QHS and receive all the benefits of being part of the SSAA "family".

Who owns the SSAA ranges in Qld/ each state?

It varies. In Queensland, SSAA Qld owns some ranges and others are owned or leased by the clubs which operate on them. This is true around the rest of the country as well. Some ranges are owned by the state organisation and others are owned or leased by the clubs which operate on them.

If we travel interstate and attend a SSAA range, are we considered a non-member and pay a higher fee? Do I need to be a member of QHS to shoot interstate?

If you're not a member of SSAA QHS or another unsuspended full member body, you'll be considered a non-member and may have to pay a higher fee (it will depend on the rules of the club you travel to).

To keep your licence for sporting purposes, you need to belong to a club that shoots nationally approved matches. If Qld is no longer nationally recognised, is your reason for having a licence in danger?

SSAA Inc is currently seeking legal advice about this matter and will report back to members as soon as possible. Once QHS has genuine reason (shortly) then we're all good.

How do non-Qld shooters feel about having to now fund SSAA National's decision to offer a free SSAA shop voucher exclusively for Qld who jump ship? I wonder if this is National-level decision-making and use of money that contributed to this mess in the first place?

At the moment, SSAA QHS has no staff to pay, clubs to support or ranges to fund. As a result, it can afford to provide some other benefits to members of QHS such as a free \$50 merchandise voucher for SSAA merchandise like our new range of t-shirts and hoodies (<https://onlineshop.ssaa.org.au/product-category/clothing/>). Over time, we hope enough Queenslanders will value being affiliated to the national association through QHS and QHS will be able to provide a greater level of support to its members in other ways. ●

WATCH SSAA PRESIDENT ANDREW JUDD EXPLAIN WHERE YOUR SSAA MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE ALLOCATED, ON SSAA TV, NOW.



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EUROPEAN GAME HARVESTING: LOOK AND LEARN, AUSTRALIA

WORDS:
MATTHEW GODSON



This column concludes my four-part review of Neal Finch's Churchill Fellowship report regarding wild game harvesting in Europe. A good take-home message is that continent's model of wildlife management, particularly its integration of hunting and game-meat utilisation, which offers valuable lessons for Australia. Across Europe, non-commercial hunters form the core workforce managing abundant wildlife such as deer and wild boar.

Governments rely on these hunters to achieve population control, animal-disease surveillance and conservation outcomes and, while professional cullers exist, they play only a minor role. In contrast, Australia depends on publicly-funded contractors and aerial-shooting programs while largely excluding recreational hunters from structured management.

A central European principle is 'no waste' with animals killed for management, food or pest control almost always used. This ethic reflects deep cultural traditions of respect for wildlife, as to kill and discard an animal is considered unethical. Compare this with Australia's approach, where most pest animals shot from air or ground are left to rot. Finch argues that economic and regulatory structures, as well as an aversion to giving 'value' to declared pests, drive this waste. By placing some commercial or cultural value on such animals, we could transform attitudes and reduce wasteful practices.

European hunting culture also emphasises clean, humane kills. The accepted best-practice shot for ungulates is the chest (heart-lung area) offering a large, stable target and ensuring rapid death. In Australia, harvest codes require a head-shot for macropods, a smaller moving target. Finch notes Australia is unique in mandating this practice and could review whether its standards truly deliver best welfare outcomes.

Another major difference is the 'revier' or lease system, which gives hunting rights tangible value separate from land ownership. Landholders receive payment or share arrangements with hunters, aligning incentives for wildlife management. Exploring similar models in this country could foster cooperation rather than competition between landholders, professional harvesters and recreational hunters.

Finch found the interconnection between commercial and non-commercial sectors to be Europe's defining feature, as recreational hunters supply most carcasses entering the commercial game-meat chain. In Australia the two are strictly separated by licensing and firearms laws, creating inefficiencies and animosity. The European system shows they can coexist productively, combining resource utilisation with public conservation goals.

He further challenged the long-held claim that Australia's kangaroo harvest is the world's largest terrestrial wildlife harvest. Collated European data suggested roughly three million wild boar, 2.7 million roe deer, 450,000 red deer, 200,000 fallow and 100,000 moose are harvested annually, meaning Europe's total commercial game-meat take easily exceeds our 1.5 million-animal kangaroo harvest.

The RSPCA UK's pragmatic stance impressed Finch as while it opposes 'hunting for sport', it accepts culling as necessary and supports full utilisation of deer carcasses. This contrasts with RSPCA Australia's increasingly negative public stance on commercial kangaroo harvesting despite similar policy foundations. There's undoubtedly a need for renewed collaboration between welfare organisations and industry to promote ethical, science-based management rather than polarised debate.

Australia's heavy reliance on publicly-funded culls is inefficient, short-term and morally questionable when edible meat is wasted. Integrating commercial harvest and regulated recreational hunting could achieve population control without ongoing public expense while respecting animal welfare. Deer in particular present an ideal test-case for such integration.

Finch condemned the recurrent mass starvation of kangaroos during drought as a national welfare failure which Europeans would never accept. Human intervention through sustainable harvesting, coupled with full utilisation of carcasses, would deliver better welfare and ecological outcomes.

He recommends establishing a National Kangaroo Initiative modelled on the UK's Deer Initiative, to bring stakeholders together (governments, landholders, harvesters, animal-welfare bodies and scientists) to align policy, training and utilisation. Nationally recognised training for both commercial and recreational harvesters would lift standards and accountability, while payment structures for landholder access could be trialled to incentivise cooperation.

In summary, Finch's work concludes Australia must move from a 'kill-and-waste' paradigm to a 'harvest-and-utilise' ethos founded on respect, welfare and sustainability. Europe demonstrates non-professional hunters, operating within a regulated and culturally supported framework, can effectively manage wildlife populations, provide high-quality meat and reduce the need for public culling programs. He sees his role as sharing these lessons widely to encourage a new, integrated Australian model of wildlife management which mirrors Europe's proven success.

This is a vision which I and countless other share. The question is: Will the pest management industry be receptive to policy change which reduces public funds going into their pockets?

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SQUEAKY WHEEL SYNDROME

WORDS:
SCOTT HEIMAN



The old saying ‘the squeaky wheel gets the oil’ means those who complain are more likely to receive attention than those who stay quiet. And it’s true that issues which are vocalised within the community are more likely to be dealt with. Regrettably, Australian political history is full of policies and laws which pander to the interests of the vocal minority at the expense of those just trying to get on with life. And, at its most basic level, this happens because a lot of politicians are only really interested in being re-elected.

From my perspective, there are a couple of recent stand-out examples of questionable decisions which had me scratching my head as to how our democratic system of government can get things so wrong. Consider, for example, the 2018 NSW Government’s ‘Brumbies Bill’ (the *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act*), which is one of the starkest examples of the squeaky wheel syndrome.

Kowtowing to a group of vocal lobbyists, the state government prioritised the preservation of an invasive feral animal over endemic species, regardless that Kosciuszko was established specifically to protect native biodiversity. In doing so, politicians ignored the recommendations of their own Threatened Species Scientific Committee, a body filled with eminent scholars and professionals. Instead, they accepted the romanticised view of wild horses expounded in a ballad written by a bloke in the 19th century.



THERE ARE NUMEROUS ALTERNATE URBAN BACKYARD USES FOR A MACHETE.

Which brings me to the latest uninformed and misguided decision, this time by the Victorian State Government. Specifically, the decision to ban machetes under the *Control of Weapons Act* is a blatant effort to obscure the systemic issues behind soaring crime rates in that state. Despite no evidence that state crime is underpinned by machete-wielding thugs, the media happily fed the public sensational imagery and videos of street crime in order to build a skewed narrative.

Those with individual stories to tell about machete crime were given more media prominence than would otherwise have been the case. And the squeaky wheel became the Melbourne metropolitan population, who were fearful and outraged by media coverage. In response, Victorian politicians were happy to jump on the bandwagon, banning machetes so they could be perceived as being ‘tough on crime’. So it’s now illegal to be in possession of a ‘large broad-bladed cutting knife’ while hunting, camping, fishing and hiking. Are you kidding me?

It’s no coincidence that, of a Victorian population of 6.5 million people, 5.35 million of them live in Melbourne. That’s a Victorian electorate dominated by city-dwellers, most of whom haven’t a clue (and couldn’t care less) how useful machetes are in the outdoors. And when the Field and Game Victoria chief executive sought to bring our sector’s interests to the fore, apparently his suggestions simply ‘fell on deaf ears’. Why? Because

politicians have no fear that hunters and shooters will stop them from being re-elected. And it’s probably our own fault as none of us became good at our sport by making a noise and drawing attention to ourselves.

Yet I reckon we’ve just learned a lesson: We’re in the minority and it’s time to start making our voices heard. Unless we’re prepared to be the squeaky wheel ourselves sometimes, our interests are destined to be ignored in favour of the pet issues of an increasingly squeamish urbanised majority, whose misinformed opinions are shaped by the media and minority groups more vocal than we are.

So I ask you, when was the last time you wrote to your local, state or federal member about an issue affecting shooters and hunters? And when did you help your local club get some good news stories into the local or regional press? Did I hear you say ‘never’? If so, it’s probably time we made some noise because if we don’t, as hunters and shooters we risk losing our rights entirely.

• Next month; An in-depth look at the Victoria machete ban.

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TAKING A STANCE ON IMPROVEMENT

WORDS:
LAETISHA SCANLAN



Q What would you say is the best stance for shooting Olympic Trap?

Adam H., NSW

A When it comes to the Olympic Trap discipline, finding the right stance is more about personal preference than adhering to a strict set of rules. Over the years I've seen all kinds of styles and honestly, there's no perfect formula. For example, Italian shooters are taught to stand with their feet extremely close together, often leaning significantly over their shotgun, while many US competitors opt for a wide stance, bending the knees with their elbows high.

So which one is right? It really comes down to what works for you. Everyone's different in shape and height, therefore you should find a stance which caters to your body type. Your stance should feel comfortable with the aim of giving you the best movement towards hitting the targets.

I've always followed a simple yet effective rule when setting up on the shooting pad. If you imagine the station pad as a clock face, with 12 o'clock directly in front of you, I position my left foot at 1 o'clock and my right at 2 o'clock, making sure there's about a 20cm gap between my heels. This slight separation is key, as it helps maintain solid balance while also allowing for a natural, fluid movement when swinging either left or right. This stance angles my body at roughly 45 degrees off-centre, which is ideal for a right-handed shooter.



EXPERIMENT WITH YOUR STANCE TO FIND WHAT FEELS MOST COMFORTABLE.

One of the best pieces of advice I can offer is to experiment at the range. Play around with your stance and adjust it based on what feels most natural and easy. If you're standing too far to the right or left, you'll probably feel a bit restricted and notice it when you miss a target. Feedback from your shots is the best guide in fine-tuning your foot position.

One essential lesson I've learned is standing too straight can also restrict your mobility, which becomes especially noticeable on sharp-angled swingers. That's why leaning slightly forward and bending your knees can help correct this problem. If you watch me shooting, I bend my knees more than most as it caters to my short stature and frame, creating better balance for me to handle recoil and control the gun.

The knee bend and slight hinging forward helps me stay stable while forcing me to drive my whole body from the ankles up. The key is to engage both knees. If you're only bending the forward leg, it can actually 'jam' you up and hinder

your ability to swing effectively. The more you rotate your torso freely from the feet up, the better you'll swing.

When I'm working with others, I emphasise how important it is to adjust your stance if you're struggling with left or right-handed targets. Sometimes just shifting the angle or width of your feet slightly can make a huge difference to the outcome. A small change can have a big impact on accuracy, so don't be afraid to experiment and discover what works best for you.

Like most technical aspects of shooting, once you're happy with the positioning of your stance, the key is to not change between stations and keep it consistent. Mastering your stance isn't about perfection, it's about finding the set-up which lets your body work with you rather than against you.

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Q I'd like to ask about shotgun ribs and why we're seeing so many guns lately with ribs much higher than we've seen in the past. Some of them are so high they seem unbalanced and spoil the look of a fine firearm.

Errol Jones, Qld

A You're spot on Errol when you say there's a trend towards high-ribbed guns with some of them being super high. You see them on Trap guns which are mounted before calling for the shot, so the balance may not be as import-

ant in those 'going away' target disciplines (at least not in the mounting of the gun).

I've reviewed several top-end models featuring high ribs for this magazine in recent years and they were all great to shoot. That's because they gave a more upright head position on the stock and some were also adjustable for point of impact. These were expensive shotguns but there are now a few more moderately priced ones featuring these and slightly lower ribs for the Sporting Clays, 5-Stand or Compak disciplines, where balance is more important when the gun's mounted after the clay is called for.

Some of these guns are advertised as 'all clay sports-type' guns and, with their adjustable ribs which put the shot pattern where you want it, especially if combined with an adjustable comb, they can certainly be used for all disciplines.

You sound like a man who likes his flat rib classic-looking shotguns and I know the feeling. Frankly I like both and find the mid-height, rib-adjustable guns pretty appealing from a futuristic-looking point of view and there's no denying their flexibility and practicality. If you haven't shot one, I'd give them a go, as they're very comfortable to use and enhance your view of the targets a great deal.

Paul Miller

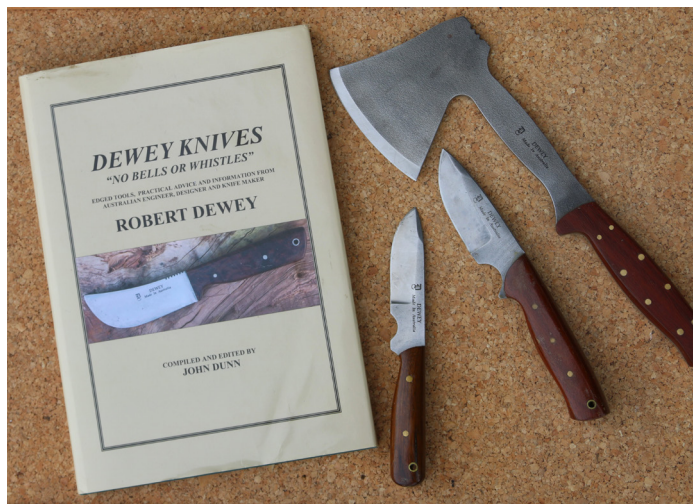
FLAT RIB



STEPPED RIB



ACS - HIGH RIB



Q As an early bird at a garage sale, I recently bought a couple of hunting knives marked 'Dewey. Made in Australia'. Both are in good condition with a light grey patina and wooden handles. They don't appear to have seen much use and I was wondering if one of your Top Shots could provide some information about Dewey knives and who made them.

L. McCauley, via email

A As far as I know, Robert Dewey began making commercial knives in the early to mid-1990s. The full range of his work includes folding, kitchen, table, hunting and special-order pieces, all of which are detailed in his book Dewey Knives: No Bells or Whistles which was published in 2013.

I first met Rob in 2003 and subsequently reviewed quite a few of his knives for this magazine. His hunting blades were typically plain and simple affairs, made from commercially heat-treated D2 steel and fitted with wooden handles or scales glued and pinned to his preferred full tang. While the cutting edges were always carefully ground, the spine and shoulders of the blades were usually left with a grey, factory finish which saved time and helped keep production costs down. Sheaths were outsourced to local leather workers and consequently are not Dewey marked.

Rob always saw himself as a practical rather than custom knife-maker and that's reflected

in the construction of most of his work. Now in his nineties, he no longer makes knives but interest in his work remains high. Over time his knives have become harder to find and are now regarded by many as collectable, with any offered for sale usually snapped up fairly quickly and the prices asked for them steadily rising. Treasure your Dewey knives as there won't be any more made.

John Dunn



Q I'm looking for information on this 8mm Mauser, specifically where it was made, what the markings on it are and what sort of figure I should be looking at insuring it for. Both bolt and rifle have matching numbers (W 4-9). Any help appreciated. PS: Love the magazine.

John Lyes, via email

A Your rifle is a Spanish-made 1943 Mauser carbine, chambered for the 7.92mm Mauser cartridge (usually referred to as 8mm). I understand these were made in Spain under licence from Mauser



in Germany (as well as some being rebadged from Oberndorf manufacture) and are based on the K98 rifle. Many were made at La Coruna factory, although yours has the crest of La Guardia Civil (The Civil Guard). This crest is based on the Roman 'fasces and sword' depicting a bundle of rods tied around an axe crossed with a sword.

Assuming the finish on your rifle is original, I suggest it could be a ceremonial version, finished to look smart rather than having the dull military finish needed for use in combat. The bayonet lug is a dual-purpose version designed by Pablo Richieri, peculiar to Spanish rifles to accept either the 1893 or 1898 service bayonets. A very similar rifle to yours sold last year on the Sunshine Coast for \$1450.

Geoff Smith

SEND QUESTIONS TO:
edit@ssaa.org.au

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

Blackburn a world-beater

Proving that Aussie shooters can mix it with the best in the world, at the 2025 Precision Rifle 22LR World Cup hosted by the West Midlands Shooting Centre near Birmingham, England in the back half of last year, Michael Blackburn was crowned world champion in the elite Open category with a resounding victory.

Dropping a meagre 11 points from 240 shots fired in a truly remarkable performance, Mick finished a staggering six points clear of his nearest rival to lift the world title in style. He said: "I came here with one goal and that was to win the World Championship and I've bloody done it!" Mick even celebrated his success with a 'shoey' on the podium, launching a night of celebrations.

Each year the event alternates between centrefire and 22LR with each match divided into five divisions of Open, Factory, Seniors, Ladies and Juniors, the 2025 event attracting more than 250 shooters from 22 countries.

The match style was much pacier than usual with all 20 stages being 12 rounds in just 90 seconds. The event is shot day-on, day-off with the Seniors, Factory and Ladies categories first, followed by Open and Junior. This allows the team to support itself with those not shooting helping those who are, from offering advice on the wind, to carrying equipment and delivering supplies. The format is vastly different to what we're used to in Precision Rifle and is very much a team effort.

Australia sent 16 shooters in categories including Open, Factory and Senior along with one lady and one junior and, after the dust settled and scores were tallied, the Aussie contingent had produced performances to be proud of. Other Australian results were as follows: Fourth in National team (Open score plus two best divisions), a solid effort considering most of our shooters were out of their comfort zone due to the match pace.

Our Open team finished fifth and were just four points off a podium place, the Factory team also placed fourth and came agonisingly close to a medal, while the Seniors romped home in third placed, well clear of the UK and just a few points behind runners-up South Africa. Individual results include Phil Nash taking seventh place in the Open division, Cody Sparks placing in the top 10 juniors, Shawn Lawson taking eighth in Factory, while



Al Phillips and Ben Beneke were seventh and eighth respectively in the Senior division.

This year's match will be held in Texas with the qualification process already well under way. For anyone looking to find out more about this terrific discipline, the Australian Precision Rifle Association (AUPRA) is the representative body so check out their website or Facebook page for all you need to know.

Travelling and competing at these matches is only possible through sponsorship support, so sincere appreciation goes to the various companies who made the trip possible, foremost among them being SSAA Victoria (who backed some of the team directly) and SSAA Mutual for providing firearm protection insurance. With rifles worth well in excess of \$10,000, knowing they're covered for loss or damage really puts shooters' minds at ease.

THE TRUTH ABOUT HUNTING: LET'S KEEP IT REAL!

WORDS:
CHARLOTTE FOX

Robbie Kröger is committed to telling the real story of the hunter and making sure the narrative is so much more than trophy photos with no context.

That's why he launched The Origins Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation which champions the 'sustainable use of wildlife globally' through every online communication channel you could imagine.

It's a wealth of information to tell the story of hunters and hunting and how it protects habitat, supports communities and fuels conservation when done properly. Now living in the US, Robbie grew up in South Africa and was formerly a professor in Mississippi State University in the Wildlife, Fisheries and Agriculture Department.

Tell me a bit about yourself

I was born in Brazil but grew up in South Africa from the age of three. I lived in Johannesburg until I was 24 with a love of nature and wildlife conservation and, like every young man in the country, I grew up hoping to become a game ranger.

I wanted to be that person who shows people lions and elephants, teaching them about the characteristics of each plant and tree and how they can help you when you're out bush. But I quickly realised game ranging wasn't a career choice that would allow me to have a family and make a living, so I changed course and went into wetlands ecology.

What drew you to that?

I fell in love with wetlands and swamps when I was 16 in the Okavango Delta with my grandfather, and from that experience wanted to study swamps and wetlands. I ended up undertaking study in that area as an Honours and Masters student and ultimately left South Africa in 2003. I came to the US to do a PhD in relation to how you could marry wetland ecology principles with agricultural production.

I was fortunate the woman I did my PhD under was someone I'd picked as a hero to write about two years earlier and, lo and behold, right when I wanted it she'd a PhD position available. From there I became a professor at Mississippi State University in the Wildlife, Fisheries and Agriculture Department, which I did for six years. In that time I became well known for integrating scientific principles with management outcomes. I learned how to speak to people and communicate a narrative, which I like to think is now a superpower of mine.

A good example of my skills was being engaged by the US Government as Chief Scientist to front the restoration effort following the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. I was asked to set up a framework for how we were going to spend the first billion dollars from Texas to Florida. It was such an all-consuming task that halfway through I lost my spark and had to find it elsewhere. That's when I found my passion for storytelling around hunting and conservation.

Had you had much hunting experience?

I only started at 26 after moving to the US. While I lived in South Africa I never went hunting. I grew up in Johannesburg with 8.5 million people and didn't have friends who hunted or lived in a hunting community. While my father and grandfather were hunters, it's not something I was exposed to.

At that time I was essentially the audience I preach to today. I wanted to communicate with people, including my sons, about what is hunting, why we hunt and how it helps herd management, invasive species work and predator control. I couldn't find anyone talking about it so decided to build those communication channels myself, which is how we started as a testimonial project of hunters explaining why they hunt.

How did your organisation evolve?

In 2019 my wife told me: "I love your passion for this project but you've raided our savings account so you need to make this viable." To be honest I didn't know how we were going to do that as we'd built a very different marketing model to all other hunting industry influencers or ambassadors.

In the end a close friend suggested I look at turning the organisation into a non-profit, non-governmental operation. I looked into it, made the change and on the day we announced it, 50 people donated money. It blew my mind and I thought: "Wow, this could actually work." That was five years ago and now we have arguably the largest global fingerprint for defending hunting as an activity in terms of communicating its benefits, consequences and impacts.

You say you wanted to shift the narrative around hunters?

We know there's a perception that hunters don't care about the environment or wildlife, are bloodthirsty killers and there's nothing good



LEO KROGER (ROBBIE'S GRANDFATHER)
WITH A KUDU AND THEN ALSO A SABLE
FROM MOZAMBIQUE - BOTH CIRCA 1965.
PETER KROGER (ROBBIE'S FATHER) WITH A
NYALA FROM MOZAMBIQUE - CIRCA 1968.

DEER HARVEST 2022 VS. 2024

SUSTAINABLE USE OF WILDLIFE

VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA





Net Venison
(kg)

8.7 Million (2022)
13.7 Million (2024)



Meals
(65g cooked serving*)

92 Million (2022)
144 Million (2024)

Deer in Australia are a valuable natural resource with social, economic, and cultural significance.

*based on the recommended 65g cooked (90-100g raw) daily serving of lean red meat

Moloney, P.D. and Flesch, J.S. (2023). Estimates of the 2022 deer harvest in Victoria: results from surveys of Victorian Game Licence holders in 2022. Unpublished Client Report for the Game Management Authority, Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Heidelberg, Victoria, Victoria 2023.

Moloney, P.D. and Flesch, J.S. (2025). Estimates of the 2024 deer harvest in Victoria: Results from surveys of Victorian Game Licence holders in 2024. Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research Unpublished Report for the Game Management Authority, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Heidelberg, Victoria.

CHAMPIONING SUSTAINABLE USE OF WILDLIFE GLOBALLY



about them. But that's not the reality and I found no-one was communicating that so decided I'd do it. But I don't want it to be about me, I want it to be about everyone else. I've now done stories on about 80 people involved in hunting and none of them have said: "I hunt because I like to kill."

They told me it's because they're closer to the environment when they hunt, they do it to fill the freezer and because it's a way of passing down a tradition of conservation and looking after the land for their kids. They get something out of being part of nature and do it for adventure, for mental and physical wellbeing and all those things which are so positive.

Describe The Origins Foundation to an outsider

Think of us as your champion or bullhorn for explaining to someone with a negative opinion of hunting or even no opinion on hunting, to educate them and give awareness. When someone interacts with us, the first thing they'll notice is we have a specific demeanour around who we are in our online community.

We've all been that person who just reads the comments in an online interaction and builds a view based on them. Considering that, we're always respectful and ensure we deliver information in a way you can understand and want to listen. For example we take a complex scientific article and break it down to an infographic, explaining why deer hunting is important for conservation, how much meat comes from a fallow deer in Australia, or how many meals a single fallow can provide.

Last year the Australian Government committed to banning importation of hunting trophies. Is that a good or bad policy?

It's almost ironic for a country like Australia to create a policy implying what another country should do with their resources. I say that as they're acting almost like colonialists. I was recently in South Africa where a lot of people go to hunt and also where there's one of the best wildlife conservation models in the world, derived from hunting.

This begs the question: "Why do you want to implement a ban like that?" Is it because you think it affects wildlife conservation? The answer's no. The answer comes down to the fact there are people talking to politicians and saying: "We don't like the activity and want you to ban it." The politician has considered this to most likely be popular, though not necessarily supported by evidence related to conservation.

What benefits does sustainable hunting tourism provide African communities?

The same benefits which come from any economic activity in rural towns worldwide. These include upgrades to schools, to medical availability and overall life improvement. Suddenly there are

NUTRITIONAL VALUE OF FALLOW DEER VENISON AUSTRALIA

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- Ethically Hunted
- Rich in Micronutrients

NUTRIENT	AMOUNT (PER 100G)	BENEFIT
Protein	22-23 g	High-quality, complete protein
Fat	~2 g	Very low in saturated fat
Iron	High	Easily absorbable heme iron
Zinc	Good Source	Supports immune function
B Vitamins	Rich in B12, B6, Niacin	Important for energy metabolism


Fallow Deer in Australia are a valuable natural resource with social, economic, and cultural significance.

Sources: Australian Association of Gamekeepers (2018). Nutrition guide for deer hunting. <https://austgamekeepers.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/1718-nutrition.pdf>

Sources: (2021). Comparative nutritional needs of game meats. Fallow deer venison and red deer. Acta Veterinaria Canada, 1(2), 93-101. <https://www.acta-vet.com/issue/1-2/93-101>

Quinn-Cavanagh (2023). What kind of deer makes Australia's venison? <https://www.foxhunting.com/articles/what-kind-of-deer-makes-australia-venison>

CHAMPIONING SUSTAINABLE USE OF WILDLIFE GLOBALLY



THE TRUE CONSEQUENCE OF HUNTING IN AUSTRALIA TASMANIA

Gross Economic Contribution

\$67.2 Million

Total Employment Contribution

512
(Full Time Equivalent jobs)

"Deer hunting accounting for 33% of the total economic contribution of hunting and sport shooting combined."

"The total annual economic contribution per hunter was \$7,608."

SOURCE: Economic contribution of recreational hunting and shooting to the Tasmanian Economy, 2023. A Report for the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania.

CHAMPIONING SUSTAINABLE USE OF WILDLIFE GLOBALLY



jobs in the community which account for more people being uplifted in that community. There's also secondary economic upliftment with people buying petrol, stopping in restaurants, purchasing from local shops. In rural towns, especially in South Africa, hunting is a big slice of the pie for those trying to make a living.

If someone says: "I don't know much about hunting, tell me more." How do you start that conversation?

I just had this conversation with a vegan I was sitting next to on a plane. She's a New Yorker born and bred, has lived in Manhattan for 50 years and I asked her why she'd travelled to Africa. She explained she'd gone on an ecotourism tour in Tanzania, Kenya and South Africa. She asked what I do and said: "Don't tell me you're with one of those hunters I heard talking in the waiting area?"

I often start conversations like that with a question "What do you think happens with hunting in South Africa?". From first-hand experience and knowledge, I explained how meat from the animals is extensively used and showed her videos of kids I'd just fed and also explained that for a lot of those children, that was their only meal that day. There is also a broader economic value of these animals to local communities.

How did she respond?

Like a lot of people I discuss hunting with, she was positive and said: "I had no idea." Explaining the benefits of food security in relation to hunting is always a strong entry point. She asked why hunters target the big animals and I explained: females and babies aren't hunted, prime young males aren't hunted, so older males being targeted is about sustainability. I was able to tell her targeting those animals wasn't an obsession, it's part of enabling wildlife to thrive.

How did you get started in hunting and what made you love it?

I was intrigued. Everyone was doing it in our community in Mississippi and some new friends asked if I was interested in joining in. I remember my father and grandfather's passion for hunting and from there I grew to love it and started exploring opportunities in other states and different countries.

What are your most memorable experiences?

We have a big footprint in New Zealand from the first project which came from Blood Origins (our original name) in 2020 which had half a million views on the content. We helped the New Zealand Tahr Foundation raise money to contest proposed government action and, in that fight, came out to be this huge voice for the Foundation. At the time the chairman was Snow Hewetson who said: "Next time you come to New Zealand I'll take you hunting." It was great as I'd known of

the guy for three years then got to meet him and experience the thing he loves most.

Another memorable experience was turkey hunting in Colorado. It's very humbling when a turkey with a pea-sized brain can beat you. A war veteran hunter and I pursued one bird for two and a half hours, which epitomized what a turkey hunt should be. He told me how many veterans struggle coming back from war because of what they've seen and done, often turning to drugs or alcohol to fill that void. He said the hunt we'd gone on gave him a high he didn't know was possible sober. It was such a powerful human moment.

What can people experience through The Origins Foundation information channels?

The way I describe it is if you think of a style of content you like to digest information through, we probably build it, make it and disseminate it. If you like stories, we have stories. If you like blog articles, we have blog articles. We also have short and long-form videos, feature documentary content and various podcasts and are about to start the Wild Origins Australia podcast.

What plans do you have for Australia?

Our organisation has been active in the Australian landscape for four or five years now. Wild Origins Australia, as an affiliate of The Origins Foundation, champions the same mission the parent organisation has, namely promoting the truth around hunting and sustainable use of wildlife.

My mum is Australian and resides in Sydney, which means I visit regularly. I've hunted there three times, twice in the Northern Territory, which is just amazing. That place is an untouched wilderness most people never get to experience. I've also been to the Hunter Valley with a bow which was exceptional pig and goat hunting.

What's next for The Origins Foundation?

Just keep doing what we're doing. We're aware we have a strategy and a plan, but the strategy is we want to own the narrative and that takes time. Owning the narrative also means being consistent, patient and developing relationships.

Discover more about Wild Origins Australia through their social media channels and podcast.

INSTAGRAM
[wildorigins_australia](https://www.instagram.com/wildorigins_australia)

YOUTUBE
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[wild-origins-australia](https://www.wild-origins-australia.com)



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BUT OH, THOSE SUMMER NIGHTS!

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Gaiters are a non-negotiable when hiking off-track. They'll help protect you from a snakebite, and also the wrath of a raspberry bush. **Sea to Summit** Quagmires are a crowd favourite for good reason. Made from 8oz canvas and 1000D nylon, they provide serious protection. RRP \$130. Keep your shins swimsuit-ready this summer.



The best defence against mosquitoes is a layered defence. Protective clothing, good quality wearable repellent to shield your skin, preferably made for Australian conditions like **Bushman**, or **Good Riddance** to protect the campsite. Keep in mind these units tend to be ineffective in breezy conditions, hence why we suggest the layered approach.

A good set of walkie talkies is essential for night hunting. The device with a single purpose means it isn't being run down streaming maps or taking those throphy pics. Coordinate instantly and quietly with rugged, waterproof and shock tolerant GME radios. The TX6165 feature up to 30hrs battery life, VOX hands-free mode and a built in torch. RRP \$349





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Criminals and guns inextricably linked



**JOHN
MAXWELL**

As Pacific islands drug busts go, this one was right up there. A haul of 1.6 tonnes of cocaine and 230 kilos of methamphetamine aboard a yacht from Mexico, probably bound for Australia. What was also found aboard were 11 Glock handguns along with 24 magazines, likely destined for the same underworld figures conducting tit-for-tat gangland shootings across Sydney's suburbs.

Though the yacht was intercepted last July off Tahiti, local police doubt that was the intended destination. "This shipment wasn't for French Polynesia," head of that territory's Customs, Serge Puccetti, told local media. He said intelligence shared between French authorities and US, Australian and New Zealand law enforcement, had clearly established the Pacific as a major transit area between narcotics production centres in South America and one of its major new markets, Australia.

Why here? Because prices of illicit drugs are high, as is the demand by Australian consumers. "In terms of cocaine consumption, the US market is now saturated. That's why traffickers are searching for new markets including Europe and, in the Pacific region, Australia and New Zealand,"

New Caledonia's Divisional Head of Customs, Hervé Matho, told local media.

There's also extremely high demand in the Australian underworld for guns, especially handguns, with \$10,000-\$20,000 each being the going rate. Smuggling small arms in drug consignments has undoubtedly been happening for some time, possibly as a lucrative side hustle for those whose main business is drugs. How many get through we just don't know, though regular gang-related shootings in Sydney and Melbourne suggest criminals aren't lacking firepower.

Back on September 10 police disclosed the outcome of Vitreus, an international anti-drug operation involving Australian and New Zealand law enforcement. In all there were 290 arrests, vast quantities of drugs and precursors were seized, along with \$1.6 million in cash and 52 firearms.

On September 5 NSW police busted a clandestine drug lab, arresting two men and seizing four firearms, including two semi-automatics, about 450 rounds of ammunition, law enforcement uniforms and ballistic vests. Two days earlier, NSW and ACT police arrested seven men on charges relating to drugs and violence, seizing three pistols and a disassembled Glock.

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“Of the 117 offenders who used firearms to commit homicide, only 11 (9.4 per cent) were licensed firearms owners with registered firearms,” it said. “In other words, licensed firearms owners were not responsible for the majority of firearm-related homicides.”

All that happened in the space of a week and illustrates once again the affinity of criminals for guns. These are people without firearms licences and, in some cases, subject to firearms prohibition orders. So where do the guns come from? That appears to be all the usual sources including theft from legitimate owners and dealers, home manufacture including 3D printing, leftovers from the buybacks of 1996 and 2003, the so-called ‘grey market’ and illicit imports.

Sometimes it’s a mixture. In January of last year, Australian Border Force (ABF) launched an investigation into a NSW man who’d tried to import firearm parts through the international mail. A search of his home turned up half a dozen assorted handguns, a shotgun and what appears to be a MAC-10 submachine gun. ABF noted the man didn’t have a firearms licence.

As with 3D production, illicit gunmakers seem to quickly discover that for reliability, there’s

little alternative to some factory-made parts such as barrels and slides. The vast US gun market and ease of online purchasing must be alluring though, along with the idea their consignment will surely evade detection among the thousands of incoming parcels. Well no, as the ABF is highly effective at detecting such import attempts.

“Buyer beware. Any weapons or parts you may purchase online must cross the border. That’s where our highly-skilled officers, detector dogs, X-ray capabilities and expert investigators all come together to monitor what comes in,” said ABF Investigations NSW Superintendent Brett Totten in a media statement.

Criminals will also steal any firearms they can lay their hands on, so gun owners can help by ensuring theirs are securely stored. Farm properties, often remote and unoccupied, have long been a reliable source for the criminal classes. NSW now specifies higher levels of security for any firearms kept in unoccupied buildings, including approved safes and alarms with off-site monitoring.

Criminal use of firearms is widely reported, especially in Sydney and Melbourne gangland shootings, yet that seems to pass with little comment by anti-gun groups. Recent media reporting has again cited the Australia Institute and its alarmist study, proclaiming there are now more legally-owned guns in Australia than before the 1996 National Firearms Agreement.

There’s the explicit implication that more guns equals more gun violence and greater danger to the community. Yet official statistics clearly show murders and suicide by firearm have declined as gun numbers have risen. So to be clear, here’s the latest data from the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) research series on Homicide in Australia for 2023-24.

During that time there were 262 homicide incidents across Australia, with 277 victims and 278 identified offenders (based on data from state and territory police). Australia’s overall homicide rate sits at 0.98 per 100,000 population, up from 0.87 in 2022-23. For the past 10 years our homicide rate has sat below one per 100,000 while by comparison, the US rate was 5.76 per 100,000 in 2023. Overall, our rate of homicide has declined by 46 per cent since 1989-90, when the AIC National Homicide Monitoring Program began.

In the latest reporting year, 216 incidents involved use of weapons, with knives and various sharp implements remaining most common and featuring in 88 incidents (34 per cent), followed by hands and feet in 38 incidents. But here’s the interesting bit. “Firearms have also decreased in frequency of use, comprising 17 per cent of weapons used in homicide incidents since 1989-



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90,” the study says. “In 2023-24, 12 per cent of incidents involved a firearm.”

Across the country, firearms were used in nine incidents each in NSW and Victoria, five each in Queensland and WA, three in South Australia and none elsewhere. In 2022-23, firearms were used in 26 homicide incidents with 10 gun deaths in NSW, seven in Victoria, four in Queensland, two in WA and one each in SA, Tasmania and the NT.

NSW is Australia most populous state and Sydney our most populous city, which should statistically account for a significant number of the national homicide toll. Yet it’s hard not to conclude that a good number of NSW gun deaths are attributable to ongoing gang warfare in Sydney’s western suburbs, where handguns seem to be the firearm of choice.

How many are legally registered firearms wielded by licensed gun owners? There’s no good data but one day there may be, though it seems likely most guns used in homicide are unregistered and their shooters unlicensed. Yet it’s licensed shooters who are really the problem, according to organisations such as the Greens-leaning Australia Institute and Gun Control Australia (GCA).

“As of September 2024, more than four million registered guns were owned by civilians, 25 per cent more than the 3.2 million firearms before Port Arthur,” said GCA on its website last year.

“We must act before a tragedy forces our hand as has happened too many times before.” The Australia Institute, in yet another report, claims AIC data shows 25 per cent of homicides involved registered firearms “where the licensing status of the firearm was identified from 2011 to 2016.”

The SSAA says five per cent of homicides were committed by licensed firearms owners. In a research paper supporting Western Australian gun law changes, the WA Police Union said at least 30.7 per cent of firearm homicide victims in that state from 2010 to 2022 were killed by a licensed firearm owner. In raw terms that’s 16 of 52 firearms homicides.

So who’s correct? The figure cited by the Australia Institute appears to relate to AIC data for the period 2011-16 obtained through the National Homicide Monitoring Program but not actually published. It’s available on request. This data only relates to licence status of perpetrators and says nothing about registration of guns used.

Out of 40 gun murders in 2011-12, four perpetrators held a firearms licence, nine were unlicensed and 27 were unknown or not stated. Of the 36 gun murders in 2012-13, three were committed by perpetrators with licences, 12 were unlicensed and 21 were unknown. Of 32 gun murders in 2013-14, three shooters held firearms licences, 15 were unlicensed and 14 unknown. In 2014-15 there were 33 gun homicides, six committed by licensed shooters, 11 unlicensed and 16 unknown and of the 32 gun murders in 2015-16, four perpetrators held licences, 14 were unlicensed and 14 unknown.

With so many unknowns it’s hard to draw a solid conclusion, though from what is known, it appears most gun murders aren’t committed by licensed shooters. How do police not know the person they’ve arrested does or doesn’t hold a firearms licence? You’d think it would involve a simple computer search but apparently not, so hopefully there’ll be better data once the new national registration system comes online.

The only definitive study of the actual firearms licensing status of homicide offenders and registration of firearms used, was released by the AIC in 2000 and related to the period 1997-99. “Of the 117 offenders who used firearms to commit homicide, only 11 (9.4 per cent) were licensed firearms owners with registered firearms,” it said. “In other words, licensed firearms owners were not responsible for the majority of firearm-related homicides.”

French Polynesia along with other Pacific countries and territories (Samoa, Fiji, Tonga), has been identified as a major transit point of the so-called ‘drugs highway’ from North and South America (US, Mexico, Columbia, Ecuador, Panama) to major markets such as Australia, New Zealand and Asia. In the other direction, labs in south-east Asia are also using Pacific islands such as Palau and Papua New Guinea as transit points to ship opium-based drugs and methamphetamines to the US market. ●

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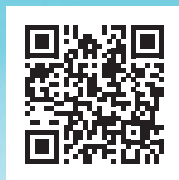
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A century at the cutting edge

DICK EUSSEN PUTS THE CASE FOR GERBER KNIVES

Gerber's handcrafted legendary blades, multitools, mil-spec and general outdoor knives have been made in Oregon since 1932 and are well respected by hunters, fishers and bushwalkers. In the early 1980s I reviewed stainless steel Gerber knives with aluminum handles and was impressed by their reliability and edge retention.

Today, Gerber is owned by Finnish outdoor supplier Fiskars who've taken some of the brand manufacturing from the US to China, where strict quality controls ensure the respected Gerber name continues. The company also works in collaboration with custom knife-makers, hunters, fishers and inventors like Randy Newberg, an American hunter and conservationist. He has a lifetime's experience in hunting animals for trophies and meat, his feedback having made a valuable contribution to Gerber's purpose-made knives.

Through trial and error, Newberg learned how to make field dressing and butchering easier, whether using the gutless method or traditional open-cavity meat preparation. From his ideas, Gerber introduced the first Newberg knives in 2017 which have been popularized in hunting camps throughout the US and Finland.

GERBER RANDY NEWBERG EBS
Multi-purpose folders are currently in vogue with some radical designs being questionable, though people buy them as collector's items. I have an in-built caution when makers introduce new field tools due to being a traditionalist, yet I also recognize evolution is ongoing and this includes new knife models.

The EBS knife is difficult to place in the traditional folder range, yet it's appealing because it's a highly practical and purpose unit for caping trophy heads, fine cutting work and skinning small game, rabbits, hares and wildfowl. It's as close to the perfect caping knife as you'll find.

The handle clips on top of a small clip-lit box which contains three non-reflective 440C stain-



less steel drop-point blades of different lengths. One has a serrated edge which can be sharpened with a diamond-hone pen. It's 8cm long and matches the same length drop-point blade, while the longer drop-point blade is 11cm. These carry the usual 'makers' edge which is next to useless, so your first job is to hone a working edge for performance and durability.

The blades clip securely on to the 16cm glass-filled nylon skeleton handle, which is narrow but fits comfortably in the working hand. I was surprised how firm the blade is when fitted to the handle as there's only a slight play, expected from such a fitting. But caping's about using scalpel-like precision cuts with only a little pressure needed, so it's not a problem. The handle also has a reflective patch for easy location in the dark.

The idea of the unit is you can pick a purpose blade for the job at hand, instead of frustrating yourself with a 'survival' knife when caping a head or field-prepping a rabbit. Weight is negligible as it's a neat little package you can toss in your pack and forget about. The length of the handle when fitted on the box is only 17cm and there's also a choil. Best of all the unit sells for about \$90 from local dealers and is available in several colours. Spare blades cost around \$60 but I'm confident the ones supplied will last a long time.

THE EBS (TOP) PACKS INTO A SIMPLE BOX-LIKE UNIT AND IS IDEAL FOR BACKING UP THE DTS HUNTER FOLDER FOR CAPING AND SKINNING.



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THE GERBER RANDY NEWBERG DTS HUNTER IS A WELL-MADE FOLDING KNIFE, FITTED WITH TWO BLADES WHICH MAKES IT IDEAL AS A BACKUP.



THE GERBER RANDY NEWBERG EBS CAPING UNIT CONTAINS THREE INTERCHANGEABLE BLADES TO MAKE CAPING AND SKINNING SIMPLE.

GERBER RANDY NEWBERG DTS HUNTER

As far as sturdy folders go the DTS is up there with the best of them. It's fitted with a 440C black anodized stainless steel 5cm serrated-edge blade, backed by a 10cm recurve brushed 440C steel blade, making this a handy butchering and skinning tool for small to medium-sized game.

The reputation of 440C steel is well known for its edge-holding durability, hardness and toughness and while it has lost some ground to 'modern' steels, it continues to be the first choice for many reputed knife-makers. While not overly quick to sharpen, I soon had a working edge capable of slicing paper.

In use the non-slip, glass-filled nylon handle feels firm and soft due to its plastic and rubber combination handle. This one also has a reflective patch in case you misplace it in the dark, though there are no problems finding it in daylight due to its bright orange colour. It also has a wide deep choil, which is extremely useful for a secure hold when cutting.

The two-tasked blades are workhorses purpose-built for field dressing, with the 'shorty' serrated edge ideal for bone and separating the atlas joint. It easily slices through tough tendons and more, leaving the primary master blade keen to cut meat and slice gut cavities. While designed as a standalone knife, I always have a folder as back-up to my hunting blade, which makes the DTS Hunter an ideal bush companion.

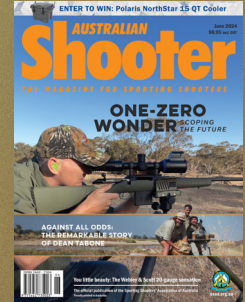
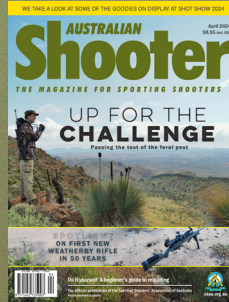
The locking devices on both blades are

positive and fail-proof with absolutely no play or movement when locked. The master blade unlocking system works when two buttons in the handle are pushed forward. Place your hand over the blade and push the locks away from it, at the same time using your hand to push the blade down to free it and into the liner. The short blade lock releases when the slide button on top of the handle is pressed down.

The barrel slides and operating mechanism are easy to clean, a must with any folders as they'll jam with gunk, blood and gore if not washed after use. If the knife is covered in blood, wash it with hot soapy water and dry. I like to spray the inside of a folder with G96 Nitro solvent gun cleaner, which removes all gunk from tight spots. Lubricate all moving parts with gun oil or dry lube to keep them from seizing. It's a good policy to wipe knife blades with gun oil for long-term storage, especially in hot or humid regions, as even stainless steel isn't immune from weather damage.

In summary the Gerber Hunter is, as the name implies, for hunters and outdoor users who don't want to carry a large fixed blade, rather opt for the portability of a mid-size folder capable of performing a myriad of tasks in the field and around camp. It's great value for a hard-working knife built like the proverbial brick outhouse and comes with a nylon belt pouch for easy carriage. Selling for around \$110 makes this one excellent value for money. Note that knives can't be shipped by post in some states and territories and you must be 18 or older to legally buy one. ●

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Let there be light

AND LOTS OF IT AS JULIAN NUSKE FOUND WITH THE OLIGHT WARRIOR

The Olight Warrior X Turbo Hunting Kit is a lighting system developed for the operational hunter, offering long-range illumination and firearm mounting. The kit comes neatly packaged in a rugged case and includes the following:

Warrior X Turbo flashlight with the ability to project up to 1100 lumens with a throw of up to 1km; 5000 mAh proprietary 21700 rechargeable battery which works well with the torch, though may make replacement or backup options less flexible than others on the market; MCC magnetic charging cable; tactical grip ring, holster clip (can be removed if needed), wrist strap and tactical ring; magnetic mount and remote pressure switch; red and green filters along with 3M rubber and Velcro straps.

The Warrior X Turbo is built to the same high standards as the Warrior X Pro from the same Olight stable. The body is machined from anodised aluminium, with precise threading and O-rings for waterproofing. Featuring an objective beam to find targets up to a distance of 1000m, it's a powerful handheld or rifle-mounted option

for long distant bursts when required and everything in between. Olight rates it IPX8, meaning it can survive submersion beyond one metre, though I didn't test this claim.

The torch has a solid, tactical look with a stainless-steel blue bezel ring on the head and stainless-steel tail cap which doubles as the charging point. The body feels robust in the hand and the machining provides a secure grip, meaning it's tough enough to handle recoil, vibration and rough stuff in the field.

Overall the Warrior X Turbo gives the impression of a premium, purpose-built hunting tool with simplicity of design being a real strength. The tail switch offers two stages in half-press for 'Low' mode (150 lumens) and full-press for 'Turbo' (1100 lumens), both of which can be activated momentarily and locked on. There are no confusing mode cycles or hidden strobes, just straightforward controls which is exactly what you want in the field. The rifle-mounting control switch option also magnetises effortlessly to the base of the torch, with a lock feature for enhanced security.



THE POWERFUL BEAM
HAS A THROW OF UP TO
ONE KILOMETRE.

Olight have also built in a handy feature to indicate battery life. When the unit has 30 per cent remaining energy the lamp vibrates once every five minutes. Once you drop down to 10 per cent it vibrates twice a minute, then six times a minute when it dips below five per cent. This makes it ideal for hunting as there's no need to rely on any visual aid to alert you as to when the power's running low.

Recharging the unit fully from flat takes around five hours. If Olight supplied a custom charger to go with their custom battery this may have been mitigated somewhat, though would no doubt increase the price at the same time. But this isn't a deal-breaker for me as you'll inevitably be charging the lamp when your return from each outing. Like most high-powered lights, as mentioned earlier, it'll step down maximum illumination to preserve run life and avoid overheating, so expectations should be somewhat managed if you require an extended period of high-output use.

Runtime in the field throughout the various settings was overall very satisfying and you should easily manage around three hours of use, give or take, depending on what settings you're using. While mounted you don't notice the heat generated at full output, though it does become warm when held in the hand. Due to its substantial reach, searching through paddocks and open fields, scanning bush and scrub or spotting game at extended distances is achieved with relative ease.

With a claimed range of 1km it's more than capable of spotting foxes, pigs and rabbits well beyond typical shooting distances, while at reduced levels the beam remains bright enough for serious field use. Beam tint is on the cooler side which some hunters may find harsh compared to warmer tones, though the sheer throw advantage outweighs this minor preference issue.

Filters naturally reduce brightness but still provide enough usable light to clearly identify targets at more than 100m, while for long-distance spotting, unfiltered white light remains the most powerful option. The unit comes with several hunting accessories, including a magnetic mounting which is easy to use on a rifle with little to no setup time once you configure how you want it to sit. The control switch is also convenient to use in the field, affording greater freedom while stalking.

Australian hunting often means moving between changing environments. This could be anything from spotlighting foxes and rabbits across open farmland, to stalking feral pigs through scrub. No matter the setting, a dependable torch will be one of the most important pieces of equipment you can carry. Hunters need a dependable light which can be thrown far and integrates well with their rifle and shooting setup, and the Olight Warrior X Turbo certainly delivers on this type of real-world scenario.

Strengths: Exceptional long-range beam with up to 1000m throw; complete kit with mount,

remote switch and filters; simple two-mode interface with momentary or constant on; vibration alerts for battery status is ideal in the field; rugged, waterproof and recoil-resistant design; excellent value as a ready-to-go hunting package.

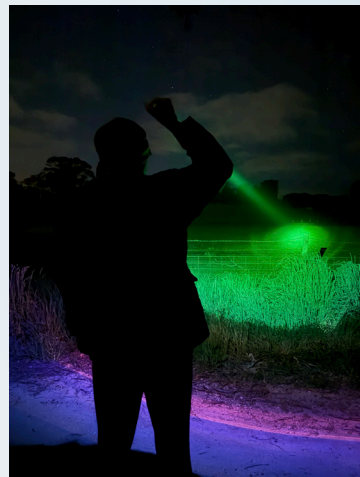
Weaknesses: Proprietary battery limits flexibility; only two brightness modes with no mid-level option; beam isn't intended for general-purpose or camping use; filter options could be expanded (e.g. blue for tracking); full recharge takes around five hours.

VERDICT

The Olight Warrior X Turbo Hunting Kit is a specialised tool which performs its role exceptionally well. As a high-performance, long-throw hunting light it combines rugged build quality, powerful reach and hunting-specific accessories in a package that's ready to mount and use straight out the case. It's not envisioned as a replacement for a vehicle-mounted spotlight with superior battery life.

The switch at the base of the lamp offers two stages for momentary or constant illumination. It can be carried on your body, lanyard or firearm mount for increased flexibility in use and comes with two lens filters in red and green. For hunting or spotting animals some may prefer a warmer or perhaps neutral tint, though the throw benefit is exceptionally good and outweighs any slight tint preferences others may have. I'm not convinced the choice of filter colours is premium, with other possible options more than likely offering a better solution. Perhaps a soft blue lens from Olight's next high-end product could give a better result.

If you're looking for a kit which excels as a high-performance, long-throw tactical torch, search tasks or simple outdoor use, then the rugged design and application features make this an excellent choice. If you're in the market for a more versatile mode option in a torch, potentially warm tints for the lens and battery option which isn't proprietary only, there may be different choices to consider. But overall I was impressed enough that I bought my own. More at olight-store.com.au



THE UNIT COMES WITH BOTH GREEN AND RED FILTERS.

RUNTIME BREAKDOWN

- Turbo (1100 lumens):**
6½ minutes
- Step-down to 600 lumens:**
10½ minutes
- Step-down to 300 lumens:**
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52 minutes
- Low mode (150 lumens):**
Up to 12½ hours



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CHRIS REDLICH ENJOYS SUCCESS WITH A ZEROTECH SCOPE

Six years ago I was happy to accept an invitation from TSA Outdoors to review the Trace HD 3-18x50 riflescope by then new optics player ZeroTech. I was impressed by the bargain-priced scope and, after reviewing more of their product lines in recent years, was happy to accept another scope from their current range, the Thrive 3-12x44 mil-dot to see if it suited my style of hunting.

THE SCOPE

Firstly, if it's purely a hunting experience with the Thrive mil-dot you're after then skip to my field test section, otherwise read on for more on the tech stuff. Supplied with the scope is a neoprene protective cover, lens-cleaning cloth, ZT promotional stickers, user manual and reticle

chart. In the hand the Thrive is by no means a compact scope but, with a 30mm main tube made from aircraft-grade aluminium, I didn't expect it to be. Measuring 345mm and weighing a mere 607g, it's light yet looks robust enough to ride on the back of a hard-kicking hunting rifle. By all appearances though, the Thrive 3-12x44 is a well-balanced and ergonomically designed hunting scope.

The dioptre adjustment dial is a knurled alloy ring, gripped easily and rotated for a clear view and reticle image. Unlike my previously reviewed Trace HD model with a generous 90-100mm eye relief, the Thrive 3-12x44 offers a marginally shorter 85-90mm. Forward of the ocular housing is the 3-12 magnification dial with all numerical adjustments highlighted in white. The dial has



THE THRIVE VIEWED NICELY FROM AN UNCOMFORTABLE SHOOTING POSITION AT THE WILD DOGS.

well pronounced lugs which promote a firm yet easy grip for selecting your chosen magnification.

Elevation and windage turrets are clearly marked for a .25 MOA adjustment and both have a full 60 MOA of travel. It may seem odd that a scope with an MRad (mil-radian) reticle uses MOA adjustments though it's not unusual. MOA is a standardised unit of imperial measurement that's not only popular with Aussie hunters, it also makes perfect sense for the sake of consistency in the Thrive models.

Nine on the dial is the side focus (parallax adjustment) and can be set from 10m to infinity. The internals and components are O-ring sealed and purged with argon gas, making it completely waterproof and fogproof, while the external surface is protected by a matt black non-reflective

coating. Finally, the fully multi-coated 44mm objective lens is protected by ZeroTech's weather shield coating, to provide clear light transmission with 12.2m field of view at 100m on 3x zoom and 3m on 12x.

MIL-DOT (SFP) RETICLE

Thrive model scopes offer a variety of reticle choices including my favourite Duplex, PHR II, PHR III and the popular mil-dot for 44mm objectives only. The reticle is glass etched and located in the second focal plane (SFP) within the ocular housing (magnification end) of the scope. When a reticle sits in the second focal plane, its size won't alter with varying magnification and for this reason I don't recommend the Thrive mil-dot scope purely for long-range target shooting. A first focal



THE MIL-DOT RETICLE IS ANOTHER VERSATILE OPTION TO THE THRIVE RANGE OF SCOPES.



plane scope such as the ZT Trace ADV models are better suited for that, as their reticles increase proportionately with magnification.

For those unfamiliar with mil-dot, the inner reticle posts are evenly broken by dots marking each milliradian, this one providing a total of 10mils in every direction from zero, which is apparently accurate at 100m. In my opinion the Thrive's mil-dot is a token reticle for those who prefer well-defined aiming marks. Importantly however, the supplied ZeroTech reticle chart will benefit the user to manually record correct holdover, relevant to their individual calibre for varying ranges. Oddly, the supplied so-called 'mil-dot reticle chart' only caters for 7mils, which I found strange.

FIELD-TESTING

Not surprisingly this scope, like all other Thrives I've tested, sighted-in with no fuss at all. I tested it at various ranges with success and familiarised myself with bullet drop and corresponding aiming marks of the mil-dot reticle. I was confident the 6.5 Creedmoor outfit was ready for hunting, though little did I know how successful my field test would be.

We happened to be working on a western property where the swing of our hammers and lick of a paint brush provided a much-needed facelift to a white ant-riddled bedroom. The owners were

clients of mine from three years earlier, where not only did I repair their roof soffits at the time, but shot a massive boar (see *Australian Hunter* Edition 78).

It was great to be back in this part of western Queensland but even better was enjoying it with my apprentice and son, Carl. The owners had no joy with local tradies making the trip from their nearest town, so I gladly answered their SOS. I consider myself in a fortunate position, where clients invite us to hunt their properties after work but, as often is the case when spoilt for choice, regrettably some are turned down. This time I wasn't about to knock the gift horse and my text message read: "Can we bring the rifles?" "Yep that's fine," was the reply and so the little 357 lever-action and 6.5 rifle were packed with our tools.

With the first day's work complete, we set up camp a few kilometres from the house. A short drive from camp took us to a remote pocket of the property and an area which looked like pig heaven. As we wove in and around a feeder gully, the local pig population basking by a dam took exception to our interruption and fled for the tree line, leaving their beach towels behind.

They were quicker than us but one unlucky sow couldn't outrun the Creedmoor. I tracked her at pace and didn't need the mil-dot aiming marks for this situation as I was confident with the running shot. A large boar was also unfortu-

FRESH PAW PRINTS FROM LARGE WILD DOGS WERE FOUND NEXT TO CAMP.



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FAST, REACTIVE SHOOTING WAS REQUIRED TO DROP THIS SOW ON THE RUN.

A MIL-DOT SCOPE WITH (UNUSUAL BUT NOT EXCLUSIVE) MOA ADJUSTMENTS AND HANDY SIDE FOCUS DIAL.

nate to cross our path on another occasion, as it tried to sneak into the darkness of thick scrub. I'd mounted a Nitecore flashlight to the scope and, despite the very dusty air, found the glass of the Thrive more than adequate in low light.

Wild dogs dominate the surrounding sandstone hills and another afternoon, Carl mentioned how he'd heard eery howls and felt as though he'd been watched as the sun disappeared. He decided to enjoy an extended pre-dawn snooze the following morning, while I chose to investigate a vocal raucous which had occurred during the night. Not more than a few metres from camp I found paw prints. Then more . . . big ones! The owners had assured me their baiting program had cleared the place of wild dogs, yet the evidence proved otherwise.

Too large to be the prints of our landlady's Jack Russell and marginally bigger than the cow cocky's Blue Heeler, the sneaky calf-killers had been making tracks in the dew-dampened earth back and forth from our camp. In the mist I was confused as to which direction to head so, upon sunrise, took up a vantage point high on a ridge at the base of a tree with a view of camp below. I bellowed some intermittent howls without response, while sitting patiently for 45 minutes until I thought I'd better head back to camp and get ready for work.

Suddenly my senses spiked as, running towards me from the fog, came a big dog with his head propped at full alert, wondering who was calling from his territory. I was in an awkward spot as he came in from the side and I needed a sight picture fast. Swivelling around the tree, I followed him with the mil-dot as he slowed

to a suspicious walk to catch my scent and now completely to the rear of my original position, he paused briefly for a sniff. I dropped him on the spot at around 100m but, to my surprise, a bitch then emerged from the fog and also fell to the 6.5 as I heaved a sigh of relief.

I returned to camp with the good news as Carl cursed his decision to sleep in. The dogs didn't go to waste and we took their scalps as a bounty, while the property owners were surprised yet happy we'd removed another threat to their valuable herd.

WRAP-UP

During our field test I thoroughly enjoyed using the Thrive mounted to my Tikka. I wouldn't say the mil-dot scope was used to its full advantage for long-range shooting during this review, but that's hunting. Yet I know if the situation arose for a long shot I'd have the aiming marks to help get the job done, and reckon it would suit a long-range varmint rifle for shooting ferals in crops.

The scope worked well in other situations and for a glass retailing around \$399 (at time of writing), it performed above its budget status. ZeroTech don't hide the fact Thrive scopes are manufactured in China but, backed by their 'any owner, any problem, always covered' lifetime warranty, you're guaranteed a bargain, especially hunters after a decent scope at a great price.

With the versatility of four reticle options and illuminated models also available, the Thrive 3-12x44 scopes will suit a wide selection of hunting rifles of varying calibre combos. For more on the ZeroTech range and local stockists, visit tsaoutdoors.com.au



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On the dot



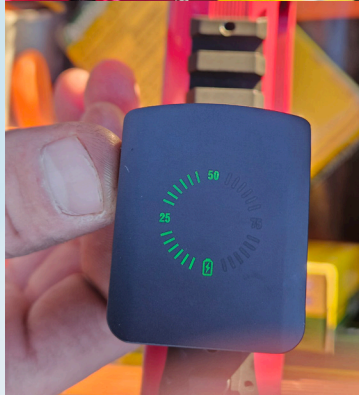
THUMBS-UP FROM BEN UNTEN FOR THE OSIGHT BY OLIGHT

When Olight first branched into the world of red dot sights I was sceptical. Known mostly for their torches (and bloody good ones at that), a lot of shooters figured they'd stick to lighting up paddocks rather than lighting up targets. But with the Osight, Olight have kicked the door in with a seriously well-thoughtout red dot system which caters just as neatly to the practical shotgunner as it does to the pistol or rifle shooter. Let's be honest, red dots on shotguns have traditionally been a bit niche in Australia, though more and more shooters are now realising the benefit of gaining an ultra-fast sight picture of ferals on the run.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

I don't normally start reviews by talking about the box but Olight deserves a mention here. While many optics arrive in generic foam-cut cases or basic blister packaging, the Osight turns up in a minimalist cardboard clamshell box that's clean, crisp and surprisingly satisfying to open. It's not foam-lined but the layout is smart and protective enough, with everything secured snugly in cardboard inserts.

Inside you'll find the optic itself, charging housing, Torx tool, cleaning cloth, lanyard for the charging cover and screws, and a well-printed manual which doesn't read like it's been translated through six different languages before finally arriving in English. Yet the standout is the magnetic clip-on charger, as that's where the Osight really starts to show off.



THE BRILLIANT CHARGING COVER; LED DISPLAY INDICATING 50 PER CENT CHARGE.

CHARGING SYSTEM

The Osight isn't just another CR2032 battery muncher, it features a magnetic clip-on charger with LED display and is a cracking piece of gear. Snap the charger on to the Osight and it displays the red dot's current battery percentage. Remove it and it gives the charger's own battery level so you know when it's time to juice-up, which is done by an everyday USB-C charger with no specialty connector required. There's also a tiny tri-colour LED on the side of the Olight which indicates green, yellow or red to give you a quick visual as to the battery status of the sight itself.

There are three different configurations for the 3MOA red dot reticle, or you can select the 32MOA circle or chose both together. There are 10 daylight level adjustments and two night levels for illumination in manual mode and, being a reflex-type optic, eye relief is non-critical which makes it ideal for pistols and heavier recoiling firearms.

MOUNTING

The Osight doesn't directly use a Weaver or Picatinny pattern built into its body, rather it employs a standard RMR/407C/507C footprint for its base. For those who aren't aware (which is probably almost all of us), the terribly uncatchily-titled RMR/407C/507C is basically a standard hole spacing and recoil lug pattern for the bottom of red dot sights.

Then Olight offer a number of mounting options with varying heights based around a Picatinny rail, with aftermarket mounts also available for Weaver rails. I mounted the Olight Osight on an SHS STP12 straight-pull shotgun with black synthetic fore-end and stock, and with what the manufacturer calls a 'red' exterior for the action (though it looks a bit pink to me).

IN THE FIELD

Sighting-in was a straightforward process via slot-head, windage and elevation screws. This was possibly made even easier by the fact I was sighting-in a shotgun, though the process is identical for rifle or pistol. The Osight does have an 'auto-sensing' feature which can automatically adjust the brightness of the display while still allowing manual adjustments. I chose manual mode and adjusted brightness towards the upper level as I was testing during daylight. The reticle appeared sharp and crisp, in fact the hardest aspect in relation to the reticle was focussing the camera to photograph the damn thing!

Multiple reviewers have commented that point of aim was highly consistent between different personnel and obtaining a sight-picture was quick and intuitive. Collectively, my reviewing buddy and I put through more than 40 shells and the Osight held a rock solid zero.

Battery life on this one sounds like science-fiction as it's claimed to have 57,000 hours on level three brightness with the dot only. It's also claimed the charging cover can recharge the



SHARP RETICLE OPTIONS.

Osight three times before needing recharged itself. This, combined with the Osight's 'motion sensor' setting which activates the sight when it detects movement and automatically switches off after 10 minutes of inactivity, can apparently result in a maximum of 228,000 hours use, which is a tad over 26 years if my maths serves me correctly. So based on several of my current lifestyle choices, my battery might conk out before the Olight does.

I didn't encounter any real negatives on this sight, though did notice when sighting-in that if you wobble your head like a rubber-neck behind the sight, the reticle does appear to 'move' around within the viewing panel. I'm not sure why you'd do that but it really isn't an issue as it doesn't move relative to the target. In fact it might even help with mounting your shotgun or pistol, as you'll naturally gravitate towards the same head position each time.

IN SUMMARY

This sight has a broad range of uses and appears to be an extremely well thoughtout, precision-made product. It almost goes without saying it's manufactured using high-grade aluminium housing and features multi-coated lenses with anti-reflective coatings.

It would be fair to say I'm a committed fan of a red dot, reflex-type sight and can think of multiple shooting applications, shotgunning being but one of them. The Olight Osight is also available in a green reticle and separately in olive green housing and retails for around \$355. More at au.olight.com



A FLOCK OF SHEEP IN NORMAL VIEW; THE SAME FLOCK VIEWED THROUGH THE GT GUARD H3.

Hot thermal at a cool price

TRAVIS ALLEN TRIALS A BUDGET MONOCULAR

Now while I have used them in the past, I'm far from being an expert when it comes to thermal devices, so this review is written from a general perspective. The GT Guard H3 is a thermal monocular that's only available online through international website www.gtguardhunt.com and, while the standard price is \$1069, the site seems to run special offers fairly frequently.

The H3 is packaged similarly to others I've seen with a hard zip-case and soft bag included. Getting started is easy enough as you just charge it with the supplied USB-C cable, wait for dark then power it up. There are four buttons on top, all of which provide multiple functions. The printed instruction sheet is in extremely small text to accommodate multiple languages, which made reading it a challenge for me, though it can be downloaded which is probably the way to go.

The H3 comes with an additional handheld screen which makes it more useable for a group of people. My night vision also didn't seem as affected. The downside is each time the screen is used, cycling through the menu to the accessories and turning on the CVBS setting is required, then it resets to 'off' next time the H3 is turned on. In fact, I found most settings would reset when the device was turned off.

Picture in picture (PIP) mode is available, which takes the object or animal in the centre of the screen and gives an enlarged version directly above, though I favoured zoom instead of PIP as the H3 has 1-8x in steps of 1x, 2x, 4x and 8x. As is always the case, the more you zoom in the more pixelated the image becomes, subsequently I opted for the lower 1x and 2x. And speaking of pixels, the H3 detector/sensor is 256x192 with a digital (AI) boost to 364x288. This is one of the important things to compare when choosing a thermal device as it does affect clarity.

It has a NETD of <40mk which people in the know tell me is low by today's standards but it will allow detecting and spotting, though detail at longer ranges will be sacrificed. Battery life of 10

hours is reasonable, the IP66 rating is lower than most (IP67 is the norm) and at less than 300g it's a lightweight unit.

Thermal devices always work better on crisp, cool nights where temperature difference between terrain and animal is more pronounced and, of course, the larger the animal the better. I viewed rabbits, ducks, sheep, horses and cows. Ducks and rabbits were at no more than 30m and the former with water as a backdrop were far easier to identify, while the bunnies, although close, were tougher to spot.

The H3 does have video and snapshot with built-in storage of 32GB, though for some reason I struggled to connect it to my laptop through the USB-C cable. After some initial error messages, followed by searching the manual and turning on some settings, it did work with videos and pictures transferred, though if you asked which setting made the difference, I couldn't pinpoint it.

In short the H3 does work as advertised. If used for observation and finding the initial heat signature, then backed-up by a higher spec scope for positive target identification, it could do the job. Personally, once the initial excitement of using a thermal optic wears off, I'd be looking for more resolution and clarity, especially if I hope to start stretching the distance. ●



YOU CAN CHOOSE TO ADD A THERMAL EXTENSION SCREEN.

SPECIFICATIONS

GT GUARD H3 THERMAL MONOCULAR

Detector:
256x192 (AI resolution
384x288)

Lens:
15mm (500m detection
range)

Zoom:
1x, 2x, 4x and 8x

Internal storage:
32GB

Weight:
Just under 300g

Accessories:
Hard case, soft bag,
wrist strap, USB-C cable

Availability:
Online store only
gtguardhunt.com

Price:
About \$1069 (standard)
though frequently on
special around \$850

Warranty:
Two years

**Thermal extension
screen:**
\$139 (standard) also
frequently on special

Lots of scope for learning

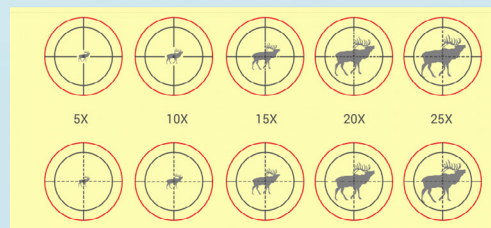
NOVICE JULIAN NUSKE CONTINUES HIS SHOOTING EDUCATION

In our last edition I charted my return to shooting after a more than 30-year hiatus, with the one thing which really struck me being how important optics are in this sport - and how advanced they've become. So imagine my delight when, towards the end of last year, the SSAA National office had a visit from Lachlan, a dedicated Category Manager from industry giant Nioa who's also a qualified Leupold & Stevens technician.

Along with my colleagues Travis Allen and Alex Hepinstall, we were treated to a detailed presentation on optics, how they work and are put together, including some of the terminology and nomenclature commonly used. So I thought it prudent to let other novices in on what I found to be a highly beneficial introduction to an often complex subject. Clearly for more seasoned hunters and shooters this may be somewhat retrograde but you never know, you might discover something you weren't aware was part of the broader world of optics. So I'll start with some of the more common terminology and phrases you'll come across when using or choosing a scope.

MAGNIFICATION

This is the characteristic by which an object appears closer than it actually is. In other words, when you're looking through your long-range optic or scope, the perception of the object you're looking at changes. The higher the magnification, the closer the target or animal will appear to be, with more vivid detail. (It's worth noting the higher the magnification of your scope, the smaller your field of view will be, but more on that shortly).

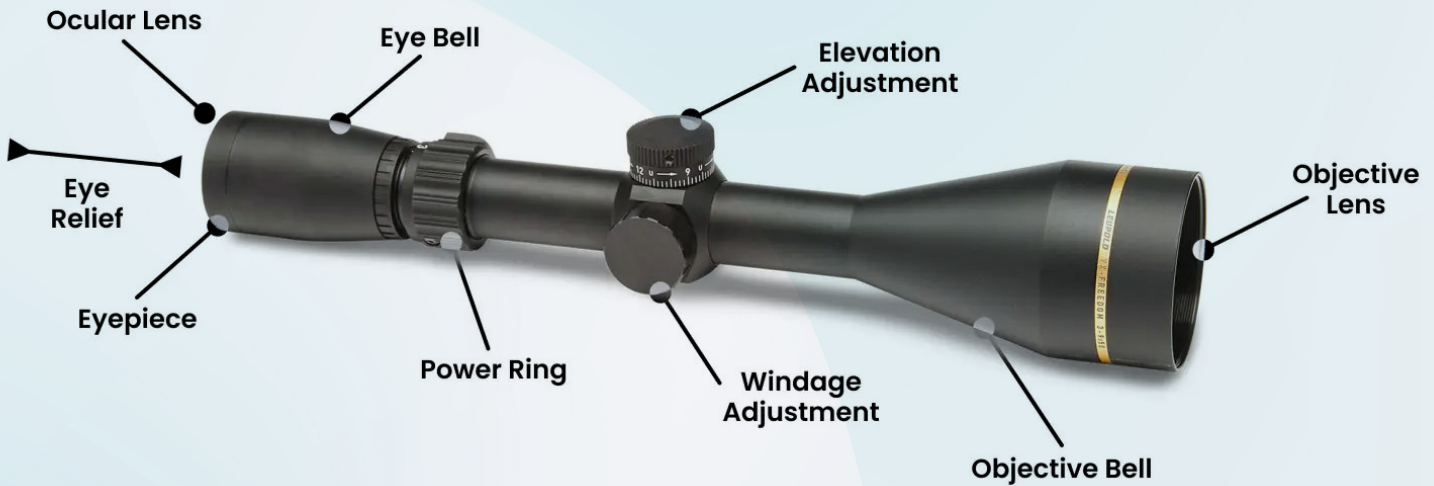


WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE AT VARYING MAGNIFICATION RANGES.

An example of this is if a scope has 5-25x written on it, the magnification will optically enlarge a target that's 50-250 metres away, making it seem as if it's only 5-25 metres away if viewed with the naked eye. Most scopes have a variable magnification, giving you the ability to adjust the enhancement easily within a certain range. As stated, the numbers in front of the 'x' on your scope specifies the magnification. But what about the number after the 'x'? Staying with the example given, if we have a scope which says 5-25x56, it has 5x to 25x magnification and an objective lens diameter of 56mm, which moves us nicely to the next area of the scope.

OBJECTIVE LENS

This is, in contrast to the eyepiece, the front of the scope facing the target. The diameter of the objective lens (like the 56mm mentioned) controls how much light can enter the scope, making it a fundamental element in the instrument's performance. This more than ever is an

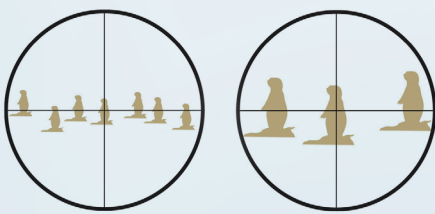


important factor when light conditions become increasingly poor.

So essentially the larger the objective lens diameter, the more light it can capture and the brighter the image appears. This becomes critical in poor light conditions, at dusk for example, as the larger the objective lens, the better those low-light images will be, a significant consideration for hunters. So with those two important factors down, we move to the field of view (FOV).

FIELD OF VIEW

This is simply the part of the image which can be seen through the scope. Generally speaking, riflescopes have a smaller field of view compared to binoculars, meaning you see a smaller area. However with scopes usually having higher magnification, the details of the object are increased. Next we need to consider the maximum extent to which the pupil in the human eye can open, which is 8mm for children with flexibility decreasing as we age. This is the exit pupil.



low magnification = wider field of view

high magnification = narrower field of view

YOUR FIELD OF VIEW CHANGES DEPENDING ON MAGNIFICATION.

EXIT PUPIL

If you look at the eyepiece of your scope from a certain distance, the exit pupil appears as a bright disc. The exit pupil is a calculated value based on the objective lens diameter (or magnification). In a high-quality scope you'll find this is displayed perfectly and round. Again, as before, the larger the exit pupil, the more light will reach your eye. And all of these characteristics bring us to one of the most important features of any scope and that's light transmission.

TRANSMISSION

Light dissemination is crucial when measuring the transmission rate of a scope. Manufacturers indicate the transmission value of their products, which is yet another factor to consider when choosing the right scope for your needs. A transmission value of 90 per cent for example means that of the 100 per cent light entering the scope's objective lens, 90 per cent reaches the eye. This is a physical principle caused by absorptions in the glass, as well as by reflections at what manufacturers call the 'glass-air boundaries'. These are the outside areas of your scope's lens which are open to the air.

Consequently, scope coatings can have a positive effect on light transmission entering the unit. In other words, surface finishes or coatings are becoming an essential feature on all glass-air boundaries of a scope, especially if you want to minimise loss of light caused by absorption and reflection. The higher the quality of coating (an area where competing manufacturers strive for individual 'points of difference') the better the

ALL THE BASICS A NOVICE NEEDS TO KNOW.



EYE RELIEF: UNLIKE BINOCULARS, A RIFLESCOPE IS NOT USED HARD AGAINST THE EYE.

light dissemination will be, minimising distracting reflections captured by the scope, especially in penetrating light.

EYE RELIEF

Unlike binoculars where you hold them hard against the eyes, a scope is usually a short distance from your eye, something known as eye relief. Put simply this is the distance between the eyepiece and your eye, which subsequently specifies where the exit pupil of the scope preferably meets the eye. This can be slightly different from person to person, often noticed when using someone else's rifle for example. Which brings us to some of the more performance aspects of your optics.

IMAGE QUALITY

The optical display performance of a scope is generally referred to as the image quality. This is illustrated by (and most favourably by comparing) the relationship between the definition of the image, resolution and distortion (optical distortion of objects during the scope's image reproduction) and by a colour-neutral, bright image.

BRIGHTNESS

The brightness of a scope as a basic rule of thumb is subject to the objective lens diameter. If more light is able to pass through your scope and exit pupil, the brighter the image, though at higher magnification the exit pupil becomes smaller, which will reduce brightness. This is why each individual shooter must find what they feel is the ideal balance between size, weight and perfor-

mance brightness for their scope. One possible measure to consider, especially for the hunter, is what is some time referred to as 'the twilight factor'. Basically this is calculated by taking your magnification and multiplying it by the objective lens diameter, certainly a feature worthy of individual assessment.

Thanks to Lachlan's expert insight I learned far more about optics than I could document here, but I'll finish with a couple of other salient points. The 'edge sharpness' of your scope is usually a strong indication of quality and should be crystal clear from the centre of the image to the outside. And when you have a clear image, you also have a good foundation for 'contrast'. This is used to normalise the sharp separation of light-dark transitions on an object and, the sharper these transitions, the higher the contrast of that image.

Finally, if this has piqued your interest I suggest, like me, you do some research of your own. Believe me, there's plenty more to discover like 'illuminated' reticles and reticles themselves, which can be wide-ranging and varied. Further research and reading on 'reticle adjustment', 'ballistic turrets', 'parallax' and 'rail or ring mounting' is also worthwhile when considering your potential purchase. So I hope this has been at least somewhat useful and enlightening for all our newcomers out there.

• *Next month: My novice's take on understanding basic ballistics.*

PIXFRA MILE 2

THERMAL MONOCULAR

≤ 25^{NETD}
mK



WiFi

ORDER CODE	SENSOR	DISPLAY	OBJECTIVE	PRICE (SRP)
PFI-M215M	256x192	800 x 600	15mm	\$890
PFI-M419	384x288	800 x 600	19mm	\$1,390
PFI-M425	384x288	800 x 600	25mm	\$1,650

PIXFRA ARC LRF

THERMAL MONOCULAR WITH LASER

≤ 20^{NETD}
mK



WiFi

ORDER CODE	SENSOR	DISPLAY	OBJECTIVE	PRICE (SRP)
PFI-A425 LRF	384x288	1440 x 1080	25mm	\$1,990
PFI-A635P LRF	640x512	1440 x 1080	35mm	\$2,900
PFI-A650 LRF	640x512	1440 x 1080	50mm	\$3,490

PIXFRA SIRIUS ZOOM

THERMAL MONOCULAR (OPTICAL ZOOM OR RANGEFINDER)

≤ 18^{NETD}
mK



WiFi

ORDER CODE	SENSOR	DISPLAY	OBJECTIVE	PRICE (SRP)
PFI-S650-LRF	640x512	1920 x 1080	50mm	\$3,990
PFI-S650D	640x512	1920 x 1080	50mm	\$4,150

PIXFRA PEGASUS PRO

THERMAL 30MM RIFLESCOPE

≤ 18^{NETD}
mK



WiFi

ORDER CODE	SENSOR	DISPLAY	OBJECTIVE	PRICE (SRP)
PFI-P435P	384x288	1440 x 1080	35mm	\$2,690
PFI-P450P	384x288	1440 x 1080	50mm	\$3,150
PFI-P635P	640x512	1440 x 1080	35mm	\$3,490
PFI-P650P	640x512	1440 x 1080	50mm	\$3,990

PIXFRA VOLANS

ALL DAY & NIGHT VISION RIFLESCOPE

4K
ULTRA HD VIDEO & PHOTO
RECORDING



WiFi

ORDER CODE	SENSOR	DISPLAY	OBJECTIVE	PRICE (SRP)
PFI-V850	3840x2160	4K	50mm	\$1,190
PFI-V850-LRF	3840x2160	4K	50mm	\$1,390

PIXFRA TAURUS & LRF

THERMAL CLIP ON

≤ 25^{NETD}
mK



WiFi

ORDER CODE	SENSOR	DISPLAY	OBJECTIVE	PRICE (SRP)
PFI-T435	384x288	1920 x 1080	35mm	\$2,450
PFI-T635 LRF	640x512	1920 x 1080	35mm	\$3,490



A Badger and a Legend

**SENIOR CORRESPONDENT JOHN DUNN
ON A SINGLE-SHOT CURIO**



Having associated with other hunters, shooters and collectors for as long as I have, I'm rarely surprised any more when some kindred soul reveals his or her latest object of interest. Sometimes it may be no more than a variation of some long-established theme, a different make or rare model perhaps. At other times it'll be something completely out of the box, not like anything you might have expected.

That was the case recently when fellow hunter Bruce Oliver quietly revealed he'd acquired a Chippa Big Badger rifle in .35 Legend, then added it was a nice companion piece for a Little Badger in .22LR he already owned. Knowing the man and his roving interests as I do, I probably should've expected it, as he's always enjoyed owning and using firearms which are a little different.

FOREARM WITH PICATINNY
RAILS TOP AND BOTTOM.



THE CHIAPPA BIG BADGER AS IT ARRIVED.

Though I don't have a particularly active interest in the current firearms market, I couldn't resist when Bruce offered me the chance to take a look at his Badgers. After all, they're both single-shot firearms and that alone will always be enough to rouse the interest of a tragic like me, especially in a different calibre like .35 Legend.

Like others of their ilk, the various Badger models are generally categorised as survival firearms, a term I feel is a bit limiting. The marque is built around an up-to-date version of the time-proven break-action every hunter of my generation used in his younger days. They weren't survival firearms then, just very useful, general purpose utility rifles suitable for all the day-to-day uses landholders, hunters or travellers might have. They're compact, easy to store

and carry and more than adequate for all sorts of game and pest animal applications, provided a suitable calibre is chosen.

CHIAPPA'S BIG BADGER

The Big Badger was introduced last year available in .30/30 and .35 Legend rifle calibres, as well as a .410 smooth bore, all of which have 50.8cm barrels. They're not pretty. All three have a skeletonised, round steel buttstock with a very basic, integral pistol grip which slips into the back of the frame or receiver and is secured by a grub screw on the underside. It has a rubberised recoil pad and four-position adjustable comb to cater for individual face fit.

The steel receiver of the Badger houses the exposed hammer, trigger and springs that power



them. There's also the firing pin, a cross-bolt safety and trigger-shaped operating lever in front of the alloy trigger guard. At the very front of the frame, a through screw acts as a pivot for the barrel.

To break the action the operating lever is pulled back, releasing a locking bolt which mates with a lug on the rear bottom edge of the barrel. This allows the breech end of the barrel to swing away from the standing breech and expose the chamber. At the same time, any cartridge in the breech is extracted from the chamber by 4-5mm where it can easily be picked out with the fingers.

To close the action the barrel is simply lifted upwards and locked into place against the standing face of the frame. As the old saying goes, it closes like a bank vault though at this stage the rifle can't be fired. The rebounding hammer is locked clear of the firing pin and the trigger disengaged. A manual crossbolt safety is also fitted.

To discharge the rifle the hammer must be thumbed back to full cock to engage the trigger before firing. A steel demi-block houses the chamber end of the barrel and its extractor, with an integral locking lug on the bottom edge below the extractor. Top of the demi-block is dovetailed to facilitate mounting of an optical sight, an absolute necessity given no sights are provided on the barrel.

The barrel is parallel with a diameter of 17.8mm and threaded at the muzzle for fitting a suppressor where such devices are permitted. A knurled cap extends beyond the muzzle, protecting the suppressor thread and crowning of the barrel at the same time.

All metalwork on the rifle has a nice flat black finish, as does the recoil pad and adjustable comb. The plastic-feeling forearm (M-LOK or Modular Lok system) wraps snugly around the barrel and is secured by a pair of Allen screws fore and aft. It has Picatinny rails (Mil-STD-1913) top and bottom that match up with dovetails on the demi-block, which together allow the mounting of a range of sights. The sides have cuts to accommodate attachment of accessories such as a torch or sling-swivels as required.

While it can be taken down, in general use the Big Badger is touted as a folding firearm. The barrel swings down and back to lie under the buttstock, just like the small-bore poachers' guns of yore which are said to have been carried concealed in a special pocket in a long coat.

At time of writing, Bruce is still sorting out a suitable sighting system for the Big Badger. He's not happy with the red dot sight he originally put on, which is why it's wearing a 2-8x32 Vixen scope in the photos. This set-up is far from ideal as the rear end of the scope overhangs the receiver too much, making it vulnerable to being easily knocked out of alignment. It also makes it awkward to cock the hammer, a problem which may be resolvable with a hammer extension. A set of higher mounts is another option, as is a long eye relief scope with a smaller tube diameter, so it's a work in progress.

For all of that the Big Badger resonates with me on several fronts, including the single-shot aspect already mentioned. It's a solid rifle with a good heft and slightly muzzle-heavy feel, which I

LEFT: BIG BADGER RECEIVER. THE LARGEST PIN IN THE CLUSTER OF ACTION PINS IS THE CROSS-BOLT SAFETY. NOTICE THE NARROW GAP BETWEEN HAMMER SPUR AND OVERHANGING SCOPE TUBE, NOT AN IDEAL SETUP.



DEMI-BLOCK (BREECH END) SHOWING THE CHAMBER AND EXTRACTOR WITH THE ACTION LOCKING BLOCK ON THE BOTTOM.



RECOIL PAD AND ADJUSTABLE COMB ON THE BUTTSTOCK FRAME.

J.P. SAUER & SOHN

ESTABLISHED 1751

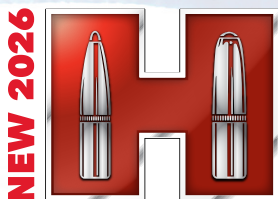
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PERFORMANCE, QUALITY, PRICE



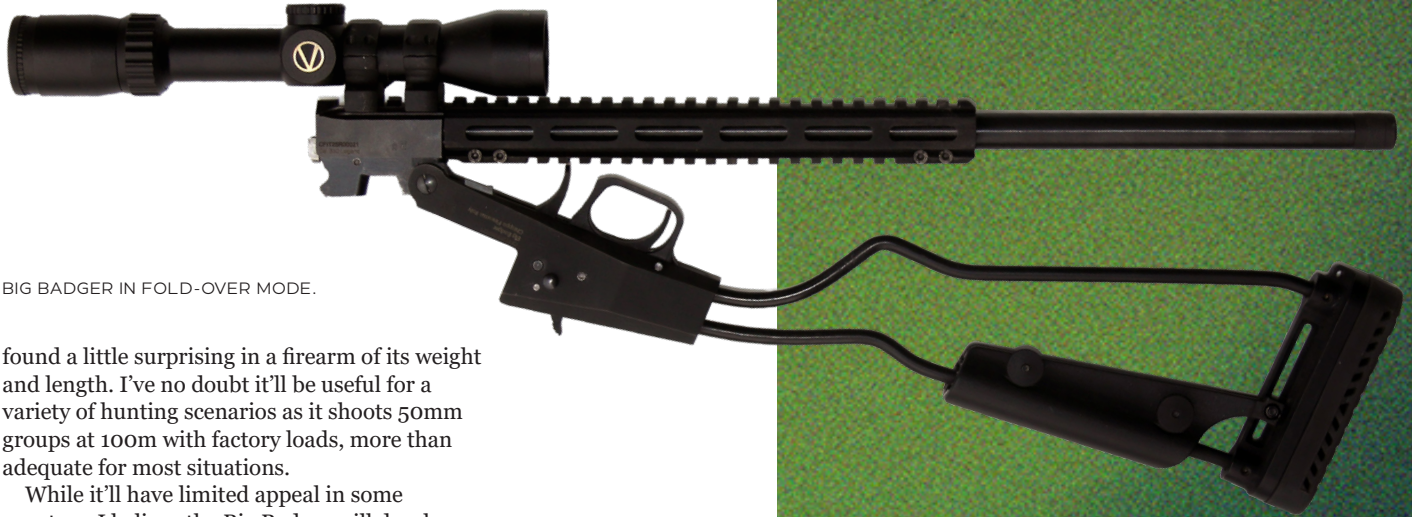
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BIG BADGER IN FOLD-OVER MODE.

found a little surprising in a firearm of its weight and length. I've no doubt it'll be useful for a variety of hunting scenarios as it shoots 50mm groups at 100m with factory loads, more than adequate for most situations.

While it'll have limited appeal in some quarters, I believe the Big Badger will develop a following over time, if only because it's so different and interesting. I could even be tempted into buying one myself, if I had the use for it.

THE .35 LEGEND CARTRIDGE

This was developed by Winchester Repeating Arms. Introduced in 2019, it'll fit the AR-15 platforms and is legal for deer hunting in those US states where regulations require the use of straight-wall cartridges. It's been touted as suitable for deer-sized game out to 230m, though I see that as a bit adventurous given its' ballistics and looping trajectory. Around 130m maximum sounds more like the limit to me, especially with the energy levels the various loads develop.

As the ballistic chart shows, changing loads between brands and bullet weights without resighting would undoubtedly create problems, especially at longer ranges. As I write this, there are three different factory loads available in Australia. ●



THE RANGE OF .35 LEGEND FACTORY AMMUNITION AVAILABLE AT TIME OF WRITING. WINCHESTER 255GN OPEN TIP, FEDERAL POWER SHOK 180GN SP AND HORNADY CUSTOM 165GN FTX.

.350 Legend ballistics			
Winchester 255gn Open Tip			
Distance	Velocity (fps)	Energy (ft-lbs)	Elevation (inches)
0	1060	636	-1.5
100	991	553	0.0
200	936	496	-33.6
300	891	449	-106.9
Federal Power Shok 180gn SP			
0	2100	1762	-1.5
100	1793	1284	0.0
200	1520	924	-9.4
300	1292	668	-33.9
Hornady Custom 165gn FTX			
0	2200	1773	-1.5
100	1890	1309	0.0
200	1612	952	-8.3
300	1371	689	-30.2



MAKE IT EASY ON YOURSELF

SAM GARRO TAKES THE STRESS OUT OF TRAVELLING

There was a time when preparing for an outback hunting trip with a couple of mates used to be a pretty basic trailer loaded with a four-man canvas tent, foldup chairs, sleeping bags, a couple of eskies of food and a water supply.

You might throw in extra jerry cans of fuel, a couple of hand torches, spotlight for night hunting, some sort of recovery gear, vehicle spares, a shovel and axe to chop wood, firearms and ammunition. In the absence of game, a couple of rods to try for a fish or two in a creek or river could come in handy but, for the most part, nature provided the rest, with logs to sit on and timber for the campfire to cook and stay warm at night.

As time went on and more in a group scenario to meet the collective's preference for greater comfort and convenience, each year during duck season or when pursuing feral goats and pigs in central western NSW, more and more gear started to pile up on the trailers. Now we were hauling extra lighting powered by a generator, a spacious fly tent for insect-free dining at night, additional tables and chairs or maybe even a portable shower and makeshift kitchen sink, the list went on and on.

Nevertheless, whether on your own or with a group of fellow hunters, organising and preparing for a trip, especially to remote places or an outback station for several days as we did, where you have to be self-reliant and resourceful, can prove challenging and at times stressful. You have to be coordinated and ensure everything is accounted for, including making provision for unforeseen occurrences or circumstances, yet there are ways to lessen the stress and make it easier on yourself.

ORGANISING GEAR

Storing most of your camping and hunting equipment in an allocated place in the shed or garage in cupboards, lockers or larger storage trunks can simplify the packing process and alleviate searching for items you can't remember placing. In turn, the various items will have their own compartment or section, including hunting wear from socks and boots through to hooded jacket, gloves and caps in a duffle bag.

On returning home everything is machined washed, dried and packed away in its place again ready for next time. My knives, binoculars, torches and batteries, backpack and related items have their own storage section. Headlamps, camera and phone charging cables, torches with



SAM ROLLS UP CLOTHING FOR WRINKLE-FREE STOWING IN DUFFLEBAG.



scope attachment and various batteries, all of which combined can be bulky, are again stored in a separate carry case for ease of access. Similarly with other related grouped items.

Rolling clothing for packing as practiced in the military is space-saving and things remain less wrinkled. Personal items like a shaver, soap and dental care are held in a toiletry bag. The backpack which accompanies me in the field is equipped with a kit comprising wraparound compression bandages in case of snake bite or injury and few larger-type band-aids for cuts. There's also a GPS tracker, skinning knife or folder for dressing game, a game bag or two depending on what I'm hunting, water bottle and binoculars, all organised in an effort to make it easier and less stressful for next time.

And to ensure everything is accounted for, a detailed list or spreadsheet where items can be added or removed and checked off when packing into the vehicle, will also prevent gear being left behind, especially if it's a crucial piece of equipment or important medication.

DRESS APPROPRIATELY

Casual attire and not hunting clothes when travelling through towns where you might be stopping for provisions or fuel - and when calling on the property owner or farmer - is the proper consideration and commonsense approach. Once there you can change into something more rugged to cope with the often dusty and sweaty conditions associated with unloading gear,

clearing the campsite, erecting tents or sweeping out shearers' quarters and the like. I routinely take a change of clothes, socks and boots for that purpose in a backpack, which makes for a quick turnaround and my casual wear packed away for the return trip.

FOOD PROVISIONING

Herbs and spices, cooking oil, sauces, mustard, vinegar and the like, which complement and enhance camp meals, can be stored in a sealed tub in a cool area and topped up as they expire, ready for the next trip. A vehicle plug-in fridge or freezer or esky with ice for fresh items like butter, meat, bacon and milk will preserve these or you might prefer to buy them nearer your destination.

After a long trip and having set up camp, a quick bite is needed to keep hunger at bay and restore energy levels. Two-minute noodles, baked beans, boiled eggs or frankfurters and the like, while pretty basic, will keep you going. Dehydrated ready meal packs from camping outlets and some of the big supermarkets can also serve the purpose, so more time can be devoted to hunting. These can even be taken on a day's hunt and prepared on location over a small burner or temporary campfire.

TOILETRY ITEMS IN ONE BAG; TORCHES, BATTERIES AND CHARGING DEVICES STAY TOGETHER FOR QUICK ACCESS.

RIGHT: ORGANISATION IS KEY FOR ACCESSING WHAT YOU NEED.



CHU
SUP
RELO

OZ
K2-1
125mm

UT:
N.W.: 3.9 KG
G.W.: 4.5 KG
CBM:0.0704CBM

PENN
8500 SS
Air Seal Spinning Head

Gasmate
HIGH OUTPUT
9.0
NOTARY PRESSURE
Gasmate Gasmate Gasmate Gasmate

Ammo

Coleman
The Outdoor Company

SUNDOME



BEFORE YOU GO

Leading up to a trip, checking the long-term weather forecast and contacting the station owner or property manager regarding conditions, activities and/or restrictions associated with lambing or calving is always a good idea. You should also ask whether you need to bring your own water supply due to drought conditions or local restrictions.

If more than one vehicle's involved, consider a UHF radio hand set to communicate while driving and when on the property. I've found this invaluable for a whole raft of reasons from a possible breakdown, alerting others of a road hazard if travelling ahead, to any medical emergency. It's also important to select a channel other than an emergency one and test communication between vehicles before setting off. It's surprising how often this simple procedure is overlooked when really needed. A vehicle inspection is also time well spent for peace of mind.

In a group situation it's important everyone shares the load, bringing food and drink items, carrying equipment like a generator, chainsaw, water containers and such like, as one vehicle won't handle it all. And encouraging your companions to take their turn in cooking meals in camp removes the pressure on one person having to cater for everyone.

PRESERVING GAME MEAT

For all your efforts in procuring game meat, you'll want to properly preserve it for taking home. A supply of bought or homemade bags to hang meat in the shade to drain of blood and cool before stowing in a fridge helps immensely in this regard. Vacuum-sealing game, whether whole rabbits or ducks or boned-out meat, need only be chilled short-term while the air which speeds up deterioration is removed. A low amperage fridge-freezer like a 12v/240v mains plug-in Engel as I've used for years is a sound investment.

VEHICLE SPACE USAGE

Where appropriate and affordable, it's worth investing a few dollars on vehicle improvements such as lockable storage drawers to house recovery gear, medical and camping gear which can remain



longer-term in the vehicle. A roof rack to carry a shovel, shade awning, cargo bag and tent all serve to make the journey and camping experience easier and more enjoyable.

DON'T LEAVE IT TOO LATE

Except for perishable goods, attend to food provisions, drinks, spare batteries and filling the fuel tank a couple of days beforehand and don't wait until the last minute. Most of your equipment can also be packed in the car or trailer a day or two before leaving. Mounting recovery gear like a high-lift jack or extra tyre, while not overly time-consuming still needs to be done and takes a bit of effort. Knowing most of the preparation is out the way will settle your mind and contribute to a better sleep the night before, though in my experience this rarely happens due to mounting excitement of the trip. ●

CAMP SET-UP WITH LIGHTING POWERED BY A GENERATOR AND FLY TENT FOR BUG-FREE DINING; AFTERMARKET STORAGE COMPARTMENTS WHERE ITEMS CAN REMAIN LONG-TERM.

RETAY



Threaded Muzzle

2-Position Safety

Threaded Bolt Knob

External Bolt Release



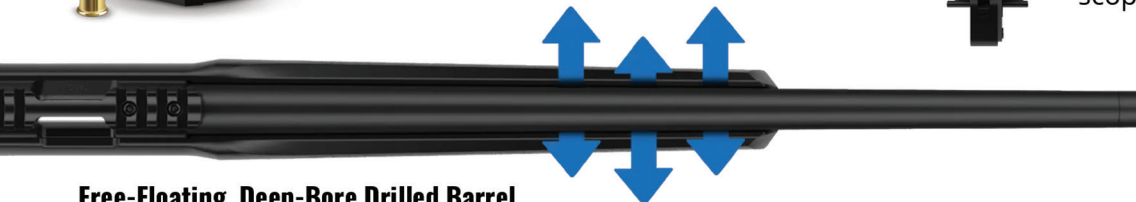
Detachable Rotary Magazine

Included 10-round detachable rotary magazine fully compatible with 10/22 platforms.



60 Degree Bolt Throw

The 60-degree bolt throw allows for faster cycling and increased scope clearance.



Free-Floating, Deep-Bore Drilled Barrel with Black Chrome Finish

The free-floating barrel, precision deep-bore drilled, ensures consistent accuracy by minimizing contact with the stock.



Steel Mechanism with Dual Extractors & 3-Point Locking

Built for strength and precision, the hardened steel mechanism features dual extractors for reliable casing ejection and a 3-point locking system that ensures maximum safety and stability with every shot.

3-Stage Adjustable Trigger

Equipped with a three-stage adjustable trigger that allows precise control over trigger weight, pull length, and reset.



700-Platform Style

Engineered on the trusted 700 foundation, this rifle is equipped for 700-pattern trigger compatibility, giving shooters exceptional reliability and limitless aftermarket trigger options.



In the doghouse

LEON WRIGHT ON A DECADE- LONG BATTLE TO HUNT WITH THE MURRAY RIVER RETRIEVER

It had been a great morning's hunt and I was well on the way to 'bagging out'. I'd been hunting ducks on a mate's property and with one to go I sneaked up the dam bank, slipped the safety off and brought the shotgun to bear on a woody on the edge off the fast-rising flock. At the shot I was pleased to see the duck fold and drop into thick grass beside the dam, though not quite so much when I couldn't find it.

But my trump card was waiting impatiently in the 4x4 and, after giving up the search, I returned to the truck to fetch Missy, my Murray River Retriever. It didn't take her long to discover the woody was long gone and after a brief search through the long grass bordering the dam, she followed the scent globules left by the duck. She sniffed her way up through the long grass beside the fence for a good 50 metres, then sat air-scenting by the fence until I caught up.

Trained not to jump fences (too much barbed wire in our district) she waited patiently for me to let her through then sniffed her way across the track to the fence on the other side. She continued on her way, tracking the woody through the long grass for at least another 50m then stopped, back tracked a few paces and pounced, collaring the hapless duck.

'Ho-hum' you might say, standard work for a Murray River Retriever and we've heard it all before. But here's something you may not have heard before. If you're the owner of a similar animal and have been using it to retrieve ducks during the season in Victoria, you've been breaking the law. Do I have your attention now? It was illegal to use the Murray River Retriever (formally known as the Murray River Curly Coated Retriever) to retrieve ducks in season in Victoria prior to 2024.

This has been the case since the Game Management Authority took over the handling of game bird hunting in that state. Furthermore, if caught doing so you ran the risk of having the dog removed from your custody and being DNA tested. If found to not be complying with game bird

regulations, there was the chance of heavy fines along with confiscation of equipment. I hasten to add this only applies in Victoria.

This came about as the Game Management Authority takes its list of dogs allowed to be used for game bird hunting from one list supplied by the ANKC (Australian National Kennel Council), who only deal in pedigree dogs and, while the Murray River Retriever is a pure-bred dog, it doesn't have a pedigree.

Without that pedigree the fact the Murray River Retriever is an Australian icon and the only home-grown retriever, having been bred true to type since 1894 and served our duck hunting fraternity for 150 years, is irrelevant to the ANKC. Little is known of the breed's history but what is known is there's a rich historical connection between the dog and the waterway it's named after.

In the early days, apart from hunting, dogs were also used to guard the early paddle-steamers and duck punts which plied the Murray River during early settlement. The origin of the Murray River Retriever, while obscure, shows it's a dog of the working classes which dates back to the mid-1800s in this country.

Believed to have originated from English and Irish heritage, it closely resembles the Norfolk Retriever as well as the Northern Water dog of Ireland, but alas we'll never be sure. What we do know is DNA testing in 2014 showed it isn't related to any other contemporary breed. While it's now officially known as the Murray River Retriever it has been known as the Murray River Curly Coated Retriever, Curly, Murray River Curly, Murray River duck dog and Murray Red, all depending on locality.

Up until the 1960s the Labrador and Curly (Murray River Retriever) were kings of the duck swamps. There were, of course, other breeds but those two were the undisputed favourites with hunters, though things were about to change with the introduction of the German Shorthaired Pointer. Dog breeders including Jack Thompson

MISSY WITH A TEAL SHE'S
JUST RETRIEVED.





of Dunfree Kennels saw the need for a smooth-haired and more versatile option like the GSP. Duck hunters after a dog which needed little maintenance flocked to the breed in such numbers that within 10 years of its introduction, it was rumoured around 50 per cent of Aussie duck dogs were GSPs.

While the Curly's a true utility gundog, it doesn't have the flashy pointing ability of the GSP. Others such as flat-coats and various spaniels pushed the Curly to the position it holds today. However, the Murray River Retriever still holds the record for serving the duck hunting fraternity longest and, contrary to popular opinion, is still extremely popular with hunters.

I live alongside the Murray River and the dog which took its name is still a favourite with duck hunters. I had the chance to check the local dog registration book from around 1930-1940 and numerous Murray River Retriever were registered, including my family's first, 'Old Tibby'.

A story my late uncle liked to tell was of the day he and dad headed out duck hunting, leaving Tibby tied up so he wouldn't follow them as they were going to the top of Lake Mulwala by boat. Tibby knew they were going hunting and voiced his disapproval of being left behind as the men left home beside the lake.

Later that day as they turned the boat for home they could hear a dog barking on one of the small islands just south of Tarramia Station, so they rowed over to investigate. They were stunned to find Tibby who, after slipping his collar, had swum and island-hopped after them for about

eight kilometres. They dragged him into the boat where he collapsed and didn't move the whole way home.

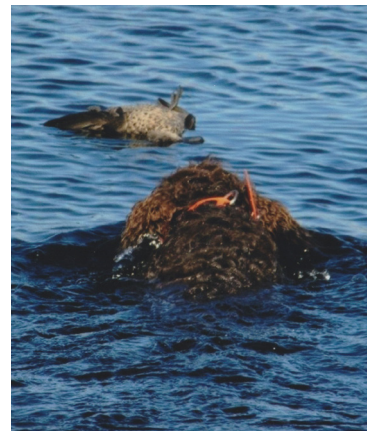
My Aunt Loma used to say all she had to do was close her eyes for a few seconds and she could envisage my grandfather, broken shotgun over his shoulder and Tibby at his heel, as they headed off for a shoot on our duck swamp beside Lake Mulwala, aptly named Wright's Inlet.

But back to the story and so began a 10-year battle to have the breed recognised by the ANKC. While the registrar of the Murray River Retriever Association worked on developing a breed standard, the duck hunting fraternity of that Association, of which I'm a member, went to work on drumming up support from organizations such as the SSAA, FGA and SFFP, all of which had members hunting over Murrays.

Firstly we had to find out for sure the situation was genuine and approached the Victorian branch of the SSAA. We were told they were due to have a meeting with the GMA regarding another matter and would raise our plight. The resulting news was indeed bad and it was illegal to use the Murray River Retriever for game bird hunting in Victoria.

Along with that first setback from the GMA we were subsequently told we could apply for an exemption which would allow us to hunt ducks while the situation was sorted out. Sadly this was wrong as the exemption only applied to breeds already on the list of approved hunting dogs. This was just the beginning of dealings with Dogs Victoria, the ANKC, numerous government depart-

WHAT THE BREED EXCELS AT -
RETRIEVING DUCKS.



THE WAVE EXEMPLIFIES THE
KEENNESS THE BREED SHOWS
IN ITS JOB.



AN OUTING ON RABBITS IS ENJOYED BY SHOOTER AND DOG ALIKE; MISSY WITH THE A DAY'S BAG OF WOODIES, TEAL AND BLACKIES.

in July 2012, and DNA samples sent to the US for verification of ours dogs' breed.

All this came with hurdle after hurdle to negotiate, lies, broken promises, misinformation and everyone stalling, the list goes on. As I'm a constituent of one of the politicians, I rang her office and asked for an appointment to discuss the situation, only to be told she was too busy to speak to me. Strangely, since that time I've noticed the same politician hasn't been too busy to put her face in front of the TV cameras at almost any and every opportunity.

To appease the ANKC and in a bid find a way forward, at an AGM, members of the Association voted to drop 'Curly Coated' from the name with the breed now known as the Murray River Retriever. This was done following advice as the previous name was too close to the Curly Coated Retriever and may cause confusion.

ments and five consecutive Ministers of the Victorian Government. Our plight was even raised by Daniel Young of the SFFP during question time

Finally, after years of battling bureaucracy and with the presentation of the Breed Standard to the ANKC, the Murray River Retriever was recognised as a pure-bred Gundog by the ANKC on January 1, 2022. Yet even though we finally had that recognition and the breed was added to Group 3 Gundogs, we were still not allowed to use them to retrieve ducks in Victoria as it had to be signed off by the Minister concerned.

Along with the backing of the GMA we forwarded all relevant information via email to the relevant Minister, only to be told she was only interested in helping constituents of her own electorate, though the email would be forwarded to the next relevant Minister (which it never was). Eventually we rang the office of Steve Dimopoulos to ask what the hold-up was, to be told by his assistant they'd never received any such email. We were assured the matter would be dealt with as soon as the Minister returned from interstate. True to her word, a few weeks later the Association received an email from the Minister's office assuring us he was aware of our plight and a favourable outcome was guaranteed when the new Wildlife Game Regulations were presented to Parliament in September 2024. So finally, after 11 frustrating years, we're there and the Murray River Retriever can now be used to hunt ducks legally in Victoria. ●

First Aussie adventure

SOUTH AFRICAN LLOYD PEREIRA REDISCOVERS HIS HUNTING TOUCH

Growing up in South Africa with an enthusiastic hunting and fishing father, I had the privilege of being raised in an environment where those hobbies were completely normal. Looking back, that wasn't the case for most youngsters 30 years ago, so I'll forever be grateful for those experiences and the fact I've stayed connected to these incredible sports ever since.

Then about four years ago my wife and I jumped at the opportunity to move to Australia. While I can't praise the country, its people and the lifestyle enough it's still a huge adjustment, uprooting your life, leaving behind friends, family and starting from scratch with your networks. It took me 18 months to be into a position to obtain a firearms licence and buy a gun, then another 18 months to finally find the time and a decent property to go walking and stalking for deer and goats.

Last June myself and a good friend drove to a large working farm in western New South Wales for a four-day adventure. He'd never been on a proper hunt and was champing at the bit to give it a go. On the first afternoon the farmer kindly took us for a drive around to show us the lay of the land. The farm was beautiful, there were plenty of animals and I passed up a decent billy goat and a three-year-old buck.

You often look at an animal, think you'll do better than kick yourself at the end of a trip because, in hindsight, that was your golden opportunity. But it was more than just not the right animals, it was only the first evening and both would have been a short stalk at best. Luckily the decision to pass on them didn't come back to haunt me.

The following morning we left camp at first light, encountering plenty of roos and a few does walking through paths in the forest but no buck. Two hours into the morning we saw two herds of does grazing up an open hill. We sat watching for half an hour then stalked in between them in the hope there'd be a buck holding court in the nearby trees. After a 20-minute stalk we were between two herds and, sure enough, a buck

wandered out from a few isolated trees. This was possibly the same animal from the night before, though sadly he caught our scent before I could even decide if I'd take a shot.

After a snack break while glassing from the top of a hill, we spotted a small mob of feral goats. We put in a relatively simple stalk, came within 50 meters then I did the unthinkable. I missed the shot at seemingly unmissable range, though I suppose four years of hunting rust can do that. With the goats now all too aware of our presence, I didn't overthink things and dropped a big billy with a neck shot.

Now came the hard part as we had to drag the heavyweight billy up the hill, suspend him from a tree and gut him. I enjoy the process of gutting, skinning and butchering the animals I harvest as there's a therapeutic element to it which gives me, as a hunter, a further sense of accomplishment. When working the goat we were careful not to contaminate the meat with fur which seemed to work well, as the meat we've eaten so far has been pretty good.

The rest of that morning and our second walk in the afternoon featured mainly roos and a few more does so, after a couple of beers round the firepit that evening, with a goat carcass hanging from a nearby tree, we hatched a cunning plan for the following day.

To speed things up we decided to drive next morning to reach our hunting location at first light. After parking up we climbed down to a dry river bed in the low light of dawn, giving us cover to enter a valley and scan the hills where we'd seen plenty of deer the previous day. About 10 minutes into the walk we spotted a herd of fallow including a good-sized buck. With the adrenalin now pumping, I steadied myself on the bank, gathered my nerves and let rip with the 6.5 Creedmoor. The sound of the shot sent the rest of the herd scurrying but, in their wake, was a fantastic buck which had dropped in his tracks.

At 150 meters and still a bit rusty, the shot was aimed squarely at the 'engine room'. In the lead-up to a hunt you can daydream, watch YouTube



CASI



ABOVE: LLOYD MANAGED TO BAG TWO OF THE THREE FERAL PIGS WHICH APPEARED FROM NOWHERE.

LEFT: FALLOW BUCK TAKEN WITH THE 6.5 CREEDMOOR ON A STEEP INCLINE AT FIRST LIGHT.



videos, research and plan as much as you want, at least that's what I do. Yet when you haven't shot for a while, the precision placement of head and neck shots go out the window when you encounter a trophy animal and that adrenalin kicks in. You just want the job done with a single shot.

It was a phenomenal experience, even more so when sharing it with a mate. It felt like the grind of the firearm safety course, gun licence paperwork, installing the safe, finding ranges to sight-in then actually sourcing a suitable property to shoot on, had all been leading up to that moment. After a few pictures on the hill we dragged the buck down, hauled him over a branch with the truck and tow rope then gutted him. We carried on walking that morning, managed to sneak within 20 meters of a few does but didn't fire another shot.

That afternoon the farmer took us out again, driving through blackberry bushes thicker than I could comprehend. A great afternoon and evening ensued where we saw plenty of animals and even managed to bag a few pigs, which apparently are rare on that property. Spending time with the farm owner in that kind of setting was also really beneficial, as you begin to better understand someone when you're sharing the experience.

The following morning we butchered both animals, an enjoyable process which, as seems to be the way with these kind of things, took longer than expected. We packed up camp and began what ended up being a tiring drive home due to the Sydney long weekend traffic. In all honestly though, the traffic is much less painful when you're hauling two eskies full of meat and a ton of great memories. ●

THE REWARDING PROCESS OF CLEANING ANTLERS NEXT TO THE FIRE.



ALIEN 2: THE SEQUEL

AUSTRALIAN & NEW ZEALAND

HANDGUN

Canik TTI - Alliance with a champion
Frontier Reflex sight - Simplicity itself
Smith & Wesson - Performance Center Model 929

ISSUE 24

**OUT
NOW**



Pole position

JOHN MCDUGALL VISITS A EUROPEAN HUNTING HOTSPOT



KRAKOW GUNSHOP OWNER IGOR SULGUT IN THE SSAA HUNTING VEST JOHN GIFTED HIM.

THE HAZEL GROUSE AND MALLARD ARE TWO SPECIES HUNTED BY SHOTGUN.

It was while attending my son's wedding in Poland I had the chance to investigate hunting opportunities available in what is a beautiful country. Gun shop Knieja was close to my accommodation in Krakow and I was fortunate enough to be able to spend three afternoons interviewing the owner, Igor Sulgut, while flicking through some Polish hunting magazines. The amount of game available was hugely impressive.

SHOTGUNNING

For the bird hunter there are exotic species such as pheasant, with both cock and hen birds on the agenda and, while the former can be hunted widely, hens can only be taken on game reserves. There's no bag limit on pheasant with the season for males running from the start of October until the end of February, while females can be hunted from October through to the end of January. Size four lead shot is recommended.

There are several species of duck available to hunt in Poland, mallard being one of the most popular. Both male and female can be taken legally from September through December, with the common pochard, tufted duck and Eurasian teal also on the list with no bag limit specified. The hunting situation is completely different in Poland, where it's acceptable to harvest ducks sitting on the water. Size four and five shot are recommended for successful waterfowl hunting.

There are three species of geese available to hunt. The greylag season runs from September 1 to December 21 and while the bean goose has a similar season, in some regions it's extended until February. The greater white-fronted goose is the third option. Shot size recommended for geese is No.2 and they're allowed to be shot on the ground as well as in flight. All waterfowl, including geese, must be hunted with a dog in a ratio of at least three hunters to one dog.

Woodcock can be hunted from September 1 until December 21 with no bag limit on either male or female birds. These are usually shot in flight, often from a hide or walked-up in stubble, with small shot sizes from No.7 to 9 recommended for successful harvesting. The wood pigeon season extends from mid-August until late November with both male and female permitted to be shot on the wing. Hunters I spoke to told me they like

to build a hide in stubble to shoot pigeons as they come in to decoys.

Hazel grouse are notoriously difficult to locate as they inhabit mountainous areas and hunters will normally use a caller to attract them during the September to November season. Grey partridge are on the agenda from mid-September to mid-October, though for hunters who use trained birds of prey the season is extended until November 30.

LICENCING

This covers several aspects of hunting and shooting in Poland. You must be well versed in the law and general firearm safety and have a handle on common knowledge about game, seasons and gun dogs. To this end you must be a member of a hunting club for at least 12 months, have learned from experienced hunters within the club and be aware that every region has a dedicated hunting base.

Once you become a member of your chosen club you have to pass three exams. Firstly a written test consisting of 100 questions, 70 covering common knowledge of firearms and 30 on safety and the law. An 80 per cent pass rate is required. Next is an oral exam on questions more specific to particular animal species based on safety and the law, then thirdly you're tested for a competent grasp of hunting accessories. All of this can be gained by being a member of a club and interacting with experienced hunters.

Strict levels of shooting competency are also required and the new hunter must pass a further three practical tests, including using a pellet gun where you must hit the target at least four times out of 10. For shooting roe deer the aspiring hunter must hit a target at 100m, landing a bullet in the '9' circle three times out of five using a .222 to .243 rifle. Shooting clay targets using a 12-gauge shotgun with 20 shots, you must break at least 10 targets with a maximum of four broken double-barrel. With these results achieved, you can then return to the hunting club and present your certificates proving you passed all tests.

There's also a psychiatric assessment on your suitability to hold a firearms licence, as well as a police check to ensure you're a fit and proper person. Finally, when issued with a Gun Owner's Identity Passport by the District Board, you



PHOTO: INATURALIST CHRISTOPH_MONING



PHOTO: INATURALIST BAARTTEK



BOARS AND ROE DEER ARE POPULAR TARGETS FOR POLISH HUNTERS.



SOME OF THE 12-GAUGE HUNTING LOADS SOLD IN POLAND. NOTE LARGE SHOT SIZES AND HIGH VELOCITIES.

can buy ammunition only for the guns you own. When buying a new firearm, the passport must be stamped and processed by police.

CLAY TARGETS

To shoot clay targets in Poland you must be a member of a certified club, then present to police with a 'genuine reason' and details of any previous experience (a criminal check will also be done). With all conditions satisfied you'll then sit two exams. For the 10-question theory you require a 100 per cent pass rate, followed by a practical test using a 12-gauge shotgun.

When you've completed and passed the exams, the paperwork must be sent to a national shooting body such as the Polish Sports Shooters' Association. The cost of an annual licence, issued by police, is around \$165 and four competition shoots a year must be recorded to maintain that licence.

LARGER GAME

To hunt you only have to pay for hunting club membership and not for individual species, though when having taxidermy undertaken there



RED DEER STAGS CAN BE HUNTED FROM MID-AUGUST, WHILE DOES CAN BE TAKEN FROM SEPTEMBER.

are fixed prices for each species and animal depending on weight. Rather than have restrictions on calibres for designated species, Poland relies upon a 'joule' or energy value measured at 100 metres for the taking of larger game.

Roe deer are the most popular species to hunt in Poland. They require a 1000-joule bullet and can be walked-up, shot from a tree stand but not from a vehicle. The male season runs from May 11 until September 30 and the female from October 1 until January 15. You can't hunt deer for three years from when you gain your licence and, for each species you intend to hunt, you must pass an exam about that species. For example with red deer the number of points, crown and teeth and how a stag carries the weight of the rack on his head.

Red deer stags can be hunted from mid-August until the end of February and a 2000-joule projectile must be used. Females can be taken from September 1 until mid-January and it's forbidden to shoot a calf at the feet of its mother, as with all deer species in Poland. For fallow a 2000-joule projectile must be used and, if using a shotgun, only females can be taken. There's a moratorium on shooting moose which remains in place to this day, though mitigation permits are available for farmers.

Any wild pigs shot must be taken to a butcher to ensure they're disease-free. The season runs year-long and a 2000-joule bullet must be used. You can use night vision optics for pigs, racoons, badgers and hares, while other species such as foxes and rabbits can be taken without restriction.

IN SUMMARY

There are some fantastic trophy animals which can be hunted in Poland. If you're an overseas hunter I recommend contacting Igor Sulgut at his shop in Krakow for expert advice and he'll put you in touch with a trusted outfitter. If you do choose to go with a registered outfitter, you must demonstrate you hunt in your own country and provide a firearms licence. Igor can be contacted on +48 691 844 077 or email igor.sulgut@knieja.com.pl ●

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FIREARM SPECIALS



SPRINGFIELD XDM Elite 9mm Pistol, 3 mags & soft case.....\$925

RUGER MKIV Target Blue 22lr Pistol 10RD cased.....\$1020

RUGER GP100 357 Magnum Stainless 6 shot revolver\$1520

BUSHMEISTER BA-X12 12GA Synthetic 5 shot lever release shotgun & 5 chokes cased\$495

RUGER 77 Gunsite Scout 308 Laminated Stainless 18" BBL with flash hider.....\$2295

RUGER 77 Gunsite Scout 350 Legend Blue Synthetic 16.5" BBL with brake.....\$1940

RUGER 77 Gunsite Scout 450 Bushmaster Walnut Blue 16.5" BBL with brake\$2050

RUGER 77 RSG 338 WIN MAG Hawkeye Guide gun 20".....\$2575



MARLIN 1894 Classic 44 MAG 20" 10 shot lever action.....\$2160

MARLIN 1894 Classic 357 MAG 18" 9 shot lever action.....\$2160

MARLIN 1894 Guide Gun 357 MAG 18" 9 shot lever action.....\$2190

RUGER AMERICAN Rimfire 22LR Blue Synthetic 10RD rotary magazine.....\$730

RUGER AMERICAN Rimfire 22LR Compact Blue Synthetic 10RD rotary magazine ...\$730



RUGER AMERICAN Rimfire 22lr Stainless Walnut.....\$1075

RUGER AMERICAN Rimfire 22LR Stainless Synthetic threaded BBL\$865

RUGER AMERICAN Rimfire 22LR Target Laminated Stainless\$1055

RUGER AMERICAN Rimfire 22 Magnum Blue Synthetic 9RD rotary mag.....\$730

RUGER AMERICAN Gen II Std Grey Synthetic 20" BBL with break 6.5cm, 308.....\$1160

RUGER AMERICAN Ranch Rifle Gen II 16" BBL with break 300 blackout, 350 legend, 6.5 cm, 7.62x39, 223, 308.....\$1160

RUGER AMERICAN Synthetic Blue 22" rifle 308, 3006.....\$820

DIANA 21 Panther .177 air rifle package 4x32 scope 575fps.....\$280



REMINGTON 700 SPS Synthetic Blue 22-250 24" BBL\$1450

REMINGTON 700 SPS Synthetic Stainless 308 24" BBL.....\$1595

REMINGTON 700 SPS Synthetic Stainless 300 WIN MAG 26" BBL\$1595

OPTICS, AMMUNITION, ACCESSORIES



CALDWELL ROCK COMBO DELUXE BENCHREST WITH FRONT AND REAR BAG\$275

RCBS CHAGEMASTER LINK 240V DIGITAL POWDER SYSTEM.....\$650

LYMAN CYCLONE ROTARY CASE TUMBLER.....\$620

LYMAN GEN 6 COMPACT DIGITAL POWDER SYSTEM\$565

POWA BEAM DELUXE FOLDABLE SPOTLIGHT REMOTE, QUICK LOCK HANDLE & V4 THERMAL CAPABILITY.....\$175



RCBS PARTNER PRESS 2 RELOADING KIT.....\$435

LE172662 LEUPOLD BX-4 PRO GUIDE HD 8X42 SHADOW GREY BINOCULARS.....\$895

LE172666 LEUPOLD BX-4 PRO GUIDE HD 10X42 SHADOW GREY BINOCULARS.....\$895



LE184761 LEUPOLD BX-4 PRO GUIDE HD 10X42 GEN 2 BINOCULARS.....\$1095

LE173805 LEUPOLD RX-1600I TBR DNA BLACK/GREY OLED RANGEFINDER.....\$795

LE184681 LEUPOLD RX-5000 TBR DNA BLACK/RED OLED RANGEFINDER.....\$1350

BUSHNELL ELITE 4500 2.5-10X40 30MM MULTI X SCOPE.....\$395

LE180613 LEUPOLD VX-FREEDOM 3-9X50 CDS DUPLEX SCOPE\$650

LE180688 LEUPOLD MARK 3HD 4-12X40 30MM P5 ILL FIREDOT TMR DUPLEX SCOPE.....\$1195

LE183823 LEUPOLD MARK 4 HD 6-24X52 34MM SF FFP PR2 MIL SCOPE \$2950

LE183971 LEUPOLD MARK 4 HD 8-32X56 34MM M5C3 SF FFP PR3 MIL SCOPE.....\$3095

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**AFTER
THE
HUNT
THE
WORK
BEGINS**

DEREK NUGENT ENJOYS CREATING MEMORIES

When viewed in its totality, a hunt is quite a prolonged and complex undertaking. In all likelihood prior to commencement, permissions and access rights will have been (re) confirmed, maps consulted and trail camera images studied for useful data. In response, a few reconnaissance stalks may also have taken place to physically ascertain the location and behaviour of game, timelines will have been agreed with hunting companions, rifles zeroed and transport arrangements made.

Once on the ground, hours if not days of effort will be put into outwitting your quarry so as to facilitate those final adrenaline-filled moments of action, where a sight picture is drawn and successful shot dispatched, resulting in a humanely grassed beast. But that's not the end of the hunt for most of us, particularly if targeting deer, as what follows is the hard work of field-stripping a carcass of venison, backpacking it kilometers across challenging terrain to then butcher and put on ice. And there may also be the task of trophy recovery and preparation to consider.

RACK RECOVERY AND PREPARATION

It amazes me how the homeward trek is more satisfying if portering a load of venison and/or a fine set of antlers. While I rarely trophy hunt as such, I always take the headgear of any stag grassed. The more impressive or interesting ones end up in the 'pool room', while others adorn the walls of our hunting shed back at camp. Yet regardless of where each may end up, the preparation and mounting routine remains identical.

Since I've no desire for a taxidermy mount, I don't cape the head and shoulders but remove the head itself using a small hatchet. I also drop the jaw bone from the skull at the same time (again a hatchet or bone saw is used). Once the venison's on ice, the head is skinned and defleshed then let to sit outdoors in a protected spot for an extended period, perhaps months. This is so a natural de-

cay process can remove the last of the tissue and clear out the cranial cavity and other voids within the structure of the skull, all of which results in a grubby-looking skull in need of some TLC.

Step one is to simmer the skull in boiling water laced with detergent to loosen up any remaining tissue, fat and sinew. Care must be taken not to over-boil it as you'll split the nasal bone and lose teeth, so it's a case of closely monitoring the boil so a clean-but-intact skull results. At various points during the boil the skull should be withdrawn briefly for a manual clean and I use a paint scraper to remove softened tissue.

When satisfied with cleanliness of the skull, step two sees it placed in a peroxide bath for four or five days and I use three or four bottles of three per cent peroxide from the chemist. Try not to let the antlers sit in the solution as some loss of colour can occur. Don't use bleach as this'll impact on the integrity of the bone itself before moving to step three, a sun-drying process where the skull is left to bleach naturally in the sun for several weeks.

Now this is my process though I'm not saying it's the only way of cleaning a skull for mounting or even the best way, as others will have their own preparatory rituals and so they should. But I'm sure all will agree the effort put in at this stage is going to determine the quality of the finished product once mounted. My advice is not to mount a skull until you're happy with the natural 'whiteness' of the bone, and I know some who use paint at this point to achieve the look they're after, not my method but to each their own.

MOUNTING OPTIONS

My preference has always been for skull mounts and, when younger, I created partial (one-third or half) mounts on traditional timber shields which were amateur affairs. Most times the screws used to secure the skull caps were obvious and when I look at them now I think: "I could've done that better," though being self-taught it was all trial and error. These days

SIMMERED, STRIPPED AND READY FOR PRE-MOUNT PREP WORK (WHITENING).



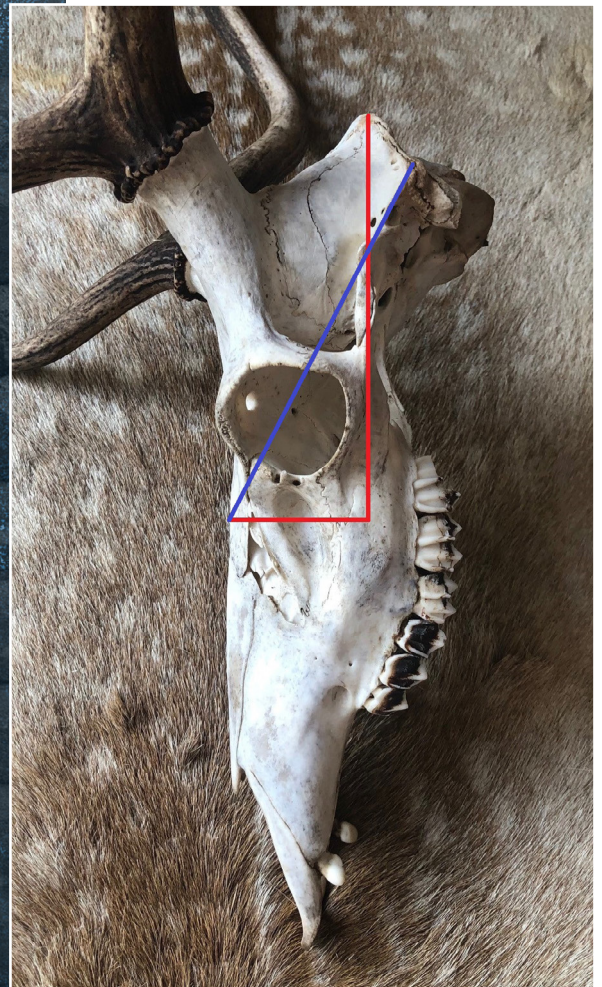


TOP: AGGRESSIVE PROJECTION OF A PARTIAL SKULL MOUNT RESULTANT OF A SEVERE OBLIQUE CUT. BOTTOM: EVEN A PIECE OF 'BUSH WOOD' MAKES FOR AN APPEALING MOUNT.

I prefer the full European skull mount and don't necessarily use a mounting board. I find there's almost a primeval satisfaction in simply affixing a full skull directly on the wall using the natural line of the teeth to both steady the mount and present the antlers. When I do use a board however, I ensure no unsightly screws spoil the look of the finished product by using the skull itself to 'hide' any mounting fixtures.

There are literally dozens of choices when it comes to mounting a skull. If you favour the traditional bone on timber look, a myriad of mounting board shapes can be crafted from a variety of timbers all finished to your own preference. Personally, I've come to settle on a backing board of quality polished timber which is tapered to follow the outline of the skull. For big racks in particular, this emphasizes the shape and size of the stag's skull and enhances its visual appeal.

If you don't want to fashion your own, an interesting source of mounting boards is your local Op shop. I regularly pick up highly appealing timber pieces simply in need of some imagination and a refurb to transform them to suit my purposes.



EXAMPLES OF PERPENDICULAR (RED) AND OBLIQUE (BLUE) CUTS TO EMPHASIZE ANTLER HEIGHT OR PROJECTION RESPECTIVELY.

Even an interesting roundel of 'bush timber' can make for an appealing option.

A range of commercially made metal antler mounts, designed for attaching directly to the wall can also be had from your local gun shop or online. These 'hanger' mounts come in a variety of styles and sizes and are an attractive way of mounting and displaying a full skull. The more expensive and sophisticated models incorporate pivot points, which allow the angle of the skull and antlers to be varied to create the look you desire, one which can be changed as the mood takes you.

There's even a range of 'micro' hangers and pegs designed to be discretely attached to a mounting board, unnoticed behind the skull itself. In fact, a wander down the bracket aisle of your local hardware store will also reveal a number of products which, with a little imagination, will serve quite admirably as trophy hangers at a fraction of the cost. Hanger-type mounts all use the anatomy of the skull to create a fixing point - the craniovertebral junction or 'hole' in the base of the skull cap.

For the traditionalist seeking a timber finish, unsightly screws can be avoided by using the same methodology. An angled dowel or bracket can support the skull and alternatively, since the underside of the skull cap is riddled with 'holes', an unseen wire can be threaded to support the mount. I prefer the latter and attach the skull



directly to the backing board by passing a wire through two pre-drilled holes then tying it off at the rear of the board out of sight. I ensure lateral support by applying a layer of clear drying glue to the tooth-line of the skull and have never had this method fail.

DEREK'S FAVOURED STYLE IS A FULL SKULL MOUNT ON TAPERED POLISHED BACK BOARD WITH HIDDEN FIXTURE POINTS.

VISUAL IMPACT

Significant degrees of visual impact can be had by changing the angle of protrusion of the antlers

An advertisement for Outlaw Wines. The background is a dark, textured surface. Two revolvers are crossed in the center. A man in a dark jacket and hat stands on the right. A star-shaped logo is in the bottom left corner. The text 'OUTLAW WINES' is in large, white, distressed font. Below it, 'THERE ARE NO RULES' is in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. Further down, 'Wine of the Australian outback, country and coast.' is in a white, serif font. At the bottom, the website 'www.outlawwines.com.au' and social media handle '@outlawwines' are listed. A QR code is in the bottom right corner.

OUTLAW WINES

THERE ARE NO RULES

Wine of the Australian outback, country and coast.

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themselves. As stated earlier, many commercial hangers have the ability to vary the pitch at which the antlers are held for differing visual impact, and those presented with a predominantly perpendicular aspect can emphasize the height and form of the rack.

Those with a more oblique presentation seem to rear forward from the mount, emphasizing the spread and heaviness of the stag's points. The former is statelier while the latter is more aggressive. Once again, presentation and impact of the antlers is down to personal preference and a function of whether a full or partial skull mount is being produced.

A full uncut skull mount provides a natural compromise between height and projection and allows for a good perpendicular aspect and pleasing projection. A partial skull mount can be used to emphasize one aspect over the other - height over projection or vice-versa - achieved by manipulating the angle at which the skull is cut. A perpendicular cut to the back of the skull will, when mounted, position the antlers as upright as possible, making them loom tall when displayed. An oblique cut across the rear of the skull will thrust the antlers forward, lower and with a more aggressive aspect and, the more oblique the cut, the more confronting the aspect.

Many decisions will be guided by wall space and ceiling height available and maturity and symmetry of the antlers themselves. I've used both full and partial skull mounts, the latter featuring both perpendicular and oblique cuts as I feel best suits the nature of each individual rack. The resulting diversity of 'looks' is not only pleasing to the eye but a good conversation point over a beer and game of pool.

FINAL THOUGHTS

A trophy is an enduring souvenir of a successful foray and often the last aspect of the hunt to be finalized. To say there's a degree of satisfaction to be had when a quality head is finally affixed to the wall is a huge understatement. After the hunt a lot of time, effort and thought go into exactly how to create a mount with the desired 'presence'. Things like quality of the initial skull cleaning and preparation is crucial, as are decisions relating to which style of mounting board, if any, to use. Whether to hide or feature retaining screws and wires, go DIY or buy a commercial hanger are all considerations which impact the finished product.

The desire for a compromise presentation of height and projection, or an intentional bias of one aspect over another will dictate if a full or partial skull mount with either a perpendicular

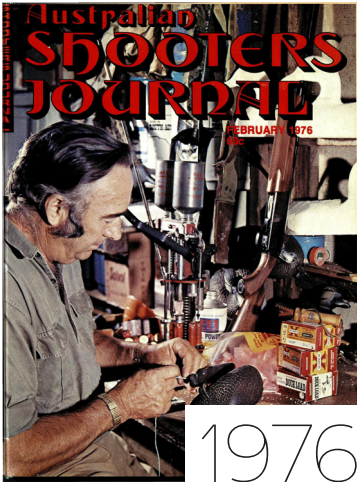


or oblique cut is used. And what of accretions? Perhaps an engraved plaque bearing details of the hunt including a small picture of the successful hunter and some inert cartridges celebrating the calibre used? The possibilities really are endless. What matters though is at the end of the process you can look at the finished mount, relive the experience, raise a glass and celebrate your own dedication as the complete hunter. ●

A SELECTION OF DIFFERENTLY STYLED SKULL MOUNTS.

FROM THE
**SHOOTER
ARCHIVES**

Welcome to 2026 and a new occasional feature to launch a new year. Responding to multiple requests from members and readers, each month or so we'll dig into the *Shooter* archives to bring you content from yesteryear. And where better to start than by travelling back 50 years this month to the *Australian Shooters' Journal* of February 1976 and an article in which **Pat Browne** points out there's more to duck hunting than simply taking a shotgun into a swamp. Hope you enjoy our glimpse into the past.



FOREWORD:
ALLAN BLANE

WORDS:
PAT BROWNE



**GET
READY
FOR THE
DUCK
SEASON**

**ARE YOU READY FOR THE SEASON ...
THERE IS MORE TO DUCK HUNTING THAN
JUST TAKING A GUN INTO A SWAMP ...
PAT BROWNE DISCUSSES SOME OF THE
FINER POINTS.**

Page 28

Australian Shooters' Journal, February 1976

We'd started early and were well in position and ready to go half an hour before first light, a time of day both Ian Campbell and I regard as the best. The multitude of small details had been completed, decoys had been set and we were relaxed and waiting for the birds to start moving. The spot chosen had been the subject of some discussion over the previous couple of days and was one of several alternative sites, giving consideration to weather and wind direction.

I relate this story of last year's opening shoot as it may help illustrate some of the finer points of duck hunting that'll make the difference between success and failure. I've been blessed over my

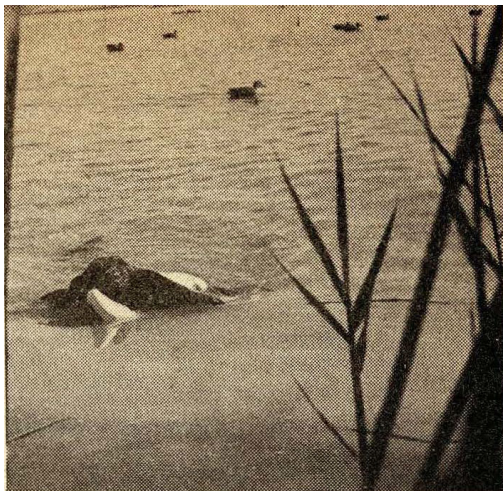
years of shooting with a group of hunters who take their water-fowling very seriously, study it intensely, observe it closely and, over the years, have developed a style which has proved both successful and rewarding.

While the majority of my hunting is done around the lakes area in SA, the principles are the same. Yet due to the occasional lack of large concentrations of waterfowl or, more to the point, huge expanses of water spreading the numbers pretty thin, our style has become more intense. In simple terms we work harder for our birds than most others.

As a consequence some of the little things we do raise a chuckle among some of my eastern



OPEN COUNTRY SHOOTING REQUIRES A SPECIAL TECHNIQUE AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL.



A GOOD RETRIEVER PUTS THE CREAM ON A GOOD DUCK HUNT. THIS MOUNTAIN DUCK IS COMING TO HAND COURTESY OF A G.S.P.

states friends but, as I say, the results are worth the effort. If I was to compare methods, the classic American way of open water hunting would be closest to ours. The method developed in the States was in essence to make the birds come to you with large spreads of decoys, good camouflage, use of a duck call and a good working gun dog.

But back to the story of last year's opening. As mentioned, several spots were chosen the day before and we had the choice of areas where we'd shoot from the boat and a couple where we'd shoot from shore from a blind. The shore spots were set up by digging

a blind which isn't hard to do. It's not necessary to excavate to a great depth, though some care is needed to make the blind comfortable without disturbing the natural look of the area.

If it's a two-man blind, dig the hole just wide enough to accommodate you almost shoulder to shoulder and, for one, a little narrower. Dig the spot for your feet about half a metre deep and a seat on the back side of the blind about 10cm deep. Make a small abutment in front about 15cm high and continue it around the sides. Allow room in the front behind this abutment for shells and other bits and pieces and to one side an area for your dog. Dress the front of the blind with natural vegetation but don't build it up too high as this looks completely out of place.

The secret of any dug blind is exactly that, it must look secret. The test (and it's the acid test) is to have your companion sit in the blind and you move out into the water and look back. Be super-critical and if there's anything that looks out of place, correct it there and then because it's

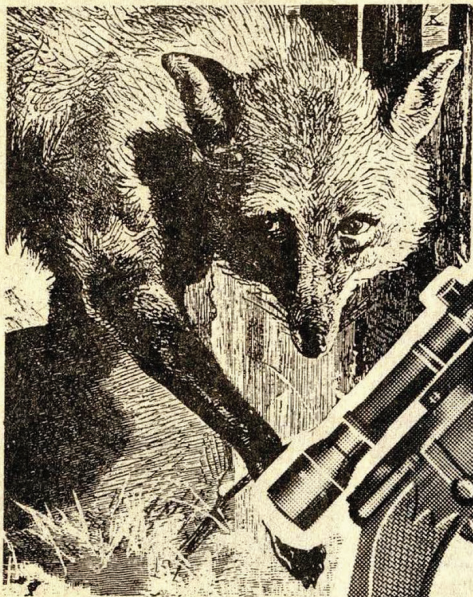
for sure you won't do it in the morning. The thing to remember in these blinds is you only want concealment during the critical periods when birds are in the area. At these times the thing is to crouch low and keep still until birds react to calling and come in to decoys or within sensible gun range. More about technique later as we go further into the actual shoot. As things turned we didn't use the dug blinds this time but the important thing is they were there if we had to.

Wind direction was such we decided to shoot from the boat among a group of reeds, allowing us to take up position in a sheltered area with the wind at our backs. Two points emerge here and bear some consideration. Ducks are strong fliers and cover vast distances, yet at the time you and I hunt them (early morning and late afternoon) they have purpose in mind, to either feed or rest. The sheltered area is attractive to birds looking for somewhere to sit and feed, while the wind direction is such they usually like to land into the wind, small points but very important.

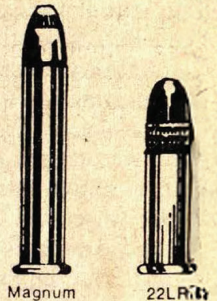
Boat set-up is as important as the dug blind, though concealment is relatively easy in the reeds. It always amuses me to see good duck hunters take lots of time and patience to use camouflage, then sit in a bright white or aluminium boat as a shooting platform. Ducks aren't silly or blind, so a bright object inside a line of reeds is completely out of place and will spook them every time. If you don't want to go to the trouble of painting an aluminium boat, bend the reeds in over the gunwales to break the line and drape a bag or two over the corners.

The ideal thing is to paint and the ideal colour is dull green or greenish yellow. If you're painting, do the lot, inside and out and while you're on the job do the tank for the outboard and the oars and paddles. My boat, a 12-foot aluminium 'Snipe', is painted dull green and everything that goes into it is painted the same colour. This takes

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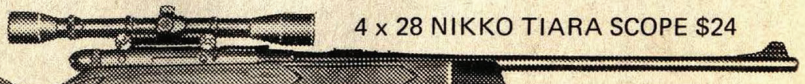
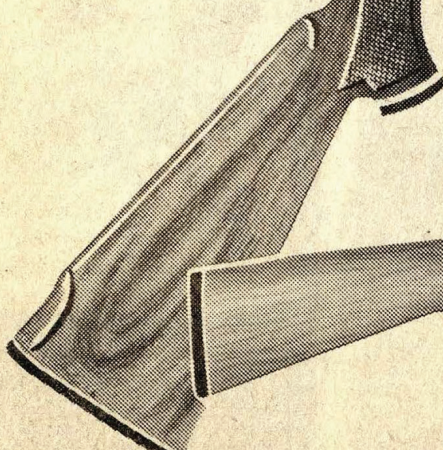


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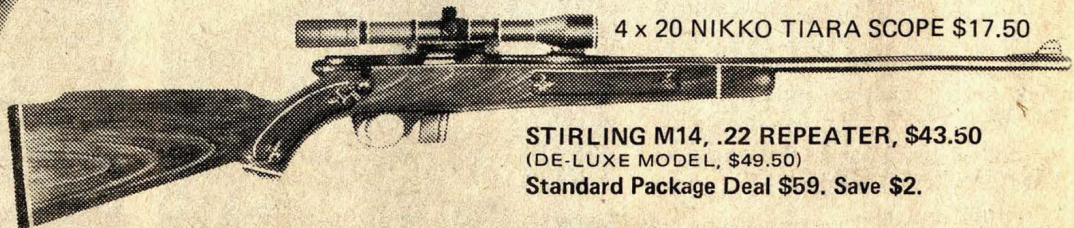
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the issue of camouflage off the mind and is one less thing to worry about.

With my boat I've the choice of two power plants which is handy for lake shooting. A 4HP 'weedless' outboard for pottering around in confined areas and 10HP for covering longer distances. Both are excellent units and are kept in tip-top condition. I don't bother painting the motors as the simple act of draping a decoy bag over them is the answer to the camouflage problem.

Some care is needed when shooting from a boat, particularly with two hunters and a couple of dogs. When you're in position or getting into position, jam the boat tightly into the reeds broadside on to the decoys, leaving about one metre of reeds between decoys and boat. Take your oars and ram them into the mud fore and aft to stop the boat moving. It's a good idea to have several wheat bags. Put a couple in the bottom of the boat as they make good non-slip surfaces, then drape one over the gunwale where the dogs get back into the boat. This makes for a comfortable self-contained blind, one I use a lot and has proved very successful.

Decoys are a subject on their own but there are some basic points to be remembered. How many? Good question. In large open areas the more the better but use them sensibly, while in heavy covered areas you get away with fewer. I've had some great shoots in river areas with as few as six, though in lakes 20 would be the absolute minimum.

Before the season, check them all for holes and ensure anchor strings are in good condition and sinkers firmly tied. Nothing is more frustrating than watching a valuable decoy float off into the distance or one slowly sinking before your eyes. It's also bad for your pattern to have lopsided blocks or half-submerged ones, as this mucks up the whole look of the set and will spook the birds.

Most birds we hunt will react to almost any decoy and the majority of dekes available are of the black duck or teal shape. If you're building up a set, go with both in the proportion of four big to one small. You'll notice most imported shapes are larger than life and this is as it should be, as experience has taught us ducks react better to oversized decoys. If making your own, make them about 20 per cent bigger than normal.

While not commercially available, a couple of good mountain duck decoys are worth their weight and size. I've a couple of excellent ones made by master decoy craftsman Arch Ralston, which have proved invaluable on days when big shelducks are plentiful. Decoy patterns aren't as important as some would have you believe. I've read and heard discussed the pros and cons of



horseshoe and pear-shaped patterns, yet no two sets of circumstances are the same.

Be sensible with placement and have your nearest blocks about 4-5 meters from the blind, spreading them in an irregular pattern in roughly a fan shape out in the direction you intend to shoot. It's a good point to have one or two out to about 30 meters as this gives you a good reference point on effective gun range. If you're setting a large spread or have collected and use a larger number of say 20 or more, it's a good idea to string every fourth block by the tail.

You'll notice most commercial decoys have anchor points both fore and aft which makes it easy. The effect of this is to make your set more irregular on windy days, as there's nothing more obvious than a set of dekes all facing one way in the wind. In warmer weather it's not a problem placing the set, just throw them into position, making sure they're all upright with no strings draped over necks and bodies. The surface of the blocks will dry quickly and look natural. But be careful on cold days and place your blocks, as when wet they shine in sunlight and that's bad news. Leave some open spaces in the pattern as, after all, you're enticing birds down to land among friends and they can't do this very well if there's nowhere to sit.

The more common types we hunt such as blackies and teal don't need a lot of room, so these areas can be quite small, no more than a couple of square metres each. It's a good policy to have one of the party in waders as this makes it easy to adjust blocks and move them as required, if that's found to be necessary after the sun has risen. If the water's too deep for wading, use oars to manoeuvre around the set, as an outboard motor makes quick work of anchor strings.

SPEND THE TIME TO MAKE YOUR SPREAD OF DEKES AS REALISTIC AS POSSIBLE.



BOAT SHOOTING IS GOOD, BUT IN SHALLOW WATER STAND IN THE SWAMP AND LEAVE THE DOG IN THE BOAT TO REST.

So we're in position, decoys set and ready for the first sign of action. With Ian being in the gun trade and myself a gun writer, it was natural we'd some interesting hardware along. Experience has taught us it's not so much the gun and cartridge being used, more the way it's used. We won't go into brands but the thing to remember is you must have the right tool for the job.

First up when birds decoy close, and by that I mean to within 20 meters, we both use skeet guns, either auto-loading or double-barreled. This particular morning we had both, Ian using a Beretta auto with skeet barrel and myself a Winchester 201 skeet gun. Later in the morning when birds are stirred up and a bit frantic and as a result more wary, both of us swap to guns with a little more choke, usually modified to handle slightly longer

shots out to about 35 meters.

Outside this range leave them alone as you're hard pressed to make clean kills beyond that and you get landed into the 'sky-busting' class if you persist. You muck up your own and everyone else's shooting by trying for long shots and, more importantly, your cripple ratio goes up and this is bad news for all of us. If there's one thing I'd say to novice duck hunters that takes precedence over all others, it's to learn to be still when birds are working. By this I mean when birds are sighted, you freeze as sudden movement is the biggest single factor in spooked flocks. If shooting with a partner, one of you should watch progress and call if using calls, while the other should support the calling but keep still with head down.

If birds have made the decision to land among your dekes you're home, now all it takes is to control your excitement and not shoot too soon. When it's all systems 'go' (a decision made when birds are well within gun range) usually braking to land, rise smoothly, pick one and concentrate solely on it to take the shot. Again, if shooting with a partner have a plan as to zones of fire and stick to it. Ian and I have the plan that I shoot left, he shoots right and this has stood us in good stead.

Under normal circumstances the action is so fast and furious only two well-controlled shots will be sent off. Downed birds should be retrieved immediately and, if there are any cripples, deal with them immediately. It's most unfair to expect

a dog to chase a swimmer hundreds of yards, with the odds well in favour of the bird. Apart from destroying the enthusiasm of your dog, there's a good chance you'll lose the bird if it dives. A point to remember is birds on the water are very hard to hit, so it's a good idea to have a pocketful of 9s or 10s to deal with cripples.

Cartridges are an evergreen subject but the thing to remember is if you're as good as the cartridge, you'll be successful. Most brands of 32 and 36-gram shells will do the job very well in sizes 4, 5 and 6. I like a 36-gram 6 out of the skeet gun early and swap to 5s from the modified barrel later. I shoot at reasonable ranges and like the extra pattern density to land more pellets on target rather than go for a lucky single pellet in larger sizes. This however is a personal view, as I know of fine waterfowlers who use 4s and even 3s with great success.

The two big ammunition companies have a high velocity load on the market for duck hunting and both are excellent shells. Winchester 'Duck Load' and IMI's 'Game Load' are the two in question, though I add a word of warning. These shells were designed for use in full choke guns and have the effect of opening the patterns with these tight chokes. If you're a one-gun man with a full choke barrel, they're ideal and will give you in effect a modified pattern, thus increasing your chances of successes, but in open choke guns they're a no-no. So if using a gun with improved cylinder or modified choking, choose a Blue Star or Ranger cartridge for best results.

Duck calling is an art and is just gaining some popularity in this country. There are some fine calls now coming on the market and a couple I've used are the 'Olt' marketed by Winchester and the 'Chieftain'. The Mark V in the Olt range is particularly good with plenty of volume and a good tone. The secret of calling is not to overdo it, as it's better to have too little than too much in the early stages until you build experience.

If you want to have a go, buy yourself a call and practice. Listen to birds in the swamp and try to imitate their call. It's beyond the scope of this short article to try and teach duck calling, though nothing ventured nothing gained. Try it in the swamp and, if it doesn't work, put it in your pocket and try again later. The object of calling is to have the birds interested in your decoys and it matters little if you play Chopin's Fifth if the desired result is obtained. Once mastered it's the most rewarding experience to watch as a good caller turns a mob of teal back towards the guns.

So there it is, some of the many overlooked points of duck hunting, little tips picked up over the years. I hope they'll be of some use to you and hopefully we can discuss some of the points in greater depth in future issues. You'll have to excuse me now I have to wade out and collect 85 decoys! Have a great duck opening. ●

DEAR SHOOTER



MORE ON THE SNIDER
I read with interest Dick Eussen's article on the Snider-Enfield rifle (*Shooter*, October 2025). If I may be so bold as to correct a small inaccuracy, the .577 Snider remained in service in Australia until at least 1902. I know this as I have the honour to own an 1870 Snider-Enfield heirloom which belonged to my father's great uncle, Charles Chambers Bryce (1879-1972).

Uncle Charlie as I knew him, left Brisbane on the troop transport Templemore on March 6, 1901 as a Private with the 5th Queensland Imperial Bushmen contingent, bound for South Africa and the Boer War, issued with the Snider-Enfield rifle now in my possession.

The regiment comprising 23 officers and 504 other ranks along with 450 horses saw action in a number of areas. I can't imagine carrying and using the enormously long and heavy Snider against the much more agile and accurate 7x57 Mausers of the Boer farmers. I believe the pay rate for a Private was five shillings a day plus a 'colonial allowance' of an additional shilling a day. The regiment returned to Brisbane on April 30, 1902 and was disbanded on May 5, 1902.

My Snider is in fine working order but has little collector value, as Uncle Charlie cut the timber from the stock just in front of the first barrel band to make it lighter. I understand he taught my father to hunt using this firearm and my father was the last person to fire it, as I have chosen to enjoy its visual presence in deference to its 150-plus years of age. My compliments to Dick for an informative article about this interesting part of our colonial history.

John Ball, via email

BUILT TO LAST

I don't know if this'll help Derek Nugent or not (*Shooter*, September 2025) but I have a Widder original buffalo Skinner knife I bought in 1970 or thereabouts. Mine has some differences which may be of interest to him, with the leather sheath having an impression of a deer or elk on the front and 'Made in Germany' on the back but without the Widder stamp.

My knife has what looks like an antler handle and 'Widder, Solingen, Germany' on the blade on the same side as 'original buffalo Skinner' embossing. It doesn't have notching at the start of the blade, so I assume Derek's is an actual presentation model which mine isn't. It has done a hell of a lot of work over the years, though is still tight and holds its edge almost as well as my handmade Puma knives from the same era.

Shane Skillington, via email

• Your September issue included a very interesting story by Derek Nugent on an old knife he unearthed. Not that my knife is as old or of the same brand, yet it grabbed my attention as the blade, handle and leather grit are much the same. I bought this one when I was 18 from a well-known quality gun and knife shop in the Hunter Valley now long gone (I'm now 60). I'm sure it was of Japanese steel and is marked 'roo Skinner'. It was and remains to this day a well-used piece of my kit.

Ross Goodwin, via email



THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Congratulations on a brilliant article by Derek Nugent on his Widder knife (*Shooter*, September 2025). I was tickled pink when I saw the photos of something very dear to me. I bought mine from a sports store in Parramatta nearly 60 years ago - can't remember what I paid for it but my hard-earned paperboy money went to good use.

I do recall seeing the same knife as pictured with the leather handle, yet as soon as I saw the Bowie knife the deal was clinched. Mine has never been used for butchering game, though it was always with me watching my favourite TV show at the time: The Adventures of Jim Bowie. Thanks for igniting the memories.

Malcombe Ambrose, via email



SEND LETTERS TO:
edit@ssaa.org.au

National

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.

Fly Shoot National Championships

March 5-9, 2026
SSAA Majura, ACT
Program: Thursday, March 5: Bench draw, range set-up (4pm). Friday: Practice and flag set-up. Saturday: 500m Light Gun Fly. Sunday: 500m Heavy Gun Fly. Monday: 200yd Rimfire Fly. Facilities: Catering by Gungahlin Lions Club, camping \$10 a night, hot showers, toilets, cooking facilities and electricity provided. Full event details on National website. Contact: Dave Groves jdgroves@iinet.net.au.

Field Rifle, 3P, Scoped Air and NRA National Championships

April 2-6, 2026
Southern Districts Rifle Club, WA
Program: Thursday, April 2: Practice. Friday: NRA 3x40, 10m 3P Air Rifle. Saturday: Field Rifle Centrefire, 10m Air Rifle Precision. Sunday: 3P Rimfire, Field Rifle Rimfire. Monday: 3P Centrefire, closing ceremony. Full details on National website. Facilities: Camping \$10 per person for duration of event, hot showers and toilets, full canteen from breakfast daily. WA-compliant firearm storage at club, \$10 per person for duration (interstate competitors only), limited space, no cases or bags, competitors must provide own trigger locks. Contact: info@sdrc.com.au

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 Rim-

fire Hunting Rifle followed by 40 shots Centrefire 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 Air Rifle. 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.

International

NRA Any Sight International Postal Event

December 1, 2025-July 31, 2026
Field Rifle, 3-Positional, Scoped Air Rifle and NRA Any Sight
Program: Competition open to all registered participants who are current financial members of Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA) Inc (or approved full member body) or National Rifle Association (NRA). Awards and certificates for first three in Off-gun (overall scores); Grades: Junior U-18 and Junior U-15. Full details on National website. Contact: Matt Rogaloff fieldrifle@disciplines.ssaa.org.au

NSW

SSAA (NSW) Big Game Rifle State Championships

May 29-31, 2026
Emmaville Shooting Complex, NSW
Program: Friday, May 29: Set-up and practice from 12.30-3pm; Saturday and Sunday: Rifle events. Awards: Medals for first three in all individual events. Facilities: Camping and caravans permitted at range with toilets and hot showers, clubhouse open for indoor camping. Contact: Ben Doherty bfjdoherty@bigpond.com or 0409 831 258 (A/H); Gary Beling beling.home@gmail.com or 0409 751 384 or 0458 102 355. Full event details on National website.

SA

SSAA (SA) Air Rifle State Championships

March 7-8, 2026
Para Range, Greenwith, SA

Program: Saturday, March 7: Benchrest (75 shots), 10m Precision (40 shots). Sunday: Field Target Open (60 shots), 10m 3-Positional (60 shots). Range open 8.30am daily, shooters' briefing 9am, matches start 10am. Prizes: State medals for all grades including U-15 and U-18. Full details on National website. Facilities: Canteen at range with light meals, snacks, tea, coffee, drinks available all day. Motels within 15 minutes, caravan parks 20 minutes. Camping on range with showers, toilets and power. Contact: Paul Rawlings paulee06@bigpond.net.au or 0403 436 905.

Tas

SSAA (Tas) Lever Action March 6-9, 2026

Westbury Shooting Club, Tas
Program: Friday, March 6: Practice after midday. Saturday: Big Bore 80 shots. Sunday: Pistol Cartridge 80 shots. Monday: Rimfire 80 shots. See National website for full event details. Facilities: Entrance fees include breakfast and lunch for competitors each day (small charge for non-competitors). Basic camping at range with toilets only. Tank water, no electricity, no fires allowed. Contact: Steve Collins 0459 834 885 or email - admin@westburys shooting.club

Vic

SSAA (Vic) Junior Scoped Silhouette State Championships

May 17, 2026
Eagle Park Range, Vic.
Program: 8.30am set up, 9-10.15 practice, 10.15 shooters' briefing, 10.30 2x40-shot matches. Nominations on the day. Prizes for first three in each age group. Facilities: Bruno's Café. Contact: Mark Butler 0409 135 740.

SSAA (Vic) Scoped Silhouette State Championships

May 22-24, 2026
Eagle Park Range, Vic
Program: Friday: Practice. Saturday: 80 shots centrefire. Sunday: 80 shots rimfire. Nominations on the day, medals for first three all grades. Facilities: Toilets, showers, Bruno's Café. Contact: Mark Butler 0409 135 740.

SSAA (Vic) Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

September 24-27, 2026
Eagle Park Range, Vic.
Program: Thursday: Set up and practice. Friday: 80 shots rifle calibre. Saturday: 80 shots pistol calibre. Sunday: 80 shots smallbore. Nominations on the day. Medals for first three in each grade. Facilities: Toilets, showers, Bruno's Café. Contact: Mark Butler: 0409 135 740.

SSAA Inc Event Cancellation /Postponement Policy

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

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

PROMOTE YOUR EVENT

Don't let your National or State championship be overlooked. Give it maximum coverage by promoting it in online and in print in *Australian Shooter*, the SSAA's National flagship publication. Visit ssaa.org.au and go to 'Disciplines: Upload Event Notices', fill in the form and we'll do the rest.

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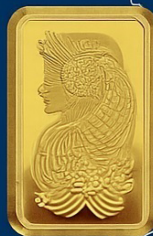


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THE DUCKS ARE STILL QUACKING

WORDS:
MARK VAN DEN
BOOGAART



Recently I came across an article on 'mankeeping'. The term, coined by sociologists at Stanford University in the US, gives a name to what they've identified as the unrequited emotional labour which women expend in keeping their male partners psychologically afloat. As a qualified student of the social sciences I was intrigued. Male loneliness is a layered and urgent issue and, for lots of good reasons, it's worth my while to understand it. But something about this new discovery of mankeeping felt off, like it was confusing cause with effect, so I filed it away in the junk mailbox of my brain.

Oddly enough, a few days later I came across a rebuttal in the form of an opinion piece on the website of an Australian national news service. The article challenged the premise of mankeeping, pointing to family and familiar roles and suggesting perhaps it's a symptom, not a cause. Having been validated by the smart people at said news service, I continued reading when I saw something which really leapt out the desktop screen. To paraphrase, the writer spoke of a time when men went down to the river to shoot ducks and catch fish. Sadly, as the ducks left and fish disappeared, so too did the shared activity that once connected them.

Apart from the fact there were still plenty of ducks and, if you in-

clude carp, almost too many fish, it was strange indeed to read that duck hunting and fishing, long dismissed as outdated or even harmful, may have held real social value. Could it be the writer was suggesting those seemingly archaic pastimes may not have been so evil after all. In fact they might have some social value by fostering connection and creating community in ways we've since lost.

Now if you hunt, none of this is breaking news. When people share outdoor experiences, they build their own networks of emotional support. Early mornings, collective tasks and quiet companionship by their very nature build connections. Working shoulder to shoulder, we form the foundation of lasting friendships which are often strengthened by a level of emotional strain. Even nature itself plays a preventative role by challenging us to be present and, in doing so, grounds us in something bigger than a Facebook profile.

For too long we've kept our hunting quiet, hoping silence might buy us peace. Yet clearly it's not working, so maybe it's time we found a better way to speak up and not just to defend but promote. Maybe it's time to reframe the narrative. Hunting, shooting and fishing aren't relics of a bygone era, they're the forgotten antidote to isolation, offering a meaningful connection to nature and powerful social payoff.

Sure hunting has many other benefits, yet too often these can be challenged or, at the very least, trivialised and pushed aside. Benefits connected to personal wellbeing may not be so easily dismissed. When viewed through a different lens, hunting becomes a powerful tool for preventing isolation before it takes root. It offers structured, meaningful engagement which builds multi-layered resilience through connection, ritual and purpose.

Rather than waiting for loneliness to become a crisis, hunting creates consistent opportunities to connect in natural, low-pressure environments. So maybe, just maybe, the cure for mankeeping isn't a redistribution of emotional labour, it's more actual labour. The kind that involves shouldering a pack, baiting a hook, scouting for sign, travelling to new places and yes, even listening to the same story for the 15th year in a row by the campfire.

Because while your mate's hunting and fishing stories may not earn them a guest spot at the next TED Talk Conference, at least you'll be there to listen. Imagine a National Hunting and Fishing Appreciation Day. Not just to honour tradition but to acknowledge their mental, relational and environmental benefits, as well as the deep and lasting value these activities offer to hunters and fishers, their families and the environment. And if nothing else at least the ducks are still quacking.

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