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**Shooter**

*Beauty...and a beast*

MARK VAN DEN BOOGAART  
ASSESS A BOLD CLAIM BY SAUER



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

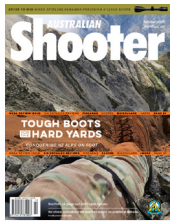
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# AUSTRALIAN Shooter

**OUR POLICY**

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

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# NATIONAL FIREARMS BUYBACK

WORDS: MARK VAN DEN BOOGAART



A firearms buyback is a mechanism of compensation. Compensation presumes loss as a lawful owner is deprived of legally acquired property and reimbursed for that deprivation. This principle is fundamental. The figure most frequently cited, \$15 billion, may be accurate in narrow accounting terms, though what it fails to capture are the extensive secondary and consequential costs imposed on licensed firearms owners. These costs are substantial, cumulative and largely unacknowledged.

**PRACTICAL EXAMPLE**  
A typical licensed hunter and recreational sports shooter may lawfully own a range of firearms, configured for different purposes, including:

- Large-calibre rifle for large game.
- Deer rifle used seasonally.
- Straight-pull rifle for feral animal control on farmland.

- Centrefire rifle configured for state forest and public land pest management.
- Small-calibre rifle for fox control and target shooting.
- .22LR rifle commonly used for training and introducing newcomers to shooting sports.
- A combination of 12-gauge and 20-gauge shotguns.
- One-off or legacy firearms retained for specific hunting or sporting roles.

In such a collection, it's not unusual for 10 firearms to be lawfully owned. Under proposed buyback arrangements, a majority may be required to be surrendered.

**CONSEQUENCES**  
After forced surrender, owners may retain only a limited subset of firearms suitable for the broadest possible uses. Others must be surrendered irrespective of their lawful acquisition. In some cases, certain firearms cannot be transferred or sold and must be destroyed. Buyback schemes commonly state firearms will be compensated at fair market value. This assurance does not account for a wide range of ancillary losses.

**UNCOMPENSATED COSTS**  
Each firearm required a Permit to Acquire, paid in accordance with licensing requirements. These fees are not refunded. Owners were required to purchase compliant storage, often large-capacity firearm safes, to meet evolving regulatory standards. When most firearms are

removed, much of that investment becomes redundant with no reimbursement.

**AMMUNITION**  
Firearms are commonly stocked with ammunition held lawfully and bought at significant expense. When firearms are surrendered, that ammunition becomes unusable and uncompensated. In many jurisdictions, licence holders were advised or required to purchase separate ammunition storage, which is similarly rendered surplus.

**STORAGE/TRANSPORT**  
Each firearm typically has a dedicated transport case required for lawful road transport. These additional items are not considered in compensation schemes.

**ACCESSORIES ETC.**  
Firearm maintenance equipment is calibre-specific including cleaning rods, brushes and tools. Many firearms have fitted stocks, recoil pads or custom components which can't be resold or repurposed. These costs are real, measurable and widespread.

**CONCLUSION**  
Buyback figures may reconcile on balance sheets, though don't reflect the full economic impact borne by licensed firearms owners. Individuals who've complied with every licensing requirement, fee, storage mandate and regulatory change are left to absorb significant uncompensated losses.

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OPEN SEASON

# DEER HUNTING: THE BENEFITS ARE NUMEROUS

WORDS: MATTHEW GODSON



Recreational deer hunting in Victoria offers important ecological, social and economic benefits. These benefits have been underpinned by the most recent harvest data reported by the Game Management Authority. According to the report titled *Estimates of the 2024 deer harvest in Victoria: Results from surveys of Victorian Game Licence holders in 2024*, licensed recreational hunters in Victoria harvested an estimated 167,600 animals.

From a purely harvesting perspective, this represents a 22 per cent increase compared to the 2023 estimate (137,100), and an 83 per cent rise on the long-term average since 2009 (91,100). The report notes that while the proportion of licence holders who hunted was roughly the same as the long-term average, the increase in total harvest was driven by more hunting days per active hunter (up 29 per cent) and higher hunter efficiency (up 15 per cent).

A breakdown by species shows most of the harvest was sambar (128,000 or 76 per cent) and fallow (35,400 or 21 per cent), while the average active deer hunter harvested 6.4 animals over an average of 13.5 hunting days in 2024. Again, more female sambar and fallow were harvested than males in 2024, the opposite of anti-hunting organisation rhetoric that only trophy animals are taken.

Research commissioned by the Victorian Government has shown recreational hunting, of which deer harvesting is a major component, makes a substantial contribution to the state's economy. Reports found

recreational hunting generated a gross economic contribution of roughly \$356 million in Victoria. Of that total, recreational deer hunting is responsible for around \$201 million and supported more than 3300 jobs, mostly in regional areas.

These figures highlight several benefits. Firstly, recreational deer hunting drives expenditure on licences, equipment, travel, accommodation and other related goods and services, particularly in regional and rural communities. This injects money into local economies, supporting jobs and businesses beyond the immediate hunting activity. Secondly, many hunters travel to remote or less populated regions to access hunting areas, spreading economic benefits across a broad geographic area rather than concentrating only in metropolitan zones. Thirdly, the industry and associated tourism benefits can act as a stabilising factor for rural economies.

From an ecological or land-management perspective, recreational deer hunting plays a role in managing deer populations, particularly where sambar and fallow are in high abundance. Harvest data offers an indicator of removal of individuals which might otherwise continue to breed up. Higher harvest numbers in 2024 suggest the activity is providing a meaningful level of population control.

Beyond economics and ecology, recreational hunting offers social and wellbeing advantages. The same study mentioned above, found hunters report higher scores for connection with nature and general health than the overall population.

The act of hunting involves outdoor physical activity, socialisation, skill development and engagement with land and nature. These aspects contribute to quality of life, especially in regional settings where outdoor recreation can enhance community cohesion.

The 2024 harvest estimate itself is valuable. By having a reliable, regular survey of licence holders, wildlife managers can gauge hunting effort, harvest rates, species composition, land tenure of hunts and regional distribution. For example, the report shows more deer hunting occurred exclusively on public land (50 per cent) compared with exclusively on private land (37 per cent), suggesting hunting is an important management tool on public land. Knowing that 354,500 hunter days occurred in 2024 gives management agencies data to assess the interplay of hunting, deer population dynamics and land use.

When integrated, the high harvest numbers in 2024 combined with previous economic modelling indicate deer hunting is a valuable recreational, economic and management tool in Victoria. It contributes not only to individual hunter satisfaction, but also regional livelihoods, ecological health and data collection. So for policymakers and land managers, supporting regulated recreational deer hunting is a win-win in balancing recreation, economic value and wildlife management.





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# EVOLUTION OF CAST PROJECTILES

WORDS:  
BARRY WILMOT



**T**he first projectiles used in muzzleloading firearms were primitive. Pure lead was melted over an open flame and poured into a casting mould, the end product usually being in the form of a round ball. The barrels of muzzleloaded firearms used at this time had smooth bores so a patch of cloth, usually lubricated with animal fat of some sort, was wrapped around the soft lead ball to form a seal in the bore.

The accuracy of these firearms was poor and it wasn't until the introduction of rifled barrels in the early 1500s that better accuracy was achieved. It was much later, about 1850, when the first practical centrefire cartridge was developed in England, then another 10 years before they were in use. Yet soft lead projectiles, albeit in different shapes, continued to be universally deployed.

Use of these plain lead projectiles continued until smokeless powder was invented in the late 1880s. These soft lead projectiles were found to be unsuitable for the higher velocities obtained with this new powder, initiating the change to lead projectiles with a soft copper jacket.

Although today these jacketed projectiles account for the lion's share of the market, plain cast lead ones are still used in vast numbers. Competition pistol shooters in particular either make their own lead projectiles or buy commercially made ones. And owners of lever-actioned rifles such as Winchester



AN EXAMPLE OF GAS CHECK PROJECTILES.

and Marlin still use commercially available bullets, though old cartridges like the .45/70 are the main customers.

The same production method used hundreds of years ago is still in place today, although the alloys and machinery are obviously far more sophisticated. Instead of pure lead, an alloy of 92 per cent lead, six per cent antimony and two per cent tin is mostly used. As the bullets cast easily, rejects are minimal and they have a Brinell Hardness Number (BHN) of around 16, which is ideal in the firearms used. Plain lead has a BHN of about five and the higher the BHN number, the harder the alloy.

Some shooters are lucky enough to have access to a ready supply of scrap vehicle wheel weights. Unfortunately, these vary in consistency, having from four to five per cent antimony, about one per cent tin and the rest lead, with a BHN of between nine and 12. Linotype was another alloy once readily available until hot-metal printing switched to computers. It contained around 85 per cent lead, 11 per cent antimony and four per cent tin. It had a BHN of 22 but was a bit too hard and needed more lead added to the mix to make it ideal.

These cast lead projectiles come in four main base types: Plain, bevelled, hollow-base and gas-check. Plain-based projectiles are most popular as they're easy to make, produce minimal barrel wear and are usually quite accurate. Bevel-based ones are similar in

performance to the plain base but, as they have a bevel on the base, slip into the mouth of the cartridge case easily and are therefore a pleasure to reload.

Hollow-base projectiles are ideal for low-pressure loads as they obturate easily (blow out at the base), to make a nice gas seal in the barrel and are popular for wadcutter target loads in pistols. The gas check is a disc of copper which fits on to the base of the projectile and allows it to be driven at greater velocities than the other projectiles. Because of this gas check they can be used in centrefire cartridges, having velocities of up to about 2500fps.

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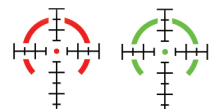
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# SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE

EYES ON THE CLAY AND NOT THE BARREL FOR SUCCESSFUL SHOOTING.

WORDS:  
LAETISHA SCANLAN



**Q** I'm new to shotgun shooting and keep looking at the end of the barrel when I call for the target. How can I stop myself from doing this?  
Jamie, WA

**A** You're not alone Jamie. Fixating on the end of the barrel is one of the most common issues new clay target shooters face, especially those who've come from a rifle or pistol background. In precision shooting a sharp front sight is everything, yet in clay target that instinct works against you.

The first and most important concept to understand is shotgun shooting is a 'pointing' game, not an 'aiming' one. You're not lining up sights and holding still, you're reacting to a fast-moving target. Your eyes are the steering wheel and the gun simply follows wherever they go. If your eyes are locked on the barrel, the gun has nowhere useful to go.

Yet that doesn't mean the barrel is unimportant. Every shotgun

shooter needs awareness of where the muzzle is pointing, so beads are useful for confirming correct gun fit and mount. But when it comes time to shoot the actual target, the barrel should never be the sharpest thing in your vision. If you can clearly see the bead or rib, your focus is too close and the target will almost certainly be missed or stopped on.

A helpful mental cue is this: The barrel should always be a soft blur in your peripheral vision. Your eyes should be locked on the clay itself, while your brain subconsciously positions the gun where it needs to be. This is how experienced shooters appear to 'just point and shoot'. They're not thinking about the barrel at all.

To break the habit you've acquired, make vision control part of your pre-shot routine. Before you call for the target, consciously push your visual focus out into the field where the clay will appear. Some shooters quietly remind themselves: 'Eyes out' or 'See the bird'. This small mental trigger can make a

difference, especially under pressure. Hold a soft, relaxed focus in the area where the clay will appear, as this makes it easier for your eyes to focus on the target the instant it flies from the trap.

If you continue to struggle then remove, shave down or dull the front bead (a white one may help and avoid high-vis beads). This can be an effective training tool. Without a bright reference point pulling your focus back to the end of the barrel, your eyes are encouraged to stay on the target. Once the habit subsides, the bead can be reinstalled or changed back.

Visual habits take time to master. The good news is once your eyes learn to stay on the target, everything else such as timing, smoothness and consistency start to fall into place. In clay target, seeing well is shooting well.

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# TOP SHOTS

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**Q** I was looking at buying a Canik TTI Combat pistol for general use at my pistol club. The gun shop showed me the compensator attached to the barrel and described its purpose. But after further research, someone said it's not actually a 'compensator', rather the pistol has a 'ported barrel'. I'm confused and was hoping the Top Shots could explain the difference.

Charles W., Vic.

**A** Various systems of using propellant gas discharge to reduce muzzle flip and/or felt recoil in handguns and rifles have been around for a while. In the 1970s and '80s, a system developed by Magna-Port became common in handguns, where slots cut into the end of the barrel allowed high-speed gasses to escape, usually upwards, to reduce muzzle flip. The slide or dust cover of semi-auto pistols also had to be slotted to align with the barrel's ports.

The muzzle brake on a rifle does much the same thing but directs gasses sideways and backwards to reduce felt recoil. Like the muzzle brake, a compensator is an attachment to the end of the

barrel which has a chamber with slots cut into it. Therefore the comp, as it's called, is an extension to the barrel rather than part of the barrel itself. So whether you call it a comp, port or brake, results are technically the same. If slots are at the top of the comp, the jet blast will/should counteract the muzzle rising.

The Canik TTI has a ported barrel regardless of how it's marketed, and there's a compensator-looking shroud over the ported slot to give a compensator-like appearance. Under normal circumstances, a compensator adds to the overall length of the handgun but in the case of the Canik TTI, the so-called compensator sits over the ported barrel and doesn't add to the gun's overall dimensions. Hope this helps.

Rod Pascoe

**Read Rod's full review of the Canik TTI Combat in the latest edition of *Australian & New Zealand Handgun* magazine, available now.**

**Q** I always read your Top Shots column with interest as it provides some great information. I recently inherited a Galand 12mm revolver which belonged to the Cameroon Governor of the French Empire in 1926. It came with a leather holster and I can read the num-

ber 7308 and 'Galand Fab' on the left side.

I was wondering what you could tell me about this revolver. It came with some old rusty ammunition which I don't intend to use but am curious as to whether or not it would still be potent (is it possible to use modern 12mm ammo?) What's the best way to clean the few rusty spots on the barrel and would you have any idea of the gun's value?

Chris Preau, France

**A** Thanks for your query Chris. There's quite a bit about Charles-Francois Galand on the internet as you've probably discovered. Your revolver is a Model 1868 in 12mm Galand calibre and, from what you've said, it was probably owned by Commissioner Theodor Marchand, so what a great find to also have this provenance.

Germany first colonised Cameroon early in the 19th century. Following their defeat in the African Colonies in 1914, it was occupied by the Allies until 1919 when France took over, appointing Commissioner Theodor Paul Marchand between April 1923 and August 1932. Acting Commissioner August Ernestine Bleu deputised for him, so your revolver could have belonged to either man.

It seems Galand had his designs made in Liege, Belgium as well as in France and Birmingham in the UK. Further versions were made

under licence by Russia, though yours appears to have been made in Paris. It was a remarkable design, well ahead of its time in terms of being double-action and also speed of loading.

The 12mm Galand (sometimes called 11mm) employs the 12mm Perrin cartridge and differs from later rounds by having a very thick rim. It's not safe to use other cartridges in this revolver as most others have a thinner rim and will therefore give too much headspace. Those old cartridges you have would themselves be valuable to collectors.

I'd clean the rust spots gently using very fine (grade 0000) steel wool and a light oil, trying first in an area that's less obvious, though you may have to live with them. Refinishing would greatly reduce the gun's value. At auction, similar revolvers have commanded prices in the vicinity of US \$2000, though with the provenance your gun comes with it could be worth considerably more.

Geoff Smith

**Q** Having spent many years shooting rabbits and foxes with my .22 rimfire and .22 Hornet, I've recently become interested in chasing deer near my home in southern NSW. Can you offer some advice about suitable cartridges? I believe the .223 Rem I've read about in older New Zealand hunting magazines and books is adequate for deer, though that sounds a bit light-on to me. Any advice gratefully received.

James Mitchell, NSW

**A** I've read similar articles over the years James and the New Zealanders certainly used the .222 and .223 widely, especially the professional deer cullers of the time. They were invariably excellent shots and probably concerned with weight in terms of large quantities of ammo being lugged around those steep hills and magnificent mountains.

You'll find various species of deer down your way including fallow, red and sambar. The





BE AWARE THE MINIMUM LEGAL DEER-HUNTING CARTRIDGE VARIOUS FROM STATE TO STATE.

former can be taken with lighter cartridges like the .223 with 75-gr bullets through a fast twist (1:8) barrel and precision shooting. However, the larger ones require far more energy to take cleanly, especially if you can't guarantee perfect shot placement.

If you decide to venture across the border, the minimum legal cartridge for hunting sambar in Victoria is a .270 calibre with 130-gr projectile, which also realistically applies to large deer such as red and rusa. There are much larger cartridges used but it becomes a question of the size of deer, the range you're shooting at and of course your ability as a shooter.

With all your experience on rabbits and foxes you should be fine, so long as you don't develop a touch of 'buck fever' as I do occasionally. I use a 6.5 Creedmoor or .30-06 which fall either side of the requirements in Victoria, yet rules are rules and you'll need a .270-plus in that state. Any of the cartridges mentioned above will be fine in NSW, as would the versatile .243 Winchester with game (not varmint) projectiles or, in Victoria, the excellent .308 Win.

Paul Miller

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.

# Ian Thompson

## REMEMBERING ONE OF OUR MOST REVERED COLUMNISTS

WORDS: GEOFF SMITH



APRIL AND IAN AT A TAFE FUNCTION.

One of this magazine's most popular columnists, Ian Thompson, passed away on January 10 at the age of 93. Ian worked for the Defence Science and Technology Group as a senior ballistic scientist for many years and, after retiring in 1989, 'took up the pen' for our magazine. He submitted many entertaining and informative articles as well as his regular Basic Ballistics columns, his final submission printed in our September 2019 issue along with a short piece thanking him for his decades of contributions.

A gentle soul with a hilariously dry sense of humour, Ian was liked by all who knew him. He often addressed meetings on many aspects of ballistics based on his own experiences, ranging from large naval guns through to small arms. He used his industrial chemistry background to design and modify propellants being made at the time.

One of his final tasks had been attempting to induce delayed ignition on electrically fired 20mm rounds, as part of a project to develop a hang-fire detection system for the Vulcan rotary gun used in aircraft. At the celebration for his 80th birthday, Ian's son Chris said: "My dad reckons if it doesn't go 'bang' he's not interested!"

A keen shooter all his life, Ian was one of the early members of what is now the Penfield Pistol, Rifle and Archery Club which sprang up from Weapons Research Establishment staff. He was also one of the founding members of South Australia's SSAA Para club back in 1969.

I became acquainted with Ian in 1992 when seeking help in setting up the TAFE SA firearm safety program. After assisting with preliminaries, he wrote and delivered a short course in ballistics for incoming applicants engaged by TAFE as paid instructors. To this day it remains a terrific introduction to the subject for people interested in teaching about firearms. We all remember his famous statement "there's no such thing as a free lunch", meaning that in the field of ballistics any advantage comes at a cost.

He taught many courses for the SA TAFE Instructor program and generously gave talks to a

wide variety of people on the subject of firearms and ballistics. He also ran Baltech, a consultancy which, in many cases, helped defend shooting clubs involved in disputes with (usually vexatious) neighbours.

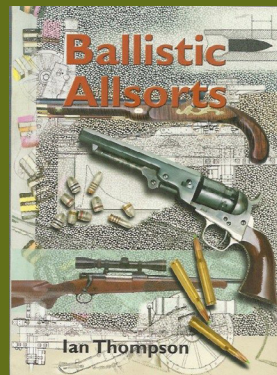
Ian and I worked together on several firearms-related initiatives over many years, including travelling to Hobart in the wake of the Port Arthur tragedy to provide training to their fledgling crew of new instructors. We also worked for several years as volunteers in the Army Museum of South Australia at the Keswick barracks, restoring and researching various military weapons. His encyclopaedic knowledge was legendary.

At one point in his career he accepted the challenge of serving as Australia's military attaché to Thailand, moving there with his wife and children. He told many stories about this period, including one where the Thai authorities became alarmed when locals in the north were making nitroglycerin for the purposes of 'instantaneous fishing'. They asked Ian if he could convince the local leaders just how dangerous this was.

So he made a small batch of NG and, in a very theatrical demonstration, dripped a tiny amount on a piece of paper placed on an anvil, then tapped it with a sledgehammer, making it explode loudly. The locals were suitably impressed. A few

weeks later he returned to the area and asked the fellow in charge for a progress report. He duly produced the tiny remaining piece of the sledgehammer handle and said the head had disappeared and their anvil was now in two pieces! Ian concluded much of humanity is addicted to loud explosions.

With the passage of time he recognised his increasing frailty and, reluctantly, gradually sold off his comprehensive collection of firearms and ammunition, moving with his wife April into a retirement village. I'm just one of many who remain grateful for the enormous passion, knowledge and generosity Ian gave to our sport. We were fortunate to know him and will greatly miss his wisdom and knowledge. Our condolences go to April, their three children and extended families.



IAN PUBLISHED HIS POPULAR AND INFORMATIVE BOOK, BALLISTIC ALLSORTS, IN 2001.

# Regardless of motivation we're all predators

**NEAL FINCH**



**A**ll wildlife requires the essentials of life in food, water and suitable habitat and they're almost always subject to competition, disease and predation. When essentials are scarce or competition and predation are high, populations decline. If the essentials are abundant or competition and predation are scarce, populations thrive. A species that's thriving can be considered by some people as overabundant or pests and all native and introduced species respond to these basic ecological principles. Human activity can deliberately or accidentally alter the balance of positive and negative influences on wildlife.

Some research suggests First Nations people's management practices in Australia reduced some species to extinction, creating the mix of species encountered by the first Europeans. Certainly, the agricultural practices introduced since colonisation have decimated some of the continent's wildlife populations while greatly benefitting others. The ecological principles described above explain why some species are winners and others are not. Wildlife management is about actively applying these principles to improve the situation for rare and threatened species, or impair the circumstances for overabundant or pest species.

Certain pest control actions modify habitats (think ripping rabbit warrens, closing gaps in a roof or fencing a resource). However, most vertebrate pest control in Australia applies a predatory pressure on wildlife populations. Baiting, disease

introduction, shooting and mustering all act as forms of predation. If you hunt you're a predator, regardless of motivation.

Hunting can be a commercial or non-commercial activity. In either case the goal might be to reduce the impacts of a perceived pest or harvest a valued resource. There is, of course, overlap between these simple dichotomies and many of Australia's licenced firearms owners would be more than one type of hunter.

I'm confident in stating most professional hunters started out as non-professionals. Similarly, a person may hunt principally for conservation purposes, yet value the resource they collect in doing so. I know commercial game harvesters who'll undertake, shoot and let lie work when it's more profitable.

HUNTING CAN BE COMMERCIAL OR NON-COMMERCIAL.

HOW MANY BOXES WOULD YOU TICK AS A HUNTER?

	COMMERCIAL	NON-COMMERCIAL
PEST CONTROL	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
RESOURCE HARVESTING	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



tionist. These are opinions only and, with three decades of wildlife management experience, not ones I share. The motivations for such statements probably have less to do with effective conservation and more to do with ideology.

If you own a firearm and hunt for non-commercial reasons, you've far more in common with professional pest controllers and commercial game harvesters than you may think. We're all predators and can have a positive conservation impact. Conversely, commercial and non-commercial hunting may amount to little or no practical benefit. The ways in which governments and natural resource managers utilise us, as predators, determines our overall effectiveness. Non-commercial hunters can increase the scale and persistence of wildlife management, while commercial hunters can provide structure, efficiency and/or market access. Together we're components of a complete wildlife management system with different motivations yet shared outcomes, contributing to one conservation goal.

I encourage all hunters to reject attempts to divide us through false claims targeting a specific point of difference. Support the non-commercial hunter who turns professional as they're answering a societal need. Buy wild game resources wherever possible, as this industry creates food and employment from an otherwise wasted resource. We're all in this together. ●

Hopefully everything I've stated above seems self-evident and you may wonder why I bother sharing the obvious. Unfortunately, there are individuals and groups in Australia who believe - and publicly state - that only a paid professional can be an effective pest controller.

Another claim is anyone who places value on an animal defined as a pest can't be a conserva-

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• *Neal Finch is Executive Officer of the Australian Wild Game Industry Council*

FIND OUT MORE:

**Vertebrate Pest Managers Association of Australia**  
<https://vpmaa.org.au/>



**Australian Wild Game Industry Council**  
<https://www.awgic.org.au/>



**AWGIC**  
 Australian Wild Game Industry Council

**Misinformation is burying a sustainable solution. Don't let it fool you too!**

Unfortunately, misinformation and uneducated opinions dominate the conversation around responsible wild game harvesting. At AWGIC, we're committed to science-led, ethical, and sustainable wild game management. Through education and advocacy, we're working to reshape the narrative, and ensuring population control is guided by ethics, transparency, and sustainability. Support our mission by scanning the QR code to learn more and become an AWGIC member or supporter.

# LIVING THE DREAM

WORDS:  
CHARLOTTE FOX

**S**hooting sports athletes from Australia often faces challenges as, unlike their counterparts from countries like Italy, China and the US who are entirely government funded, they often have to balance work, family, training and competition.

*Laura Coles is an accomplished Australian Olympian and Commonwealth Games athlete, business owner, qualified exercise physiologist and mother. From growing up riding horses around Busselton in WA, to being a self-taught athlete, Laura sat with Charlotte Fox to tell her story from first picking up a gun to becoming an elite shooter.*

## Tell us a bit about yourself

I grew up on a couple of acres in Busselton which is a lovely little country town. Guns have been around the family my entire life and I've early memories of helping dad reload rifle shells when I was about three. He'd hunt rabbits, bring them home and skin them and I'd play with the pelts, so firearms have never been unfamiliar to me.

Following changes to firearm regulations in the 1990s, my grandfather didn't want to install a gun safe so dad took over his firearms from when he was a clay target shooter in Esperance. He also had an old Trap gun he hadn't used in a while, which triggered dad's curiosity to try it at the clay target club in Busselton.

He really enjoyed the experience, so I went with him the following week and still remember my first shot. Previously I'd only used a .22 and air rifle so my first shot with a 12-gauge shotgun was a bit of a shock. I had to take time to process whether I wanted to shoot anymore, so I gave it five minutes and decided on a round of Trap. I was terrible and shot about three out of 25!

## What did you most enjoy initially?

Spending time with my dad. It was something we could do together. He was a rifle shooter and hadn't done much clay target, so we were learning at the same time which was fun.

## You've been to both the Olympics and Commonwealth Games. What's your discipline?

I shoot Olympic Skeet. Most people in WA start with American Skeet, which I did for five years then transitioned to Olympic Skeet, which I found hard. American targets are doing about 50km/h, whereas Olympic targets are up around 89-92km/h.

There's also a different shot sequence. In American Skeet you only shoot pairs of targets on pads one, two, six and seven. In Olympic Skeet you shoot pairs (two targets released simultaneously) on every station except for pad eight, which is a more challenging sequence. American Skeet targets come out when you call for them but in Olympic, they might come out immediately or up to three seconds later, which can seem like an eternity.

You also start with the gun off your shoulder in Olympic Skeet, at a marker which is about the same level as the bottom of your elbow. You can only bring the gun to your shoulder when you see that target emerge. I found that change the hardest.

## When and why did you swap?

I swapped in 2007 and made the change so I could compete in more competitions, including the Olympics. When I was five I told mum I wanted to go to the Olympics, though at the time I thought it would be in horse riding. In WA we don't have a history of successful athletes in Olympic Skeet. Robin Bailey won Commonwealth Games bronze in New Zealand in 1974, but no-one from WA had made an Olympic team in clay target shooting before.

## What was that experience like?

I met quite a bit of resistance to the idea of changing. I was given a million reasons why I couldn't do it including being too small, too expensive, I lived on the wrong side of the country and there was no-one here to teach me. Luckily my greatest

strength isn't the ability to shoot. I don't have heaps of natural ability, my real strength is resilience, persistence and determination.

**Is tenacity what helped you overcome those perceived barriers?**

It was. It's completely up to you whether you want to take on board that information. It's just someone's opinion and it's up to you if you let that stop you from trying or not. It can be disappointing to hear someone doesn't think you can do something, yet only you can determine your actions and outcome. Since I made the Olympics in 2020, I proved success in this discipline is possible. Now there's lots of interest from people looking to set their own Olympic goals here in Perth, which is nice to see.

**How did you develop skills to reach elite level?**

Watched lots of YouTube videos! I'd study girls shooting finals at World Cups and similar events, watch their technique then experiment by trying different stances through trial and error. My shooting journey is probably still like that as I don't have a technical coach.

**Describe the Commonwealth and Olympic Games.**

The two are very different. The Commonwealths are known as the 'Friendly Games' which I agree with. They've such a great atmosphere, still very competitive obviously, though I found my opponents really nice. You have sports of all different types, which brings together athletes from diverse backgrounds who are all really good at what they do.

The Olympics are intense, very serious and the pinnacle for most athletes. Everyone is doing all they can to ensure they don't waste that opportunity. It's a huge journey to qualify, so athletes give everything, which is a lot of pressure.



### You went to a Covid-delayed Olympics in Tokyo. What was that like?

Unusual. It's the only Olympics I've been to so I don't have anything to compare it to, but everything about Tokyo was different and a bit stressful. We just managed to squeeze in our qualification, though it was up in the air as to whether that event in Sydney would even go ahead. Eventually they allowed it in a modified format, where only those in the running to qualify for the Games could compete.

Once we had the qualification done I went straight back to Perth and, within a couple of days, our state border was closed. Then a few days later the Australian team withdrew as Tokyo was still trying to go ahead in 2020. It didn't take long for organisers to realise it just wasn't possible.

It was difficult to keep training through that and maintain motivation and a positive frame of mind. On top of that, I'd difficulty accessing training facilities as when Covid outbreaks would occur, one of the first restrictions would be to close gun clubs. Up to that point the biggest break I'd had from shooting was two weeks, then during Covid I couldn't access my training ground for 10 weeks. I used the situation to relearn things and ultimately become a better athlete.

### What's your favourite sporting moment?

I can't go past winning Commonwealth gold in Glasgow. I'd seen shooters compete in those events on TV and thought I'd probably only ever dream about being one of them. I was so lucky I had my parents there to witness it, which made it even better.

### Talk us through that competition.

I'd so many moments of doubt, as I think lots of athletes do at times. You have good and bad training days and I had a terrible one the day before my competition. I'd gone against a coach's wishes and attended the opening ceremony, which I really wanted to do, so by the time I got back to our village it was very late. I had to be up at 6am for my final training session before competition and shot like a tired person, which was terrifying. I slept like a log that night and was relaxed as I felt that competition wasn't going to be mine, so I focused on enjoying the experience. The crowd applauded my last target and I didn't know why as I hadn't shot a perfect round. Then it turned out I'd qualified in first place for the final.

The goal Shooting Australia gave me was to make the final by being in the top six. So I'd qualified for the final, ticked that off the list and didn't have any expectation on my shoulders. I came first in the semi-final which guaranteed me a medal, so when it came to the gold medal match I was shooting freely.

I was in the zone but had no idea what big of a deal it would be to win a Commonwealth Games gold medal. After winning I'd go straight into a live TV interview where I was so shy and inexperienced, but it was a fantastic feeling.



LAURA, CENTRE, CELEBRATES 2014 COMMONWEALTH GOLD IN THE WOMEN'S SKEET IN GLASGOW.

### When did you realise you'd won?

I remember this vividly. At that time it was a random draw for where you shot in that final. I was second shooter and had to follow the girl in front, which meant when I got on that last pad I knew what she'd shot and what I had to do. I needed two targets out of four to draw and three to win. When I stepped up to that pad I hit both targets on my first pair, so I knew I'd drawn with her.

I remember my mind going from being fairly calm and focused to having a real moment of panic, thinking: "I can either miss both targets and go into a shoot-off or hit one and I'm a Commonwealth Games gold medallist." I had to put those thoughts aside and go back to following my process. I remember calling for that second pair, hitting my first target and thinking: "Oh my God, I just won a Commonwealth Games gold medal!" Then I missed my second target, which I kicked myself about for two weeks.

### For anyone looking to get into shooting, what do you suggest?

Contact your local gun club whether it's clay target, rifle or pistol, through their website or social media. Clubs are run by incredible volunteers, so online is a great way to chat with them initially. Some clubs publish competition schedules, so you can check out a competition and decide if it's something you'd like to try. Shooting's such an inclusive sport, that's one of our strengths, which provides a fantastic opportunity for people to have a go. ●



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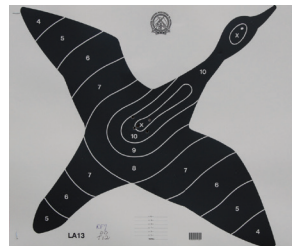
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### GRYCOL INTERNATIONAL

D/L: 410650524

The key to a good range bag is functionality. You need a bag with compartments, pockets and dividers so you can organise all your gear and find it in a jiff. We like the **Savior Specialist Range Bag**, featuring three lockable pistol sleeves, lockable front pocket with mag slot panel, two side pockets all in a durable polymer frame. RRP \$149 and available in five colours.



Paper targets are available at your local range, on the **SSAA Online Shop**, and **ACS Swan Express Print** - download the extensive catalogue here. Featured are the black and white Gallery Rifle Targets RRP \$219 for a pack of 200, and the Target LA13 Duck RRP \$87.45 pk100.



If you are new to shooting and think ear protection isn't that big a deal, your fellow shooters at the range are going to pull you up fast. Why risk permanent hearing loss and tinnitus when earmuffs come pretty cheap (all things considered) and in colours to suit every personality. The very popular **Walkers Razor Slim Earmuffs** RRP \$59.99 available in every colour from Coyote Brown to Pink Sprinkles.

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Don't be that guy with the preventable injury. Protect your eyes and always take shooting glasses to the range. There are a broad array out there, like the Challenge EVO Shooting glasses from **Beretta** for RRP \$54, or the interchangeable **Walkers Sport Glasses** for RRP \$163.



A man in camouflage gear is shown from the chest up, looking down and to the left. He is holding a pair of black binoculars with a red accent. The background is a blurred forest.

 Nocpix

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# Gunning up for duck season



## JOHN MCDUGALL WEIGHS UP THE COMPETITORS

**T**he recent history of duck-hunting guns has been something of a nightmare for Australian shooters, starting with the firearms buyback of 1996 which saw the removal of all self-loading and pump-action shotguns. Then the introduction of non-toxic shot in 2001 brought a further whittling away of firearms not suited for steel shot. Only some Remington and older Winchester over-and-unders were deemed suitable, until European manufacturers introduced the Fleur-de-Lys proof mark which designated those shotguns for steel, especially high-performance loads compared to 'ordinary' steel shot.

'High-performance' related to the shot size and velocity those loads were travelling at, so size 3 shot and loads doing in excess of 1300fps were designated high-performance, while steel loads of smaller shot size and slower velocities were deemed 'ordinary'. Neither were recommended to be used in shotguns with a barrel constriction of more than half choke. So what's currently available, now that all game shooting on public land must be done with non-toxic shot?

Most duck hunters will be using their favourite sporting clays gun or a second one they can shoot

well with, which could be either an over-and-under shotgun, a double gun or side-by-side. More recently there's been a trend for in-line bolt-action shotguns which come mainly from Turkey, often with a six-shot capacity, though they remain a Category A firearm due to their action and not their magazine capacity.

I've reviewed a number of these guns and found the Templeton Arms offering one of the fastest and most reliable, now it has the release button located to the rear of the receiver. The Bushmeister from Nioa is another popular in-line bolt-action shotgun. These can be bought for less than \$1000, depending on whether you prefer a combination gun with a second, shorter barrel which can be used on pigs or quail, or if you're content with the 28" version.



To find out what shooters can expect for the 2026 season (starting in February in South Australia and March in other states where legalised), I visited several gun dealers as they were stocking up for what should be a bumper season, subject to water availability and southern state rain.

There are some shotgun bargains to be had since Raytrade passed their Fabarm distributorship to C.R. Kennedy in Brisbane. During the transition, Raytrade were selling their stock of Fabarm shotguns at bargain prices, often \$1000 off the normal retail price, so it pays to shop around. Yildiz have gone to OSA from Raytrade and, once again, there are bargains to be had as remaining stock is cleared out.

Stopping in at Apex Firearms and Defence in Dandenong, Victoria, one of the sales people

picked out a few guns they expect to sell well this season, starting with the Bushmeister Combo at around \$1320 with combination 20" and 28" barrels. These are Cerakoted to withstand the brackish waters found in most duck swamps, with the attraction of a cartridge in the chamber and five in the magazine having great firepower appeal. This combination won't necessarily translate into more ducks for the bag, but your limit may well be achieved sooner with the extra number of shots available.

Next up was a Beretta 686 Silver Pigeon 1, priced competitively at \$3350. Being limited to two shots may be seen as a bonus by many dedicated duck hunters, as it restricts firepower which means you can enjoy being out in the swamp longer. That two-shot capacity also pushes you



A CLOSE-UP OF THE CHARLES-DALY RECEIVER; CLOSE-UP OF THE FABARM RS 12, AVAILABLE LEFT-HANDED.

OPPOSITE PAGE: MIALL'S HAD A GOOD SELECTION OF SECOND-HAND, SIDE-BY-SIDE SHOTGUNS.



A LEVER RELEASE, BOLT-ACTION HARDHEAD SHOTGUN FROM TURKEY ; BELOW, PETER HALL TOOK A MIXTURE OF BLACK AND WOOD DUCKS WITH HIS BROWNING OVER-AND-UNDER.

to become a better shot, as you must be focussed enough to make them count. I've only one criticism of this gun and that is its silver receiver, which could potentially alert ducks as the sun catches it.

The third gun presented was a Bettinsoli X-Trail over-and-under. I own one of these with a case-hardened receiver which has served me famously, though my son shoots extremely well with it too and commandeered it for his own use. The latest model with a satin-silver receiver sells for around \$1975 including a full set of chokes.

During my day in Melbourne I met Morgan Raymond of Raytrade who was sending out some bargain-priced Yildiz shotguns. The SPZ SME Black was selling for \$1395 and the Elegant model side-by-side for \$1495. These were both greatly reduced in price and, with black receivers, are well suited to duck shooting. Both came with a full set of chokes and for a gun at just above the \$1000 mark were an excellent buy.

SJS Trading sell the Templeton T2000 in-line bolt-action shotgun and, since my review of this one some years ago, the lever has been removed and replaced by a button to the rear of the receiver. This upgrade is far more suited to the gun, ergonomically well designed and positioned for smoother and faster handling.

Next stop was Miall's gun shop in Frankston where they had a good display of Browning and Miroku shotguns. These were mainly 3"-cham-

bered guns, well suited to handle the semi-magnum loadings often required for duck shooting in large open waters.

Then it was on to Pakenham Firearms where owner Michael was most obliging. He started with a Franchi Instinct, a favourite duck gun of mine thanks to its mechanical trigger mechanism and colour case-hardening. At \$2250 it's well priced for a gun with dedicated steel shot proofing, a hard plastic carry case and full set of choke tubes.

A Charles Daly caught my eye as it was unusual in colour, having a grey receiver which also featured a couple of partridges in flight that looked pretty basic. A closer inspection revealed this was an entry-level shotgun, though I'd rather pay the extra dollars and own a Yildiz over-and-under. Among some great buys were a couple of superseded Fabarm sporters, an RS12 selling for a knock-down \$3495 and a N2 Elos at a greatly discounted \$2750. Both had black, non-reflective receivers, a bonus when duck hunting, and were backed by a substantial warranty.

In conclusion, I'd encourage those in the market for a duck-hunting shotgun to consider interchangeable choke tubes and, don't forget, no tighter than half-choke for steel shot loads. And if you opt for an in-line bolt-action gun, get along to your local club for some valuable practice before heading out. ●





# Non-toxic shot now mandatory for all

## JOHN MCDUGALL LOOKS AT YOUR OPTIONS

**W**ith duck season upon us, it pays to familiarise ourselves with what ammunition is available to duck hunters. I've compiled a list of non-toxic shot loads which are now mandatory for all duck shooting (on private or public waters according to the Victorian Game Management Authority representative I spoke with), along with quail which must also now be taken using non-toxic shot.

The selection of loads from various importers is quite generous and comprehensive, although Remington and B&P loads won't be on the shopping list. Eley and Federal (both Nioa), Gamebore, NSI (Bronzewing), Clever and Saga (both OSA) and Winchester all have a selection of non-toxic loads, mainly in steel with a couple of brands offering more expensive bismuth.

Boxes of steel shot loads, depending on size, usually attract a premium as while a slab of 250 rounds of lead would cost roughly \$145, steel loads in 12-gauge are a little more expensive at around \$200. Bismuth is unachievable for many shooters, costing between \$700 and \$1000 per slab of 250. With bag limits significantly reduced during recent years, I've chosen to shoot bismuth. Three packets for opening should be more than sufficient to take a bag of ducks (around 10 birds for the day) with cartridges left over for another outing.

So after 45 years as a duck hunter what can I share? The one thing I've learned is to shoot in front of flying birds, as they can reach deceptive speeds. Ducks out to 15m don't require a great

deal of 'lead', unless they're zooming down a river or creek. Birds over decoys also require little lead and you don't need hyper-velocity steel loads to harvest them. High-flying ducks need the most lead and usually high performance or high velocity loads and, if using bismuth which performs the closest to the old lead shot, a little lead is required. (Don't confuse lead (ee) with lead (eh).

I enjoy shooting over decoys as birds set their wings and expose most of their body. 'Home-ruling' or shooting ducks on the water is considered highly unsporting unless you're 'swatting' a wounded bird to put it out of its misery. And remember, steel shot ricochets so be very careful of the direction you're shooting and ensure others are not in the 'shot zone'.

Most steel shot loads around the 1300fps mark (396m/sec) will serve adequately without much difference in downrange performance inside 35m. It's when ducks fly higher or further out that faster loads with larger shot should be used. For instance if birds keep turning away from a poor decoy set, it'll be advantageous to up your shot size, extend your lead marginally and increase the velocity of the load for clean, humane kills.

I recommend size 4-6 steel shot loads to 35m travelling at 397m/sec and 4-shot loads doing 427m/sec for ducks out to 45-55m. For high-flying birds, size 4 and 3 steel at 427m/sec should be used, same as the lead shot we used previously.

CLEVER

This is an Italian firm which make highly respected shotshell loads in steel and bismuth. Clever Mirage 32-gram steel shot bio 4 is a specially-developed load, where shot pellets break down in water. Clever Mirage T2 soft steel loads are produced in size 7 shot and are ideal for 'swatter' loads to dispatch wounded birds on the water.

Mirage T4 Pro Steel 12-gauge is a 28-gram load in size 7 shot, again suitable as a swatter or for close-in ducks over decoys. Mirage soft steel hunting is a 35-gram load available in shot sizes 2-5 and is for more distant ducks out to 45m and beyond. Mirage T3 bismuth is 32-gram available in 4 shot. This is an excellent all-round load for 'pass' shooting, ducks over decoys and high-flying birds out to 50m. Improvement in bismuth manufacture has overcome the tendency for these pellets to shatter which is a positive for clean, humane kills.

ELEY

Eley Hawk is an English company making three steel shot loads available in Australia through Nioa. VIP Steel is a 12-gauge, 32-gram load in a variety of shot sizes travelling at 1350fps. I've used these several times over rice fields in NSW and found them lethal out to 45m. Great for shooting over decoys.



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VIP Lightning Steel is a 76mm, 12-gauge load available in shot sizes 2-5 doing 1410fps. Being a magnum load it has greater knockdown power. Again, I've used these on the rice fields of NSW and have dropped birds just beyond 55m. Eley Hawk VIP steel Pro Eco is a 28-gram loading of 7 shot steel travelling at 1312 fps. This are more a swatter load for wounded birds or for clay target shooting.

FEDERAL

Made in the US and distributed here by Nioa, there are two loads offered in a variety of gauges and shot sizes. The Black Cloud FS contain 60 per cent round steel pellets and 40 per cent 'Flight Stopper', which are round pellets with a ring around their diameter. These are reported to cause greater wound openings for instant kills. Black Cloud FS comes in 12 and 20-gauge with shot loads ranging from 32 to 36-gram, being 3" loads with velocities around 1600fps. For the 32-gram, 2¾" version, velocity is cited at 1450fps. Also available in 20-gauge, these Black Cloud FS loads are lethal out to 50m. Available in shot sizes 2, 3, 4 and BB.

Federal's second non-toxic shot load is the Speed-Shok Waterfowl, available in both 12 and 20-gauge. The 32-gram, 2¾" version travels at 1500-fps and the 36-gram, 3" at 1450fps. Both come in the most popular shot sizes of BB to size 6 and I've enjoyed great success with these on ducks out to 45m.

GAMEBORE

Hyper Steel 12-gauge loads in 70mm cases and size 4 shot in a 32-gram load doing 1450fps, is an excellent performer on ducks out to 55m. Super Steel loads of 5 shot in a 32-gram load, also loaded into 70mm case with velocity cited at 1400fps, are lethal out to 45-50m. Silver Steel in 32-gram loads of size 4 shot travelling at 1400fps, is preferred for its environmental protection by using a biodegradable wad that's soluble in water. This one also uses a 76mm case.

Super Steel in a 32-gram load of 4 shot doing 1400fps is excellent for all-round duck hunting, while Super Steel 12-gauge in size 7½ shot with 24-gram payload is ideal for 'swatting' wounded birds on the water. Bismuth is available in a 30-gram, 12-gauge load travelling at 1400fps. Gamebore also offer sub-gauge loads of 16, 20 and 28-gauge for duck hunting and currently have stocks of Baschieri and Pellagri steel travelling at 1320fps in size 4 shot and 12-gauge only.



NSI

Nobel Sport Italia are made in Italy and distributed by Bronzewing Australia. They're excellent loads at affordable prices and lethal on ducks out to 45-50m. Game Steel is a 32-gram, 1362fps 2¾" load available in 3, 4 and 7 shot which is good for taking birds over decoys or pass shooting out to 45m. Waterfowl Steel is a 35-gram, 2¾" load in size 2 shot doing 1450fps, well suited for taking ducks at longer distances out to 50-55m. NSI non-toxic steel shot loads are well priced and excellent performance-wise.

SAGA

Made in Spain and distributed here by OSA, the only Saga non-toxic load is their 36-gram, 12-gauge in a 2¾" hull. This is cited as travelling at 1200-1250fps and would be suited to ducks flying in close (out to 35m) due to its relatively slow velocity. Available in size 4 shot, this one's a budget load.

WINCHESTER

Over the years of using non-toxic steel shot in this country, Winchester Australia has whittled down its US offerings to four, including a 32-gram, 2¾" option called Winchester Expert in 4 shot travelling at 1400fps and a 36-gram, 2¾" load of 4 shot called Winchester Drylok doing 1300fps. The two Expert Game/Target loads in shot sizes 8 and 9 can be used as swatter loads or for quail. Extensive testing of various products in previous years has proven 4 shot in steel loads to be most effective for taking ducks on the wing. The Drylok and Expert in size 4 are both excellent for taking birds out to 45-50m and reasonably priced.

IN CONCLUSION

Australia's lucky to have such a selection of non-toxic shot loads to choose from, though I suggest you shop around for best prices. I remember when you could take 20 birds for your bag limit on opening morning, and I'd buy a case of 500 Black Ranger Winchester lead shot shells for less than \$200. These days I shoot bismuth for gun care and humane kills, taking birds mainly over decoys. Since bag limits have been more than halved, three packets of bismuth costing similar to those 500 Black Rangers more than suffice. And it's always a good idea to visit your local gun club for some practice ahead of opening day.



# Learning curve

## **JULIAN NUSKE CONTINUES HIS NOVICE'S JOURNEY IN BALLISTICS**

**W**hen a bullet travels down the barrel of your firearm to the target it's using ballistics, which is basically the mechanics of how projectiles move. For novices like me, it helps to break down ballistics into its three main stages, those being internal, external and terminal.

I'll start with 'internal ballistics' which is what's happening inside a firearm the moment you pull the trigger. Firstly we have ignition. The firing pin strikes the primer on the cartridge, which ignites the propellant. The gas caused by this ignition goes through a period of rapid expansion, which pushes the bullet forward through the barrel of your firearm. As it travels down the barrel the projectile begins to pick up speed, causing acceleration.

The design of your barrel can make a difference here and most have what's known in the trade as 'rifling'. These are spiral grooves cut into the inside of the barrel which makes the bullet spin. This is important as it provides stability in flight, leveraging a physical property (angular momentum) which resists changes in the direction of motion.

Once the bullet exits the muzzle of your firearm, external ballistics begin to take over.

External ballistics covers the stage concerning everything which affects the bullet's path through the air. The first thing the bullet experiences the moment it leaves the barrel is gravity as it begins to drop. Next, as the bullet drives through the air, it starts to experience air resistance which makes it slow down. Coupled with this, a bullet will be subject to wind factors and crosswinds can play a major part in pushing your bullet off course.

The last thing to consider with external ballistics (which you'll hear precision shooters talk about a lot) is a somewhat scientific term and that's 'ballistic coefficient'. This is to do with how well your bullet cuts through the air. If it has a higher ballistic coefficient than other projectiles on the market, it should fly straighter and further than its competitors. All these external ballistics is why you hear shooters talk of 'bullet drop'. Quite logically it's the descending curve of the bullet travelling along its path to the target.

The final stage when learning about ballistics, is what occurs when a bullet hits its target. 'Terminal ballistics' studies how the bullet behaves on impact and the first thing to consider is penetration. Obviously, this is how deep your projectile penetrates the target you're aiming at.

Next is what's happening when it goes into the target, which is expansion of your bullet. Some ammunition is designed with bullets which expand, such as hollow points that create a larger wound canal. Lastly we have transfer of energy to your intended target. The projectile has 'kinetic energy' which is delivered to your target and can determine its effectiveness. Different purposes call for varying bullet designs. For example, some prioritise penetration which is clearly useful when hunting larger animals like deer or wild pigs, while others focus on expansion.

You'll hear talk about the varying calibre types available, which in simple terms refers to the diameter of a bullet. Frustratingly, if you're an Australian let alone a novice, this is usually measured in inches (like .22 and .45). Yet since the introduction of metrification, millimetres are being used more and more as in 6.5mm, 9mm and 7.62mm.

Calibre connects with ballistics in several ways. Smaller calibres like the .22 LR fire a lighter bullet. Lighter projectiles have less recoil, which is good for beginners as they're easier to shoot but, according to the laws of physics, this also means they carry less energy.

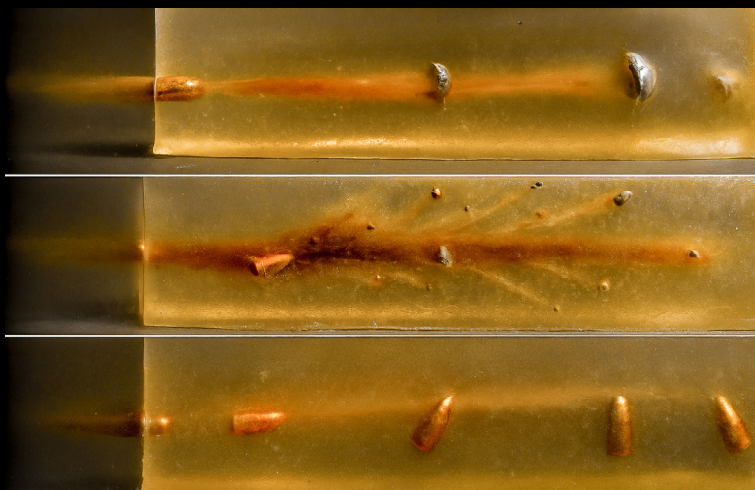
Medium calibres tend to allow greater balance between adaptable recoil and a reasonable amount of power, which makes them (like 9mm or .223/5.56) popular for use in both handguns and rifles. Larger calibres introduce a relatively heavier projectile. The advantage of this comes down to Galileo again as it'll travel further, hit the target harder and penetrate deeper, though obviously this will produce more recoil.

Bullet velocity is also something to consider, as a smaller or lighter projectile will often travel faster but lose energy very quickly. If you're concerned with an accurate trajectory then fast, sleek bullets will fly very flat, resulting in less bullet drop. But keep in mind the heavier a bullet is the more likely it will arc, consequently hitting your target harder at closer ranges. Finally, larger calibres will deliver more kinetic energy on impact as mentioned earlier which, of course, is important when hunting.



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PENETRATION IN BALLISTIC GEL.



So as a novice why should I be interested in ballistics and calibres? Because understanding these basic concepts will inevitably make you a better shooter. For recreational shooters and hunters or anyone just curious about firearms, understanding the concepts surrounding this topic will give you several things. Accuracy will improve as you'll be able to determine how your bullets behave in flight. Importantly, you'll be able to choose the appropriate calibre and ammunition for your desired purpose. Furthermore, you'll be a safer firearm user through the knowledge you've acquired on how powerful and arbitrary a bullet can be.

Ballistics doesn't have to be a complicated subject to learn. It's about motion, energy and physics. Calibre adds another level by illustrating how the size of a projectile effects speed, trajectory and impact. You could be shooting paper targets at the gun club or seeing how they deal with ballistics on your favourite TV crime show. But if you know the fundamentals you'll have a distinct advantage on what occurs when the trigger is pulled. Like anything new to us, learning about ballistics is going to be a personal journey of discovery, so why not start yours today? ●

• Next month: What the novice needs to know about ammunition



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# Let's Go Wild!

## CHRIS REDLICH ENJOYS SUCCESS WITH A NIFTY BUDGET RUGER

I'm not going to lie and say it was a match made in heaven or love at first sight. In fact, this wasn't my first encounter with such a rifle, yet what really caught my eye was its slimline appearance for such a big bore. The invitation arose to review the new Ruger American 'Go Wild' and, having recently enjoyed the Scout version in .223 Rem, I was keen to test its big brother in a similar arrangement. But what really had me hooked was the chambering in .450 Bushmaster.

### .450 BUSHMASTER

This joins the popular 300 Blackout as another cartridge on a growing list of straight-walled, big bore, short-action calibres designed to function through AR15-platform rifles. I was surprised to learn the .450BM has been around for almost two decades and, despite being a joint project between US companies Hornady and (aptly-named) Bushmaster, was a cartridge purely meant for what the name suggests - bush use.

Although these new AR-designated cartridges share a similar overall length to the .223 Rem, they're by no means targeted at long-range use like the popular little Remington. Interestingly, the .450 Bushmaster shares DNA with another, lesser known long-range calibre, the .284



THE AMERICAN RIFLE POINTED NICELY WHEN TAKING SHOTS AT RUNNING GAME.

Winchester. The latter is a favourite of mine and the reason why I went to the bother of building a custom hunting rifle in that chambering. It has what's known as a rebated rim, where the case walls are larger in diameter to the base.

Like the .284 Win, the .450 Bushmaster case head diameter measures the same as a .308 Winchester, making it a compatible offering for commercial rifles. At first glance the .450 BM looks a little bit like the .45/70 Govt, though really much closer to a pistol round on steroids because of its straight walls. The .450 BM is ballistically similar to the .45/70 using light bullets, though the latter's heritage round outperforms the former with modern, heavier 300-grain loads. I've enjoyed surprising accuracy from the .45/70 Govt using Federal ammunition and while distributor Nioa cautioned me on my expectations, I was nonetheless keen to see how the .450 BM would perform in the American.

### THE RIFLE

Unlike Ruger's popular M77 controlled round feed, the American Gen 2 is a push-feed action and improved version of the Gen 1. The American rifle family have chrome moly barrels with the benchmark standard of cold hammer-forged rifling. The 22" Sporter profile barrel on this one is deceptively light and easy to point, most likely something to do with the noticeably gaping .45 calibre hole down the middle of the tube which has reduced its weight. I suspect the Go Wild in smaller chamberings such as 6.5 Creedmoor may weigh a tad more with the same profile barrel.

The .450 Bushmaster shoots big bullets and the rifle's slow right-hand twist of 1-in-16" ensures most in the weight range of 250 to 300-grain will suitably stabilise. Nioa supplied 300-grain

RIFLE PACKAGE WITH THE LEUPOLD VX-FREEDOM SCOPE AND FEDERAL 300-GRAIN AMMUNITION.



CLOCKWISE: APPROXIMATE 2MOA THREE-SHOT GROUPS AT 100M WERE CONSISTENT FOR THE 300-GRAIN FEDERAL POWER-SHOK LOADS; .450 BM CARTRIDGE FLANKED BY THE .284 WIN (LEFT) AND .45/70GOVT; THREE-LUG BOLT FOR SHORT BOLT THROW AND POLYMER THREE-SHOT DETACHABLE MAGAZINE.

Federals and, after their own extensive testing, were convinced they were the best match for this outfit. I'm not recoil sensitive but the threaded muzzle end accommodates a removable, multi-port brake which not only looks the part, it tames muzzle jump well with heavy bullets. But a word of warning: Don't forget hearing protection with this little powerhouse or your ears will hate you. What's interesting is the brake (22mm in diameter) was noticeably larger than muzzle end of the barrel. In fact, the barrel subtly tapers from its parallel mid-section of 18.77mm up to where the rear of the brake makes contact, yet matches the overall contour nicely.

All metalwork on the American range are protected by Cerakote. This one, being the Go Wild version, refers to the new camo style of the stock and gold/bronze-like colouring on all metallic parts. I'm not a big fan of the bronze though it does match the stock well. The single piece cylindrical receiver beds to the stock via four, angular milled recesses, mating with an integral synthetic bedding block system and fastened by two action screws between the opposing recesses. Once secured the entire barrel is free-floating forward of the front screw and block.

Although the American Go Wild rifle is a budget offering, Ruger have done a wonderful job of presentation. I reckon if you're going to build a budget rifle, build one that sells, and the feel of the bolt reinforces a quality product. The three-lug design enables a short, 70-degree throw and while having a no frills finish, the stainless CNC-machined bolt moved smoothly through the entire action cycle, while the large claw and plunge ejector removed and threw spent cases clear.

Despite the large bolt knob and rear shroud being of not-so-glamorous plastic, they make up one per cent of overall weight reduction. And while it didn't occur during testing, the plastic bolt knob on this one had a habit of unwinding during cycling. I persisted with regular tightening but if it was my own rifle, I'd apply a daub of silicone or Loctite to prevent further loosening. The inclusion of a full Picatinny rail on all American models proves Ruger have built them for utility and makes for versatile scope mounting. This one came with a Leupold VX-Freedom 4-12x40 Duplex (package offering) and capped off the outfit well.

The polymer composite stock is ready for work, while its new Go Wild camo blends with Aussie bush and is a welcome improvement on the original drab colouring on the original Gen 1. The upgraded rippled lines of the new stock are contoured to promote a positive grip in tough conditions, something I came to appreciate during testing. Like its Ruger cousins the American stock is ambidextrous but, instead of a straight comb (as on the M77), it's gently raised and connects firmly to the cheek.

Ruger don't supply the extra bits with the rifle, though the modular nature of buttstock allows for further customising with optional spacers. I found the cheekpiece and length of pull on this one satisfactory at the supplied height for comfortable offhand shooting, while the rear sling-swivel sitting flush in the buttstock gave a snag-free rest when using gun bags.

Ruger's Marksman trigger is similar to Savage's AccuTrigger and does take some getting used to. It's a two-stage affair that's user adjustable from three to five pounds. I'd prefer rifle makers lowered their pressures to at least a two-pound minimum but, for whatever reason, it's a rarity.



UNIQUE BEDDING SYSTEM, SHOWING LUGS OF THE STOCK AND MATCHING RECEIVER RECESSES; NOTE LARGE CONNECTING ROD TO ACTIVATE THE PUSH/PULL TOGGLE FOR THE THREE-STAGE TANG SAFETY.



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Despite my complaint it came set at 3.5lbs and I managed it. The three-stage slide safety, which uses a push/pull connecting rod and rotating locking toggle, is at the rear of the tang and controlled easily by the tip of the thumb. All three stages clicked positively with 'safe' identified by two highly visible white lines (one for trigger safe and two for bolt lock) and a single red line for 'fire'.

#### RANGE AND HUNTING

After zeroing, my efforts to tight-en groups below MOA with the 300-grain Federals were in vain. However, consistency proved to be an important outcome as all groups hovered just below and above two MOA with no flyers, making it adequate for hunting mobs of pigs. I trialed the rifle from all positions and, despite the scary number of 450 which seems to elicit a squint from some, the entire outfit at a mere 3.4kg (scoped and loaded), pointed beautifully and shot comfortably. In fact a couple of running hares couldn't outrun me and the rifle at 100m shooting offhand, reinforced importance of the fitted muzzle brake which greatly reduced barrel jump.

The .450 BM cartridge may have been overkill on hares, yet worked just as well on numerous pigs which, after all, is its intended purpose. Yet I noticed during fast bolt action, the flat-nosed hollow points would occasionally misalign on the feed ramp when chambering, causing me to make slow and deliberate cycling to prevent it happening again. This can be a common occurrence in bolt rifles where broad-tipped, straight-walled cartridges are more at home in a lever gun fed by a tubular magazine.

On a recent work trip to western Queensland, my son Carl and I made the most of an invitation to shoot as many pigs as we like, so seized the chance to test the American. With temperatures around 40C, pigs don't venture out until late in the day and, fortunately for us, this coincided with our knockoff. Like clockwork, several mobs were busted in the evening and, between the two of us, contributed to a population reduction including one of the biggest boars I've ever shot. Accuracy on paper didn't count for much in the end, as I also managed to floor a running boar at 150m, while allowing for lead and compensating drop.



#### FINALLY

While not as refined as my wife's timber-stocked M77, the all US-made American Gen 2 Go Wild is a well-built budget rifle retailing for around \$1000 (\$1600 for Leupold VX-Freedom package). However, for a calibre such as .450 BM targeting pig hunters, this rifle needs a bigger magazine capacity than three. I can't speak for everyone but, when busting mobs of pigs, my aim is to drop as many as possible without the interruption of a mag change.

I guess that's the inconvenience we've had to shoulder since losing the privilege of owning fast repeaters, for which the .450 BM was originally intended. Yet old-design lever rifles will certainly benefit from this chambering. My recommendation for a five-shot magazine (minimum for the .450 BM) should be Ruger's consideration for future American models.

That said, the fat little .450 BM generates enough energy from the 560mm barrel, that 250 and 300-grain bullets with their large frontal impact should drop a red deer with one shot out to 100m and beyond, that for the higher velocity .308 Win chambering. For the complete American Gen 2 model configurations and chamberings available in Australia, visit [www.nioa.com.au](http://www.nioa.com.au). Special thanks to the professional staff at The Open Range in Toowoomba for facilitating review rifle transactions. ●

ONE OF MANY PIGS TAKEN, THIS ONE A RUNNING BOAR AT DISTANCE.

# Blades for the brain

## KNIFE-MAKING KEEPS JOHN DUNN CEREBRALLY ACTIVE

**W**hen you take up knife-making or any other craft to keep your grey cells active, word gets around and before long someone is bound to ask: “Can you make me a . . . ?” While I like to be accommodating, there are times when the ask is something I’m not remotely interested in and any such requests are politely declined. Others strike a chord of interest and when that happens, I usually find myself in the workshop, trying to figure out how I can create whatever’s been asked of me.

I like jobs which increase my experience base, especially knife styles I haven’t made before. Consequently, I often have several projects running at once and life is rarely dull. Over the past 12 months or so I’ve had quite a few ‘odd’ jobs (different) come my way for construction, some of which are detailed below to give you an idea of the variety of experiences knife-making can offer.

While some of these jobs began as an idea discussed over a cuppa in the kitchen, others arrived as pencil drawings or photographs requiring a phone call or two to clarify. Some came as worn examples of a particular design their owner felt required replication. For all of that, none are earth-shattering or even new designs, yet each represents an addition to this maker’s repertoire of experience. Regardless of where they came from, the idea for each project was then converted to a scale drawing which became the starting point.

### DIFFERENT STYLE OF KITCHEN KNIFE

This one came to me as a photograph lifted from the internet with some basic dimensions about steel thickness and blade length and depth. It’s an American design I believe and was sent by a friend in Canberra who knows what he likes in the way of knives, even when those around him disagree. My first impression was that it was Flaming Ugly and was accordingly dubbed Fugly, a name it carries to this day.



A COUPLE OF BUTCHERS' KNIVES WHICH ONE PROFESSIONAL HUNTER PREFERS TO FACTORY-MADE OFFERINGS



A DIFFERENT STYLE OF KITCHEN KNIFE, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS FUGLY.

It's a heavy knife with that weight allowing it to be also used as a light chopper if required, yet at the same time it's handy enough to carry out more mundane tasks like slicing or cutting. Made from 5mm-thick 15N20 steel and fitted with walnut scales it sits in the hand nicely, its heft and balance belying those unconventional looks and, apart from normal kitchen duties, I'm told it's the "best pumpkin knife ever made".

BUTCHERS' BLADES FOR A PRO HUNTER

There's nothing particularly outstanding about the design of either of these as they're effectively run-of-the-mill butchers' knives. Two worn examples of the original design were sent to me by a Victorian hunter who makes a living by culling and processing kangaroos and deer for landholders. Though it would've been easier for him to buy a couple of factory-made examples, he asked me to make them as he already owned a couple of my hunting knives and was impressed with blade quality and the way they held an edge.

Made from 1084 steel fitted with red gum handles, these have proven their worth. They're now the only ones their owner uses for processing animals and he firmly maintains they hold a better edge than most comparable factory offerings. Nice work if you can get it.

KITCHEN SELECTION

Simple knives for the kitchen were the first designs I ever had a crack at and, for a change of pace from hunting and fishing blades, I still like to make them when asked. The larger one in the photo was made for my nephew as a wedding present and both he and his wife swear by its usefulness.

The others are cheese knife variations based on a design given to me by a repeat customer I made a 'skinner' for some years ago. They're easily made from 2.5mm 15N20 steel fitted with



A QUARTET OF KITCHEN KNIVES EASILY MADE, FUNCTIONAL AND A PLEASURE TO OWN.

walnut scales. Realistically, commercial products would be cheaper but wouldn't have the appeal handmade offerings give the discerning buyer.

KNIFE AND STEEL COMBINATION SHEATH

This came about over a cup of tea with hunting mate Graeme Fifield. He initially asked me to make one of my Murganella hunting knives for his grandson Noah's 15th birthday. That wasn't a problem and the gift was duly crafted from 15N20 steel, hafted with sambar antler scales from their favourite hunting area. He then decided to pair it with a steel in a combination set, which meant a sheath was required to keep them together in a handy package at the bottom of a day pack. As it turned out, making the latter proved the most challenging part of the request.

Knife and steel combinations have been around for years and it was American book *The Skinning Knife* by M.H. Cole which offered me a range of options to work with. After cherry-picking the best ideas it had to offer, I made a series of scaled pencil drawings and eventually came up with a working plan.

As the photo shows the finished sheath is a simple, fold-over affair made from 3mm cowhide which wraps around and secures the steel at the main fold, with several rows of stitching holding it in place. These lead on to the knife sheath proper which has two rows of stitching along the outside edge for strength (for details on how to make this part of the sheath, refer to the October 2025 edition of this magazine.)

Noah recently sent me some photos of his knife/steel combination with a couple of deer and a wild dog he took last winter, so he's obviously putting it to good use. I'll take that as a vote of confidence.



NOAH'S KNIFE AND STEEL WITH THEIR COMBINATION SHEATH.



CAPING KNIVES FOR ROB TRITTEN TO USE ON LARGER GAME SUCH AS BUFFALO AND BANTENG.

#### TRITTO'S CAPING BLADES

These came about from a bear hunt Rob and Gorgia Tritten from R&R Outfitters made to Alaska in 2025. There they were introduced to a style of caping knife which Rob reckoned would be useful for the work they do. He sent me photos of the knife alongside an extremely old-fashioned tape measure calibrated in inches, suggesting I could probably make one for him.

Though a little unusual to look at with its short (50mm) pointed blade and long handle, it has proved its worth in the paddock, especially for use on the buffalo and banteng which comprise a large part of the Trittens professional hunting activities. The steel is 15N20 and the knife hafted with buffalo horn scales, the weathered outer surface of the horn left intact wherever possible to provide grip for hands that may well be slippery with blood or water. I've now made three of them for Rob (he has two sons who hunt and work with him) and to date all reports have been positive.

#### HERITAGE KNIVES FOR A PAIR OF OLD FELLAS

This was originally meant to be a one-off exercise, a surprise present for Mr Fifiel's 70th birthday. Shaped in the Nessmuk style from a piece of Damascus steel forged by Northern Territory knife-maker Steve Sunk, this one has an oryx horn haft and handmade leather sheath. It's a nice piece of kit, even if I say so myself. A few weeks after the event a second knife was required when another good friend, Jim Power, also turned 70, his made from the same piece of steel but fitted with chital antler scales.

Both told me later these would probably never see use in the paddock, rather put on display somewhere for others to appreciate. Now that's not such a bad outcome for a couple of knives which started out as 'odd' jobs.



JIM POWER'S HERITAGE KNIFE, DAMASCUS STEEL WITH CHITAL ANTLER SCALES; THE HERITAGE KNIFE MADE FOR GRAEME FIFIELD, DAMASCUS STEEL WITH ORYX HORN SCALES.



# The Eagle has expanded

## SAM GARRO VISITS A TOP VICTORIAN FACILITY

**T**he long-established, well-managed and maintained Eagle Park Range at Little River in Victoria attracts shooters of all persuasions, from the experienced to the novice. It offers the chance to participate in a sport shared by others under closely supervised and controlled conditions, where safety is paramount and a pleasurable experience can be enjoyed by all.

As shooters we're fortunate to have such a venue open to SSAA members and the general public, in an idyllic and picturesque setting in the You Yangs mountain range, catering to different shooting disciplines and club events. It's a multi-faceted facility offering a variety of disciplines including pistol, shotgun and large calibre rifles.

Here's a place far from bustling city life and daily chores, where a few enjoyable hours or a whole day can be spent improving or maintaining skills, sighting-in a firearm or just target shooting for pleasure. Shooting's not just a growing sport and pastime, it's now regarded as a beneficial outdoors activity. Shooters travel to Eagle Park from near and far, including regional towns like Colac, Ballarat and Bendigo, to enjoy their sport in a safe and controlled environment or participate in competition shoots.

Over the years, as noticed through my own regular attendance, numbers have steadily increased. This can be attributed to the SSAA's ongoing promotions and efforts to further the sport, though also as a result of keen shooters encouraging others to 'have a go'. The facilities continue to evolve and welcome more and more visitors, made possible through planned improvements and expansion. This includes accommodating a variety of disciplines and clubs events so, for example, black powder shoots can coexist without affecting the main range or other activities.

### MAIN OFFICE AND SHOP

Range manager Drew Philbey is very much 'hands-on' in his role, regularly touring the complex to ensure operations run smoothly. Range officers and office staff all take pride in their work, with a strong emphasis on safety. They're happy to take time to properly explain procedures and requirements, whether it's an enquiry over the phone or a visitor at the counter, everyone is made to feel welcome.

Apart from accepting range fees, the office and shop is well stocked with popular calibres of ammunition, hi-vis vests, eye and ear protection, a wide range of paper targets, clays and many other items the visiting shooter will need. And in the event you've forgotten or don't have the necessary equipment then target stands, firearm rests and related aids are available for rent or purchase at reasonable prices. Safety course pamphlets and other SSAA information is also freely available.

### RANGE FACILITIES

To gain a better appreciation of the facilities and significant work carried out in recent years, Drew took time out to drive me around and point out the various improvements and additions. A lot of effort has gone into steady and impressive upgrading, to the point where Eagle Park can now be compared with some of the best shooting ranges in the country.

Standout features including the establishment of a new training range with high concrete dividing walls for safe shooting. From the main

BGRC MEMBERS FIRE AT DANGEROUS GAME POP-UP TARGETS; EXTENSIVE EARTHWORKS AND LIFE-SIZED DEER SILHOUETTES.





RO WITH A GROUP OF NON-LICENSED SHOOTERS, THEN GROUP SHOOTING IN THE PRONE POSITION; SHOOTERS AND AUTHOR TARGET SHOOTING AT THE MAIN RANGE.

shooting line, it's difficult to properly appreciate the extensive earthworks until you pull on a hi-vis vest and walk the full 500 metres. Additional or extended gravel roads, ground levelling beyond the main range's previous parameters, earth embankments, deep gravel drainage channels and water retention dams all become evident. Further to that, the recently introduced life-sized metal deer silhouettes strategically positioned at the far end of the range are hugely appealing, and have drawn multiple compliments from interstate shooters and visitors.

New buildings include the impressive SSAA Victoria Training Centre and 5-Stand club storage shed. Range commands have been automated through an intercom system, audible throughout the length of the main firing line, to maintain consistency for ROs and participants when making ceasefire and safety announcements.

All ROs, at times as many as six on Saturdays, are equipped with two-way radios for quick, responsive communication. All these improvements, along with other staff and public amenity upgrades, have been achieved at considerable cost and effort, demonstrating highly effective use of members' and visiting participants' fees and contributions. Ongoing maintenance, repair and upkeep of the grounds and facilities continues as normal.

#### MAIN RANGE ONE

The undercover and concreted public main range with 100 benches for comfortable and accurate shooting is well used by members and is also open to the general public. It's certified for all calibre of rifles including 50BMG to distances of 500m, while part of the range is allocated to those using heavier calibres and muzzle brakes.

Adjacent to the range is a separate section, identified by low shielding white baffles at the firing line when shooting prone, is set aside for non-licensed shooters. These are under close and strict supervision of range officers at all times. During my visit, a group of young shooters were highly attentive as ROs explained procedures and imparted their knowledge and it was pleasing to see that level of enthusiasm.

Shotgun shooting is also available on the main range, with a clay target thrower located at the end of the firing line which can be used by members during normal opening hours.

#### MAIN RANGE TWO

This undercover facility has 25 concrete benches and also stretches to 500m. It's used by sub-clubs including Victorian Muzzle Loaders, Military Rifle Club, Eagle Park Precision Rifle Club, Melbourne Sporting Rifle Club and takes independent bookings by organisations like the police, prisons, AFP and Border Force.

**Range Three** is a training facility for firearms safety course beginners and other outside organisations, normally comprising smaller groups and usually with an RO in charge.

**Five-Stand range** is at the far end of the car park and is a designated area for Sporting Clays with various Trap layouts.

**Pistol ranges:** The Practical Pistol League of Australia, Little River Raiders, Sporting Shooters' Pistol Club, Third Military District Club, Australian Military Collectors Club and Military Pistol Club uses a complex of 18 pistol ranges for IPSC and other competitions. These clubs have a very strong following.

**Big Game Rifle Club:** The BGRC, of which I'm a member, stages a variety of events using



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SCAN ME



classic big game rifles, particularly large-calibre and British-origin firearms. In December 2023, the Big Game Rifle Club of Victoria erected a high cement dividing wall through its own member funding and a government grant, to provide a separate 50m Dangerous Game range to facilitate more than one event at the same time. A further clubroom extension is planned when funds are available to accommodate country, interstate or international visitors participating in hosted competitions.

**Sporting Clays:** This ground is run by the Australian Cypriot Shooting Sports Association who hold a popular monthly competition.

#### TRAINING

Behind the scenes, good work is also carried out in the training of young and new shooters in safe practical firearms use, ethical behaviour and practices, respect for property and animal welfare, understanding rules and regulations and more, helping grow membership and support for the sport.

A non-negotiable is in place for strict adherence to correct muzzle direction of firearms on the range, as the first rule of firearm safety. Non-compliance results in being asked to leave the range, as the roster of 25 staff view safety of patrons and team members as their primary objective.

#### COME AND TRY

For new shooters, long arms rimfire (.22LR) and centrefire (.223 and .308) options are available, including packages where firearms are made available under supervision only, with fees varying according to type requested and usage, all of which can be viewed on the SSAA Eagle Park website.

#### PUBLIC AMENITIES

Whether on your own or with family or friends and you're feeling a bit peckish, Bruno's Café

with indoor and outdoor seating is conveniently situated next to the car park. It offers a range of hot food, sandwiches and drinks including coffee. Public amenities are also on-site.

#### RANGE RULES

When visiting, it's important to be familiar with range rules and requirements which are there for the safety of all. Similarly with regard to memberships, facilities and options available to those new to shooting, training programs, operating times, how to get there and contact details, all of which are detailed on the Eagle Park Range website. And if still unsure what to do or how to go about it, just give the office a call.

#### CONCLUSION

For any sport to succeed into the future, providing the tools through education, training and support, as well as the practical means to participate, is paramount for newcomers. Pleasingly, attendances at the range have been steadily increasing over the years, with improvements and expansions keeping up with growth and demand.

For Drew Philbey it has been a hugely satisfying achievement, as it has for Facility Manager Shane Doyle and SSAA (Vic) CEO Jack Wegman, who acknowledge the efforts of those before them. ●

SECTION WITH LOW-SHIELDING Baffles FOR NON-LICENSED SHOOTERS UNDER SUPERVISION OF ROS; SOME OF THE OTHER SMALLER RANGES.



*Continued improvement is possible through the support and contributions of SSAA members and the visiting public.*

VISIT:  
SSAA Eagle Park Range  
165-315 Gifkins Rd, Little River,  
Victoria.  
Phone (03) 8892 2720.



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**SIFA**



# As good as it gets



ROBUST SHOOTING BOOTHS WITH AUTOMATED TARGET RETRIEVAL.

## PAUL MILLER VISITS A STATE-OF-THE-ART RANGE AT AUBURN

**A**s indoor venues go, the Auburn Shooting Centre (ASC) in Sydney's western suburbs is up there with the best of them. A state-of-the-art facility which officially opened in early 2025, it's run by SSAA (NSW) and represents a decade-long effort by the state executive to establish a new, modern indoor range in the Sydney metropolitan area.

The centre is purpose-built for skill development, training and community engagement and aims to be the leading destination for pistol shooters across the region. The ASC is managed by Boutros Zouki, a key member of the SSAA (NSW) team who also oversees operation at the Hill Top Shooting Complex.

Boutros, together with the team at the Oran Park headquarters and dedicated range officers at Auburn, have worked tirelessly to establish a facility which reflects the state's commitment to excellence, safety and accessibility. This effort ensures every visitor, whether a seasoned veteran or first-time novice, can experience a professional and welcoming shooting environment.

### THE RANGE

The ASC is located at 16-18 Byrne Street, Auburn and accessed via an underground car park beneath a modern industrial complex featuring secure, lock-up parking for visitors. The facility comprises three fully enclosed, ventilated and filtered 25m ranges, equipped with advanced air-conditioning and purification systems.

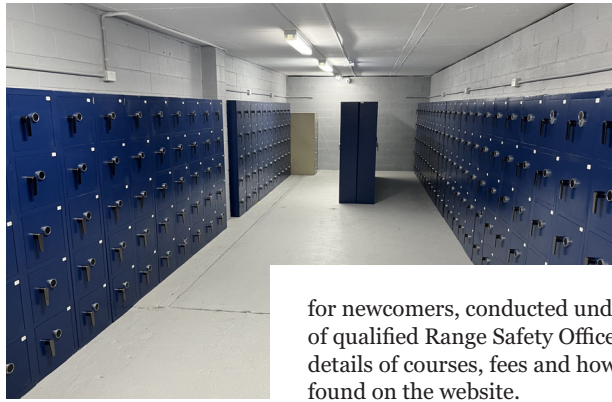
Each range has automated target retrieval systems which allow shooters to load, replace and adjust the distance of their targets directly from their shooting booth. Auburn is classified as an 'no danger area enclosed range', meaning all projectiles fired are safely contained within the facility. Recent upgrades include a robust 6mm rubber ballistic curtain in front of substantial backstops, providing exceptional safety and noise reduction.

Ranges A and B offer five lanes each, while range C features nine lanes and is ideal for club competitions and events. Like the SSAA Hill Top complex, ASC caters not just to SSAA members but a range of pistol clubs, both social and competitive. The centre also welcomes walk-in visitors, including unlicensed guests who can fill out a P650 form to participate in up to three supervised sessions to decide if the sport is right for them.

The facility also hosts corporate events and social activities with a view to learning more about shooting, and provides the training and assessment required for a newly-formed club and other firearms licensing requirement.

### TRAINING AND SAFETY

ASC offers entry-level approved SSAA (NSW) Safe Shooting Courses (both longarm and handgun), which forms the first step in helping participants prepare for the state's firearms licensing process. 'Try Shooting' sessions are also available



ABOVE: SUBSTANTIAL SECURE STORAGE FOR PISTOLS AND LONG-ARMS IS AN IMPORTANT AND USEFUL ASSET. LEFT: TARGET RANGES ARE FITTED WITH NUMEROUS FANS TO MOVE AIR BEFORE IT'S FILTERED.

for newcomers, conducted under the supervision of qualified Range Safety Officers (RSOs). Full details of courses, fees and how to book can be found on the website.

The venue includes a well-stocked shop catering to all pistol shooters' needs, as well as a comfortable lounge and modern bathroom facilities. Security is paramount, with comprehensive CCTV surveillance, back-to-base alarm systems and reinforced construction. A dedicated armoury area includes compliant pistol and rifle lockers, accessible through an armour-rated security door, where shooters can rent lockers to safely store firearms on-site.



LARGE AND IMMACULATELY PRESENTED LOUNGE FOR SHOOTERS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

Before accessing ranges via the welcoming foyer, all users proceed through a glass-enclosed walkway. You're required to wash your hands both before and after shooting activities, in accordance with the facility's rigorous occupational health and safety standards. A high-performance air filtration system operates continuously during sessions, while staff adhere to strict cleaning and maintenance protocols to safely remove spent projectiles and lead residues. The club's website provides comprehensive guidance on the approved air rifle and pistol calibres permitted for each range.



ABOVE: THE 25M RANGES ARE FULLY ENCLOSED AND THOROUGHLY CLEANED WHEN SHOOTING'S OVER. RIGHT: ASC MANAGER BOUTROS ZOUKI AND HIS DEDICATED STAFF MAKE SHOOTERS WELCOME.



**FAMILY-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT**  
The ASC is a standout example of a welcoming, family-friendly experience. Boutros Zouki and the SSAA (NSW) team emphasized that some of the range's most skilled and consistent shooters are women - and why am I not surprised. Auburn is more than just a range, it's a safe and professionally managed space where shooters of all levels can learn, practice and enjoy the shooting sports. And for anyone curious about pistol shooting, it's the perfect place to start.

Special thanks go to the whole team at Oran Park, Boutros and the Auburn ROs for their professionalism, dedication and warm hospitality and for maintaining such a first-class facility for the NSW shooting community.

[auburnshootingcentre.com.au](http://auburnshootingcentre.com.au)

**VISIT:**

ASC is open seven days a week, Monday-Saturday from 11am-9pm and Sunday from 10am-6pm.  
16/18 Byrne St, Auburn NSW  
Phone (02) 9071 2100



# Top of the heap!

## **HILL TOP RANGES NOW MANAGED BY SSAA (NSW), WRITES PAUL MILLER**

**O**n September 1 last year after a long and protracted negotiation with the New South Wales State Government's Office of Sport, SSAA (NSW) took over management of the two rifle ranges and pistol range at Hill Top. In a deal lasting 20 years, it is now known collectively as the SSAA (NSW) Hill Top Shooting Complex.

Negotiations began with a site inspection by SSAA (NSW) President Lance Miller and CEO Peter Szaak, followed by a tender process. This resulted in several interested parties and, at the end of that process, the state Executive were rewarded for their immense efforts with SSAA

(NSW) becoming the successful applicant.

This is exciting news for our members and a triumph at both state and national level, as these are excellent facilities catering to most rifle shooters with targets from 50m to 500m. There's also an 800m range which is now leased by The Southern Highlands Rifle Club and managed by SSAA (NSW), while the 50m pistol range is home to a variety of clubs and is a prime handgun shooting facility.

The Southern Highlands Regional Shooting Complex (Hill Top range) was the brainchild of the late Dave Cook and the late John Tingle MLC, stemming from their shared vision of the need for



an international shooting venue, easily accessible to those from Sydney, the south coast and Southern Highlands. Subsequent representation by Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party members Robert Brown MLC and Robert Borsak MLC secured the complex as it is today.

The venue is managed by Boutros Zouki and his team of experienced range officers, who were most welcoming when I met them for a tour of the facilities, Boutros giving me a comprehensive rundown on what they encompass and how they're managed. I was already familiar with the 500m range which I use for rifle reviews and ammunition testing, though had only visited the

800m range once and had never seen the pistol facility. So let's take a look.

#### 500M AND 50M

These two ranges were built under the auspices of the NSW Government's Office of Sport and are far more recent than the 800m one. The ranges were approved in 2010 and completed in 2019 and comprise two excellent venues for rifle and pistol shooting. The now-renamed SSAA NSW Hill Top Shooting Complex also continues to serve as the 'home range' for the Illawarra branch of the SSAA, Illawarra Regional Shooting Association, Illawarra Services Rifle Club and Seventy-Four Pistol Club.

THE TARGET-RICH 500M STRETCH.



Both ranges have substantial buildings offering administration offices and covered shooting positions. Excellent toilet facilities are a feature and both are well covered for any occupational or recreational health and safety issues. Both are supervised by qualified range officers who are welcoming and helpful, while ensuring excellent safety standards. Complex manager Boutros Zouki is the epitome of cheerfulness and hospitality and while we all love our shooting, it's just nice to feel part of the set-up on arrival.

The 50m pistol range caters to all handgun disciplines over five separate ranges, while also allowing air rifles and .22 rimfires to be used. Four of the ranges are fully covered and feature a moveable booth set-up, and there's also a pneumatic moving target system that's particularly impressive. SSAA members from the Sydney region who are licensed handgun users will find this facility highly suitable to their pistol shooting needs.

The 500m range is ideal for several of the SSAA disciplines, as well as recreational hunters looking to sight-in their rifles and check their handload's performance at distance. This one has targets starting at 50m, going out to 100, 200, 300, 400 and 500m. It caters to rimfire rifles right through to larger centerfire cartridges, with various-sized steel plates placed along the 500m line of targets, smaller ones being particularly challenging at that distance.

The 60 substantial benches provide a perfect rest. Shooting positions are covered by an acoustic shelter which offers good weather protection, yet not too close to the shooter and so isn't claustrophobic or noisy to shoot under. I'd have to say

it's the best range I've ever shot on and I believe SSAA (NSW) has plans to carry out a few tweaks here and there, so it continues to be a premium shooting venue for future generations. It was also pleasing to see a significant number of women, juniors and families using the 500m range and taking so much enjoyment from their sport.

#### 800M RANGE

The Southern Highlands Rifle Club (SHRC) has a long and interesting history dating back to around 1898. The club was formed by amalgamating the Moss Vale and Burrawang Rifle Clubs who subsequently joined forces with the Bowral and Mittagong Rifle Clubs then, in 1932, they all amalgamated and became known as the Bowral-Mittagong Rifle Club. Shooting took place on the Welby Rifle Range until the outbreak of World War II then recommenced in 1946-47. The club eventually moved to Hill Top when the Welby Range was closed, changing its name to Southern Highlands Rifle Club to collectively represent all the local outfits which had amalgamated over time.

The current range was built at Hill Top on what was then Forestry Commission land in 1986 and became operational under the management of the SHRC. Other clubs which use or have used the 800m range include Illawarra Regional Shooting Association, Illawarra Services Rifle Club and Seventy-Four Pistol Club.

The SHRC continues to thrive and now leases from SSAA (NSW) the 800m range with a long, narrow 'classification' template which allows shooting from 100m all the way to 800m at 100m



SECRETARY LYDIA DICKINSON OBSERVES THE TARGET SYSTEM IN ACTION.



intervals, with appropriate mounded shooting positions at each of these distances. The 800m position has a very neat, covered and sound insulated shooting layout, with electronic target systems and an excellent view all the way to the butts.

The club holds shooting events for firearms ranging from air rifles to 8mm centrefire cartridges. Service Rifle and F Class events are very well attended with even lever-action enthusiasts catered for on a regular basis.

There's a comfortable clubhouse and modern amenities to welcome anyone interested in rifle shooting. Members are friendly and you don't need a firearms licence or be a member of SHRC for the chance to have a shot and form an opinion on what long-range shooting's all about. The club offers new shooters the chance to sign a P650 form, which allows three visits where they can shoot under supervision. It's then up to them to decide whether they'd like to join and apply for their licence to get into the serious enjoyment long-range shooting offers.

I was again interested to note the family atmosphere and how well some of the juniors and younger members were shooting and the way everyone interacted. I'd always thought of Service Rifle or long-distance shooting as the domain of older males with an interest in military service rifle-style shooting, as a holdover from the Second World War and beyond.

How wrong I was. Of course these interests and traditions are still alive and well, yet the mixed age groups and particularly two of the young ladies, Ava and Lucinda Harrison participating and shooting some of the best scores, was a real

eye-opener for me. They certainly give their grandfather a run for his money!

It's important to note that while the SHRC hires this range, it's also open to other clubs by negotiation with SSAA (NSW) on days SHRC isn't using it. These can be SSAA clubs or others appropriately accredited and insured, who are able to provide qualified range officers.

These three premium ranges are designed for local, state, national and international competition, at the same time providing safe and welcoming access for all shooters, not just SSAA members. They also have substantial parking to accommodate larger numbers of visitors at big events.

Thanks to Garrie Harrison for introducing me to the SHRC and committee members for making me feel welcome and showing me around. Under SSAA management, I can only see these facilities going from strength to strength, providing a comfortable and safe experience for everyone from families to serious competition shooters.

Last but by no means least, thanks to Pete Szaak, CEO of SSAA (NSW) for his valuable factual input and considerable enthusiasm for this amazing shooting complex and its long-term future in the Southern Highlands of NSW. ●

AN AMAZING 60 COVERED BENCHES AND NOISE INSULATING AND WEATHER PROTECTING ROOF OVER ALL SHOOTING POSITIONS; CHEERFUL AND CAPABLE RANGE OFFICERS MAKE YOU WELCOME AT THE PISTOL RANGE; GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS; FINE-TUNING WITH SOME GRANDPA INPUT!

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*SSAA (NSW) proposes to open SHRSC four days a week. Initially, opening times will be Friday 10am-5pm (500m range only), Saturdays and Sundays 10am-5pm (all ranges), bookings for the fourth day will be made directly with SSAA (NSW).*

VISIT:  
 SSAA Hill Top Ranges  
 430 Wattle Ridge Road, Hill Top,  
 NSW.  
 (02) 3824 8888  
 admin@hilltop.nsw.ssaa.org.au  
 range@hilltop.nsw.org.au

# A vision for the future

## BIG THINGS ARE PLANNED FOR RURAL SA, AS MATTHEW GODSON DISCOVERED

**N**estled in the heart of rural South Australia, the Allambi Shooting Complex represents a bold new chapter for the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SA). Acquired with the support of a State Government grant from the Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing, this freehold property is set to become a premier, multi-discipline shooting facility, designed with the needs of SSAA members in mind.

### STATE-OF-THE-ART

The Allambi complex is being developed to accommodate a wide range of shooting disciplines. Ranges are currently pending final approval and certificates from the SA Police Firearms Branch and are laid out as follows:

**Range 1:** A 1609m (one-mile) range is currently pending approval and funding to begin construction and will cater to long-range shooting enthusiasts.

**Range 2:** A 40-position 100m and 200m range which will host a wealth of disciplines and matches, as well as being a place where visitors looking to sight-in a rifle prior to a hunting trip or do some load development can work. Members will be able to book a position and time-slot.

**Range 3:** Funding is pending for a range that'll cater to multiple shotgun disciplines.

**Range 4:** This 1000m facility will accommodate a variety of disciplines and matches.

**Range 5:** A dedicated pistol shooting complex planned to include 25m, 50m and 100m ranges for numerous disciplines. Development is pending further funding.

Each range is designed with accessibility in mind with disabled toilet facilities to ensure inclusivity for all members.



TREES FOR LIFE - THE REVEGETATED AREAS WILL PROVIDE FURTHER HABITAT FOR WILDLIFE.

**CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITY** SSAA (SA) is committed to environmental stewardship at Allambi. The property hosts a resident population of vulnerable malleefowl, with the Association actively engaged in conservation efforts to protect and rehabilitate the local ecosystem. This includes planting native vegetation in collaboration with conservation organizations to enhance the habitat.

### UPCOMING DEVELOPMENTS

While the complex is still under development, SSAA members can look forward to powered campsite with planned accommodation for those seeking a shooting getaway. Once fully operational, a comprehensive schedule of events and competitions will be announced.

### SHARE THE VISION

The Allambi Shooting Complex is more than just a range and is testament to the SSAA's commitment to securing the future of shooting sports in South Australia. As development progresses, members are encouraged to stay informed and become involved. Stay tuned for updates on SSAA (SA) social platforms, as they work towards making this a premier destination for Association members and shooting sports enthusiasts. ●

OPPOSITE PAGE: AERIAL VIEW OF THE 40-POSITION FIRING LINE; INSIDE THE LARGE SHOOTING SHED ALL BENCHES ARE WELL PROTECTED FROM THE ELEMENTS; INSET: CONSTRUCTION OF AN EARTH BERM TO ABSORB BULLETS.

STAY UPDATED:  
SSAA SA FB: [SSAASOUTHAUSTRALIA/](https://www.facebook.com/SSAASOUTHAUSTRALIA/)





# At home on the range

## MATTHEW GODSON JOINS AN SA SHOOTING COMMUNITY

Visit [ssaapara.org.au](http://ssaapara.org.au) for event details and membership information.

SSAA PARA RANGE:  
Rifle Range Rd, Greenwith SA 5125  
(08) 8289 6918

**L**ocated at Greenwith in Adelaide's north-east, the SSAA Para branch has been a cornerstone of South Australia's shooting community since 1969. With more than 700 active members, it's one of the largest metropolitan SSAA branches, offering a wide range of shooting disciplines, first-class facilities and a welcoming club atmosphere built on safety, skill and camaraderie.

Para's diverse range facilities cater to rifles, pistols, shotguns and airguns and features a 300yd main range for centrefire rifles and long-range shooting, as well as a 100m rimfire and 50m multi-purpose range for rifle and pistol events. For precision handgun matches there are two 25m turning-target ranges for precision handgun matches, while pistol and air rifle competitions are staged on the 10m air range.

Shotgun facilities include 5-Stand and field-style layouts and the set-up is completed by Practical Pistol and Single-Action bays as well as air rifle field target and archery ranges, all of which are supervised by accredited range officers to ensure safe and organised shooting for all.

### DISCIPLINES AND EVENTS

Para supports almost every SSAA discipline, with regular matches and practice opportunities. These include Benchrest, Scoped Rifle, Field Rifle and positional shooting, along with Practical Pistol (IPSC), Single Action and Cowboy Action.

There's also a healthy interest in air pistol and air rifle, black powder and muzzle-loading, metallic silhouette events, lever action, gallery rifle as well as the popular shotgun disciplines of 5-Stand and Sporting Clays.

The branch hosts national and state championships, the ANZAC Day Memorial Shoot and popular open days to introduce members to new disciplines. Experienced section captains mentor shooters and maintain a strong competitive calendar.

### MEMBER ACCESS

The Para branch is open seven days a week, typically 10am to 4pm with extended weekend hours when range officers are present, with members from other SSAA branches welcome, following standard sign-in and safety protocols. While the 300yd main range is temporarily closed for review, all others remain fully operational.

### A TRUE COMMUNITY

SSAA Para isn't just a range, it's a sporting community. Volunteer-driven, welcoming and committed to safe and responsible shooting, it provides members with top-tier facilities, regular competitions and a supportive environment for shooters of all skill levels. For SSAA members in Adelaide and beyond, Para branch is the ideal place to hone skills, compete and enjoy an extensive range of SSAA disciplines. ●

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# STOPPED

---

before it started



**DANIEL O'DEA ON AN ALL-AUSSIE  
SUCCESS STORY, SADLY NOW WITH  
AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE**

*It's almost prophetic as I re-read the following article which was written before the Bondi tragedy. In starting, I celebrated a strong and growing Australian firearms manufacturing industry, in a buoyant market seemingly recovered from its lowest ebb of the late 1990s, Port Arthur and the subsequent buyback. Little did I know that prior to going to print, this optimism would be turned on its head as we stare once more at a bleak and uncertain future. I was going to rewrite the following review but thought I should leave as-is, if for no other reason than to demonstrate how precarious our position can be and how we, as shooters, must remain united against the onslaught. At time of writing, the future of the rifle in question is now uncertain.*

**F**or someone who's been in this business for a while and was around in the late '90s when gun ownership here was at its lowest ebb and looking at a very uncertain future, it's hard to believe I'm here today in a country with what seems to be an ever-growing market in Aussie-made firearms. Fifteen years ago, if memory serves, no-one was making firearms in Australia for the civilian market on any commercial scale.

In 2013 Lithgow Arms restarted civilian offerings with the LA101, Warwick Firearms introduced their WFM4 at much the same time for the Cat D market, followed not long after by their WFA1 straight-pull. Today we can add Southern Cross Small Arms, Wedgetail Industries, Oceania Precision and, more recently, Eureka Gun Company and Shawmac Industries, all producing various models specifically for the Aussie shooter.

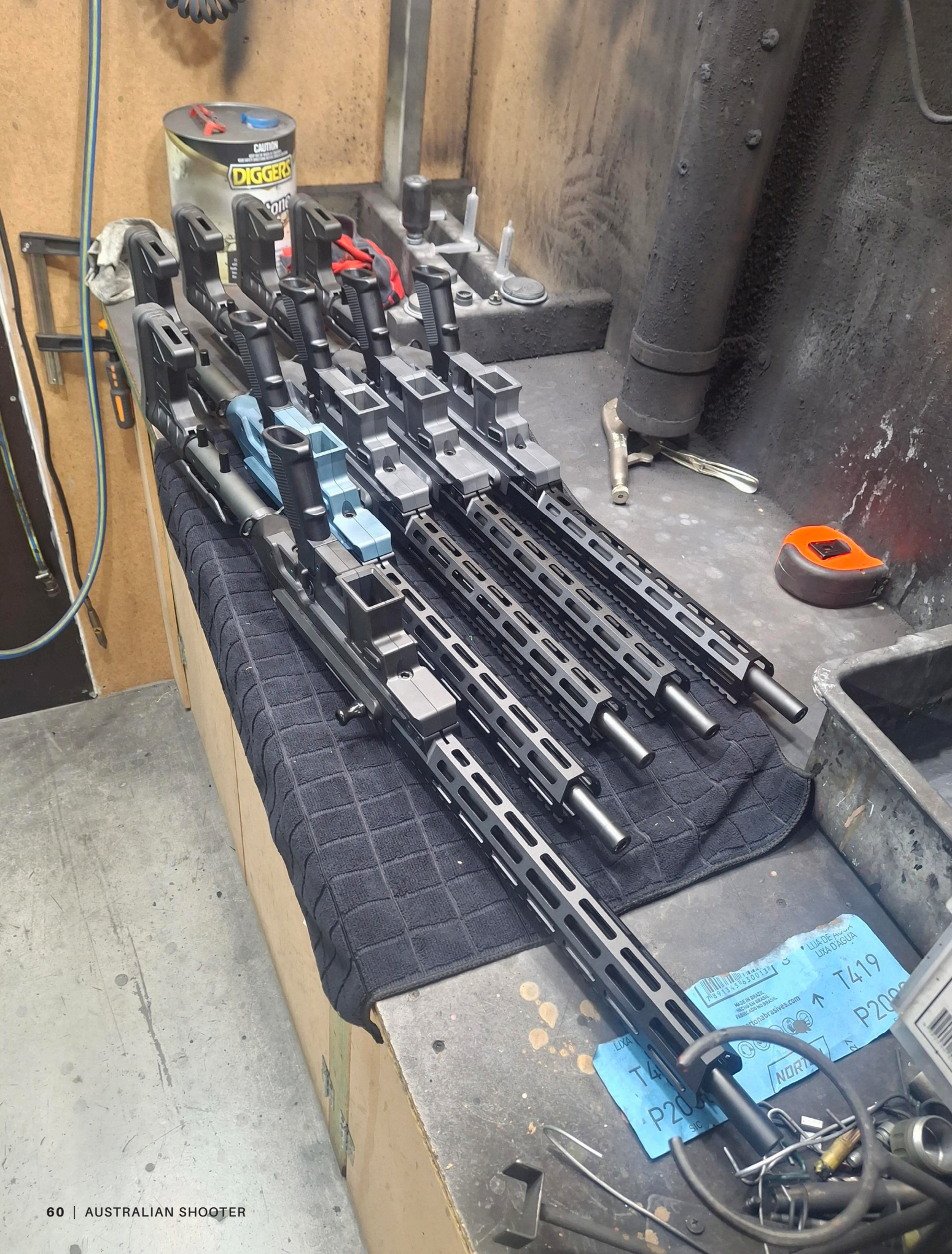
And it's at Shawmac Industries we find ourselves today, taking a look at their all-new Aussie Scrub Gun aka the ASG-9 rifle, a compact blowback lever-release offering, chambered for the ever-popular and affordable 9mm pistol round. It's what might otherwise be referred to in some competition circles as a PCC or Pistol Calibre Carbine.

For those unaware, Shawmac Industries are a rather diversified company. Based in Nowra on the NSW south coast, owner Dan Shaw has an interesting back story. A pilot with a background in law, he cut his teeth in aerial shooting and training, as well as suppressor manufacturing and gunsmithing services. A theatrical armourer, he also has his name behind a growing number of productions for both local and international companies and streaming services. So you might ask, with so many strings to his bow already, why start making firearms? We put that to Dan and here's what he had to say.

"The ASG-9 concept was born within our armoury services around a firearm we designed for a film. With an onset of interest by some for a retail option, we explored further development, setting a series of goals for the design which we've carried through to the present day. These were that the firearm firstly must be a ground-up build (not just a copy or modification of something else), it must be NSW-compliant for Category B, it would need to use readily available materials and, wherever possible, those materials must be Australian-made. We wanted the project to support as many Australian business as it could. Likewise, it had to be built simple but at the same time both strong and robust. It had to be easily serviceable and must be a multi-use platform.

"We took functioning concept examples to the SSAA Shot Expo in 2024 and asked for feedback - good, bad or indifferent. At the time we weren't completely committed to taking the project forward and wouldn't without market support. The level of interest from the SSAA event significantly exceeded our expectations, so we took onboard the feedback, redesigning the ASG concept rifle in line with all original goals to become the ASG-9, the current production design.

"The project has been guided by myself and close friend, engineer Brad Patton. The ability to cohesively bring together knowledge across firearms, law, operational use, the industry and advanced engineering has been instrumental. Wider support and input has come from Scott Warwick (Warwick Firearms) and Gideon Marshall



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(Marshall Armaments Research Services), whose knowledge and support have been significant.

“Staying true to initial goals, manufacture of the ASG-9 has been enabled by working partnerships with Australian industries and regulators including, but not limited to, NSW Police, Image Consulting and Engineering, Nowra Fasteners, Cleaver Firearms, DK Custom Parts, Hook 'n' Bone Trading Co, Pattison Springs, Bughole Ballistics, Warwick Firearms, Integrated Solutions, Alcock & Pierce, Safari Firearms and many more. What we ended up with in the ASG-9 is a 'multi-platform' lever-release, blowback carbine, proudly built in Australia and successfully designed to be NSW-approved as a Category B rifle.”

This last point of Dan's, although perhaps not overly importantly to those in other states, was pivotal in his home state of NSW which, due to strict interpretation of appearance regulation, has had its licensed shooters excluded from owning many other domestically manufactured Australian firearms.

The rifle comes supplied with a carbine rifle bag, two 10-round magazines, a chamber flag and bore snake. My first impression was a compact, nuggety firearm in the sense of being 'stocky' or 'thick-set'. It feels solid and unbreakable, over rather than under-engineered and weighs a respectable 3.35kg though looks like it should weigh less.

A percentage of the weight of course is taken up in the bolt assemble, as the action is effectively straight blowback with no locking mechanism, so relies on sheer bolt mass and the recoil spring to delay breech opening. This is a common and proven operating method for pistol calibre firearms as used in other platforms, many of which are historically renown.

The bolt moves back and forth in a channel machined in the upper receiver, with a guide rod extending from the rear into the bolt, orientating the recoil spring. A buffer subdues any excess energy once the bolt reaches the full extent of its reward travel. The lower receiver is somewhat of a clamshell affair, where two halves bolt together with the fire control group sandwiched between. One half includes the rear tang and stock stub, the other acting like an oversized side-plate.

Everything, and I mean everything, is held together with hex bolts, which kind of reminds me of my 1964 Nuffield Tractor (in a good way). If you owned a set of imperial spanners there wasn't a part you couldn't remove, only with the ASG it's hex keys, not spanners. It's nice to own something that's fully serviceable without special tools, albeit I'm sure full disassembly is neither required nor recommended.



THE ASG-9 HAS AN ARCA RAIL MACHINE INTO THE LOWER RECEIVER.

It features an A2-style pistol grip which, being compatible with any MSR (AR-type) grip, means swap-out options are endless should you choose to customise. Grip, safety and trigger all have that similar MSR orientation, which seems to be the ergonomically accepted benchmark these days. On the right side, a rounded protrusion which can be operated with the thumb acts as the bolt release.

The magazine housing forward of the trigger guard has a push-button release to the front right and accepts Gen 3 or newer 9mm Glock pattern magazines. A spring-loaded cocking handle to the left of the upper receiver draws the bolt and operating parts back when and where required. Forward of that is a generous M-Loc machined alloy handguard which, when combined with the upper, provides a continuous full-length PIC rail, all combining for more than ample real estate for sights, optics and accessories.

So how does it work? Operation is as follows: With safety engaged and all protocols applied (muzzle direction etc), use the cocking handle to draw the bolt back, both cocking the hammer and locking the bolt to the rear, now automatically held by the bolt release. Now load and insert a magazine. Pushing the bolt release does exactly that with the bolt riding forward, stripping and chambering a round from the magazine.

Pressing the trigger lets the hammer fall, striking the firing pin and igniting the cartridge. Recoil or blowback energy now forces the bolt to the rear, ejecting the spent case, where upon the bolt is caught by the release and hammer by the trigger sear, competing the cycle of fire. To go again the release must be pressed and cycle repeated.

The rifle I received for testing was from their early production, reported to have had 6000 rounds through it in testing and demonstration. As a good sign it showed little evidence of excessive wear. It'd been fitted with both flip-up sights



THE ASG-9, FOUR FROM FIVE IN THE 1" BULL AT 50M.



ASG-9 WITH TARGET AND AMMO

and H2 Aimpoint Micro (red dot) and I used it as-is for testing. The rifle comes with an MDT tube-type stock with cheek piece adjustable with a hex key and is finished with a rubber recoil pad.

The stock tube is held in place by a castle nut, an ambidextrous sling plate located between it and the receiver stub. So you're good out of the box for a single point sling rig, though will have to be creative outside of that. Worth noting is the ASG has an ARCA rail machine into the receiver just forward of the magazine housing if you want to bipod or tripod-mount the rifle.

I tested it with multiple 9mm ammo types and all shot well, clustering nicely at 25m. The rifle was sighted for 50m so typically 25-50mm low at 25m. I centred four out of five in the 1" ring of a 6" Glow Shot target at 50m, while at 100m had projectiles landing about 150mm low. 100m target groups were about 4 MOA for me, which I thought was good when shot with a 2 MOA red dot, though would undoubtedly be better with a magnified optic.

So where does the ASG-9 fit in? Despite its Australian Scrub Gun acronym, I think most will find a home on the range in competition disciplines such as IPSC. That aside it'll make an excellent fun plinker for anyone looking to step up from a .22LR. For ethical hunting of small to medium game, 9mm with the right ammo choice will do just fine with proper bullet placement and ranges kept below 100m, beyond which significant drops in velocity and energy occur. Think like a bow hunter with emphasis on close stalking, knowing your trajectory and bullet placement.

Based on early interest the ASG is set to be a popular new market edition with strong pre-sales already registered. More at [shawmacindustries.com.au/asg-9-rifle](http://shawmacindustries.com.au/asg-9-rifle)

## SPECIFICATIONS

<b>Rifle:</b>	ASG-9
<b>Action:</b>	Lever-release
<b>Trigger:</b>	Single-stage
<b>Calibre:</b>	9mm (9x19)
<b>Capacity:</b>	10-round (Magpul GL9), two supplied
<b>Barrel:</b>	16" (420mm) chrome moly
<b>Twist rate:</b>	1:10
<b>Weight:</b>	3.35kg
<b>Muzzle:</b>	Threaded 5/8x24
<b>Sights:</b>	(Nil) full-length Picatinny rail
<b>Butt stock:</b>	MDT
<b>Overall length:</b>	865mm
<b>RRP:</b>	About \$3799

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# Reality bites!

## DEREK NUGENT TAKES STEPS TO AVOID VENOMOUS EMERGENCIES

**A**ustralia is home to some of the most unique wildlife on the planet. So much so that when the first examples of animals like the platypus reached 18th century Britain, they were seen as outlandish fakes. After all, a tail like a beaver, bill like a duck and poisonous spurs to boot, who could've conceived of such a creature. Indeed, some 93 per cent of Australia's estimated 700,000 native species of flora and fauna exist nowhere else in the world.

Yet sadly since European settlement, almost 1500 land-based species of animal have either become extinct, are at risk of extinction or are considered endangered. In fact Australia has the highest rate of mammalian extinctions in the world. Another interesting ecological fact which has seen us develop a certain degree of global notoriety, is 85 per cent of the world's most venomous snakes can be found here.

Of Australia's 170 species of land snakes, 100 are classified as venomous. Of these, 25 are deemed 'potentially' deadly, including 12 species identified as being 'absolutely' life threatening. Ours is the only country with more venomous than non-venomous species of snake and, as such, a certain level of understanding and preparedness needs to underpin every outdoors person's forays into the wild, hunters included.

### WATCH YOUR STEP

Snakes are endemic to Australia and can be found just about anywhere. From arid scrub land to suburban backyards and everywhere in between including farms, parks, gardens, sports grounds, public reserves and even the local tip to name but a few. Even so, snake bites are actually quite rare here, particularly when compared to a place like India where there are upwards of 100,000 reported bites and 50,000 deaths every year.

Annually in this country there are around 3000 snake bite incidents with an average of two deaths. This is perhaps down to the fact snakes don't see us as prey and most bites occur when they feel under threat and a bite becomes their exit strategy. Most bites occur in one of two contexts, either the surprise encounter or in response to deliberate attempts to 'interfere' with a snake. In both instances if the 'freeze' or 'flight' strategy hasn't resolved the encounter, then 'fight' (ie bite) becomes the instinctive go-to with potentially tragic outcomes.

The five most venomous land snakes in Australia are the inland taipan, eastern brown, coastal taipan, tiger snake and death adder.

The **inland taipan** has fangs of 4-6mm and grows to an average length of 2-2.7m. It thrives in inland flood plains and can be found in Queensland, NSW, NT and South Australia. It's the deadliest land snake in the world and its venom can kill an adult within 45 minutes, yet it's both reclusive and rare.

The **eastern brown** has fangs of 3-4mm and reaches an average length of 2m. It can be found in eastern and central Australia, likes drier, open landscapes and thrives in urban environments. It's the second deadliest snake in the world, being fast-moving, aggressive and responsible for the bulk of lethal bites in this country.

The **coastal taipan** can be found in northern and eastern Australia and northern WA. It enjoys tropical conditions and thrives in wetlands, monsoon forests and cane fields. It's a close cousin of the inland taipan and, when threatened, its strikes are multiple and highly accurate. It has the longest fangs of any of Australia's deadly snakes at 13mm and averages around 2m in length, though isn't usually confrontational in nature.

The **tiger snake** can be extremely aggressive and is found along the south-eastern coast from





NSW to Tasmania including parts of SA. It reaches an average length of 1.2m with 3-5mm fangs. Because they can often inhabit highly populated areas, it's responsible for the second-highest number of bites.

The **death adder** is relatively small at less than 1m. It prefers a dry habitat and can be found in eastern and southern parts including Queensland, NSW, Victoria and parts of SA and WA. It has longish fangs at 6-8mm and, being an ambush predator, tends to sit tight and risk being trod on by the unwary trekker rather than flee, though is unlikely to strike unless touched.

The **red-bellied black snake** while commonly encountered afield, doesn't make the top five and is in fact quite shy and retiring. The **mulga snake** or **king brown** is actually a member of the black snake family and also sits outside the top five. It's the heaviest and most widely distributed venomous snake in the country, delivering huge amounts of poison in a single bite. Up to 150mg per bite has been recorded when milked for antivenom production purposes. Northern mulgas are deemed more aggressive than their southern counterparts.

#### FIRST AID

It has always amazed me that, given the number of hours spent in the great outdoors annually by Australians, there aren't more snake bite incidents and consequently more fatalities. I guess luck and common sense in response to snake encounters plays its part, yet so too does our awareness of and preparedness for first aid in response to bites.

From the outset it's important to understand not every snake bite results in envenomation, as sometimes a snake will strike but not inject venom. Yet it's impossible to know if that strike has resulted in a 'dry' bite, so immediate and appropriate first aid is required. It's a fact that, when done correctly, first aid techniques in response to snake bites will buy the victim several hours in which to access proper medical attention.

Firstly ensure the victim is safe from further strikes but don't try to kill or capture the reptile. A photo will suffice for later identification purposes and two bite victims are definitely not better than one. Secondly, remove any jewellery but not clothing and keep the victim still. Now bandage the bite site which in the majority of

cases will be a limb, if possible using a dedicated snake bandage or, in its absence, a wide (10-15cm) elasticized one.

Work upwards from the lower portion of the bitten limb, taking time if possible to mark the bite site on the bandage. The bandage should extend as high up the limb as possible (fingers to shoulder, toes to hip) and be as tight as for a sprained ankle. Many snake bandages actually have visual features to guide correct tensioning. Also apply a splint and bind firmly to as much of the limb as possible.

Furthermore don't apply ice, cold compresses or elevate the limb. Despite what you may have seen John Wayne doing in True Grit, don't incise or suck the bite site, don't wash it or apply an arterial tourniquet. And never medicate the victim with any stimulants or pain medication, as both are counterproductive to the effective management of a snake bite.

As an aside on the point of splints, I'd like to draw readers' attention to a brand new, innovative product recently released by Walk'N'Stalk. Dubbed the Game-Bar Carbon+, it's an ultra-light, telescoping shooting aid, at one and the same time a hiking pole, shooter's rest and gambrel. Built with the latest carbon fibre technology, it's breathtakingly strong and incredibly light.

Its telescopic design means in an emergency it could become a splint for either arm or leg, with the supplied webbing used as binding. Simply put, in the same way snakebite kits can be carried in the field, so too could a highly efficient splint. It's wholly Australian conceived, designed and marketed, a pedigree well worth our endorsement and support as hunters (visit [www.walknstalkstore.com](http://www.walknstalkstore.com))

Finally keep the patient still and comfortable, lie them down and prevent any walking or moving around. Remember, at all times the point is to prevent venom entering the blood stream and circulating. It goes without saying that at any point, preferably as quickly as possible, a triple 000 call should be made to have qualified medical attention on site ASAP. Depending on circumstances and in the absence of phone reception, activating a PLB (which all outdoors persons should be carrying these days) could be required to save a life, perhaps even your own.

#### PREVENTION BETTER THAN CURE

I don't bear any ill will towards reptiles and am usually content to let them be, yet like most Aussies I've had my fair share of 'necessary' encounters with them. Most have been in relation to moving and relocating harmless carpet snakes from my backyard.

AN INEVITABLE OUTDOORS ENCOUNTER;  
HARMLESS CARPET SNAKES ARE AN  
ALTOGETHER MORE AGREEABLE PROSPECT.



PROTECTIVE GARB: CHAPS AND GAITERS; RUNFUN BOOTS: SNAKE-PROOF PEACE OF MIND.

However I've also had some 'interesting' experiences with eastern browns, most notably a big bugger which slithered into our camp toilet tent and had to be persuaded to leave. It still sends shivers down my spine to imagine what could've happened if I hadn't been in the right place at the right time to spot it disappearing under the flooring. The next person to use those facilities could've been in real strife.

Naturally I've also come across snakes while hunting, though fortunately have never been bitten and always bypass them. A professional snake handler once gave me some sterling advice I always follow. He said: "They're not interested in you so stand still, leave them alone and they'll go on their way." Enough said though there's still merit in being suitably prepared for the worst.

While carrying a comprehensive first aid kit with snakebite bandage and Game-Bar Carbon+ for splinting is a no-brainer, prevention is still better than cure. Thus appropriate attire is your

first line of defence, particularly when you understand how small venomous snakes' fangs actually are. Long, loose-fitting trousers and shirts of a heavy and durable material are a must. They minimize skin exposure, are resistant to puncture and create a 'dead air' space between clothing and skin, which prevents a piercing bite.

Depending on circumstances and personal preference, clothing can be augmented with chaps or gaiters for added protection. Enclosed footwear is also essential and items made of leather, heavy duty denim and canvas, Kevlar, ballistic nylons like Cordura and synthetic rubber like Neoprene are readily available.

#### WALK WITH CONFIDENCE

South-east Queensland has enjoyed bumper rain these past few years, with the resulting lush grass cover perfect for unwanted encounters of the reptilian kind. This has been foremost in my mind as I considered the fact I'd have no chance of spotting a snake in the densely grassed paddocks I hunt. So it was with interest I began to peruse ads in *Australian Hunter* for snake-proof Runfun boots.

What immediately attracted me was the length of leg coverage they provide. I've never liked ankle-cut boots and have always opted for calf-high military boots when hunting. However, these seemed to go one step further so I splashed out and bought a pair online from the 4WD Depot, which was recommended by Australian Importer AFN. Pricing will vary considerably (\$200 to \$260) depending on where you source them and shipping costs. These boots have been a terrific investment which quite literally allowed me to walk with confidence when afield this past year, so look out for a detailed review in next month's magazine.

#### ON REFLECTION

In the final analysis we're responsible for our own safety and wellbeing afield. And while every possible scenario can't be anticipated, the most common potential accidents can easily be prepared for if not comfortably avoided. While we don't have to consider encounters with apex predators like lions, wolves or bears, we nevertheless need to be aware of the extreme risk to life and limb posed by our bevy of venomous snakes.

It's an unfortunate fact that bites from any of Australia's venomous snakes are life threatening, requiring immediate first aid and usually the application of antivenom in hospital. That said, the preventative approach is quite pragmatic: Be proactive and dress appropriately, be sensible and leave them alone and be informed so in the event of a bite you have the confidence, knowledge and first aid resources to manage the situation. ●

• A fuller assessment of Runfun snake-proof boots will appear in our May edition.



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# Machete madness

**KATH HEIMAN ON A PUZZLING DECISION BY VICTORIAN AUTHORITIES**

**M**any of us have been struggling to get our heads around Victoria's state-wide ban on machetes a few months ago. As campers, hunters, hikers or fisherfolk, most of us will have used a machete at some time. There's a characteristic to machetes which make them an enormously useful outdoors multi-tool, their design allowing a wide range of cutting motions which offer lots of versatility. Being shorter than a sword, longer than a carving knife, thicker than a kitchen knife but not as thick as a survival knife, they can handle both heavy-duty chopping and delicate precision work.

A machete can clear vegetation around camp or along overgrown trails, create kindling for the campfire and cut fruit and compost in the chicken coop. The belly of the blade can be used to skin and butcher while with a good quality one, the heel of the blade performs as an axe. And in a survival situation, a machete will help you fashion poles and roof material for a shelter.

Their day-to-day usefulness is obvious when you travel to developing nations around the world, my experience coming mostly from Papua New Guinea where I've spent time in coastal villages. Communities live a subsistence existence by tending gardens, fishing and foraging. Homes are built (and regularly rebuilt) from bamboo, sago plant and palm leaves, harvested from thick

vegetation surrounding the settlements. Palms are felled, lawns levelled, vegetables cut and coconuts opened, with machetes involved in all of these tasks. Many children use broad-blade kitchen knives until they're big enough to handle a machete, while every adult male carries a machete most of the time. It's part of everyday life.

So why has the Victorian Government singled out machetes for prohibition? Reading parliamentary debates surrounding the introduction of the ban, it's obvious crime in that state is a problem. According to official proceedings of Parliament (Hansard), Victorian crime levels are at their highest in two decades, with almost 640,000 reported in the year to June 30, 2025. Offences by under 18s have soared 42 per cent in the past 10 years and crimes against the person (homicides, assaults, robberies, sexual offences etc) surged almost 75 per cent in the same period, including a 37 per cent increase in murder.

A crime is committed in Victoria every 50 seconds, a car stolen every 17 minutes, retail theft every 13 minutes, serious assault every 29 minutes, family violence every 58 minutes, aggravated robbery every 2.6 hours and every 1.1 hour there's an aggravated burglary. Wow! Clearly something needs to be done but is banning machetes the way to go? Logically that would depend on how many are used in violent crime.



THIS PURPOSE-DESIGNED AUSTRALIAN OWNED AND MADE SURVIVAL TOOL IS NOW BANNED IN VICTORIA, REGARDLESS IF YOU'RE A PILOT, HUNTER, BUSHWALKER OR SURVIVALIST.

## WRANGLING WEAPONS

In an effort to curb the violence, police seized 6876 blades, machetes and 'zombie knives' in the first six months of 2025, almost 75 per cent of them from people living in metropolitan Melbourne. During search operations officers took 59 (1 per cent) prohibited knives (flick knives, knuckle knives, trench knives). Beyond that the spokesperson gave no details on how many of the remaining 99 per cent of seized blades were machetes, or whether the haul included household knives.

And while Victorian politicians and police were happy to rattle off crime statistics to support the ban, I couldn't even find one who identified the actual number of machete-related crimes in the state. Mostly the commentary followed a similar pattern: "We need to get knives out of the hands of criminals, so we need to ban machetes."

## CORNERING CRIMINALS

Apparently 40 per cent of Victorian crime is committed by just 5400 offenders. Some of the criminals are in Melbourne, some are youths and some no doubt use machetes. For example in November 2025, Victorian Police Commissioner Mike Bush said investigators were dealing with 610 teen offenders from 33 gangs. In the same month, Victorian Police Commander Mark Galliot said Melbourne's northwest metropolitan region deals with the state's largest proportion of youth gang-related offending (44 per cent) with 350 identified gang members. "We know their names, we know their addresses and we know their associations," Bush told 7 News.

Inflaming this picture of lawlessness, the media shows images of machete-wielding thugs on the streets of Melbourne. And the commentary

around these confrontations often uses racially motivated language like 'tribal brutality and savagery', 'hunting in packs' and 'warlike culture' to single out Sudanese youths as the main perpetrators of Victorian knife crime.

Interestingly, Victorian authorities don't publish statistics on the ethnicity of offenders, though research does exist. The media recently reported there were 18 Victorian children murdered at the hands of an offender carrying a blade during the past four years. Of those, 11 were gang related and in nine cases the child victim was from a migrant community.

Looking at the Sudanese community in particular, people born there committed just 1 per cent of violent offences across Victoria between 2016 and 2021. And while these figures may not cover children of migrants, there's nothing in the recent report to suggest their rate of offending is exponentially worse. Indeed, in the same period you were more than twice as likely to be attacked by someone from New Zealand, England or Ireland.

Whichever way you cut it, there's clearly far more crime in Victoria than just street fighting in Melbourne. According to Victoria's Crime Statistics Agency, there were 638,640 recorded offences in 2025. Of these, 97,890 were crimes against the person (15.3 per cent) where people were threatened, hurt or killed. Yet most of that crime wasn't being played out in public for all to see.

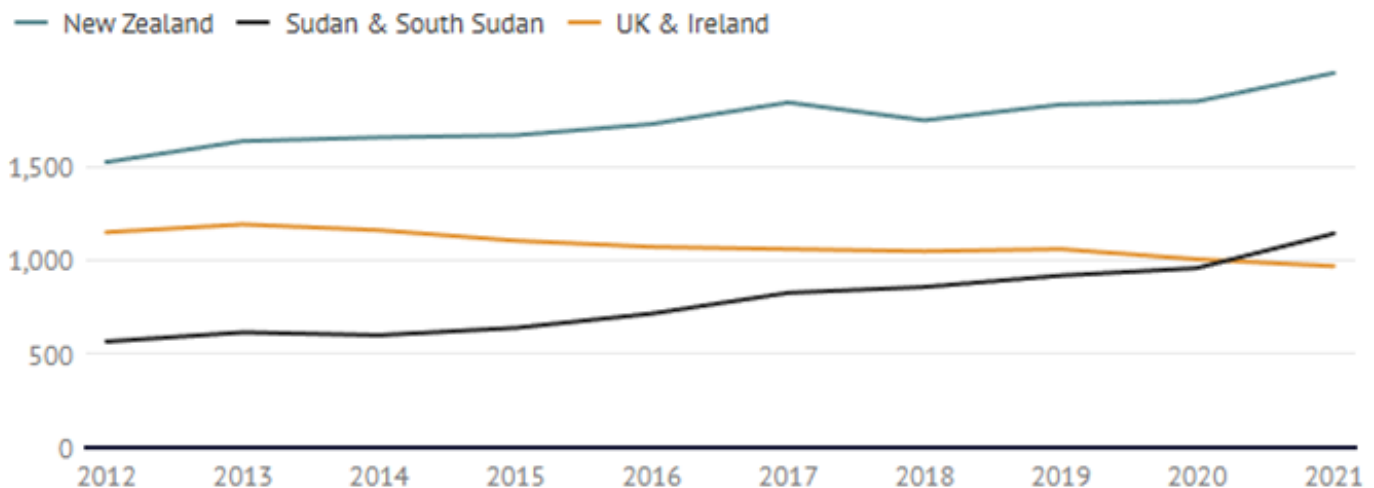
For example there were 44,238 incidents of family violence (45.1 per cent) which was probably happening mostly behind closed doors, unseen and therefore beyond the reach of cameras and tabloids. And there were lots of other people being stalked, abducted, robbed, blackmailed and otherwise harmed or threatened by villains.



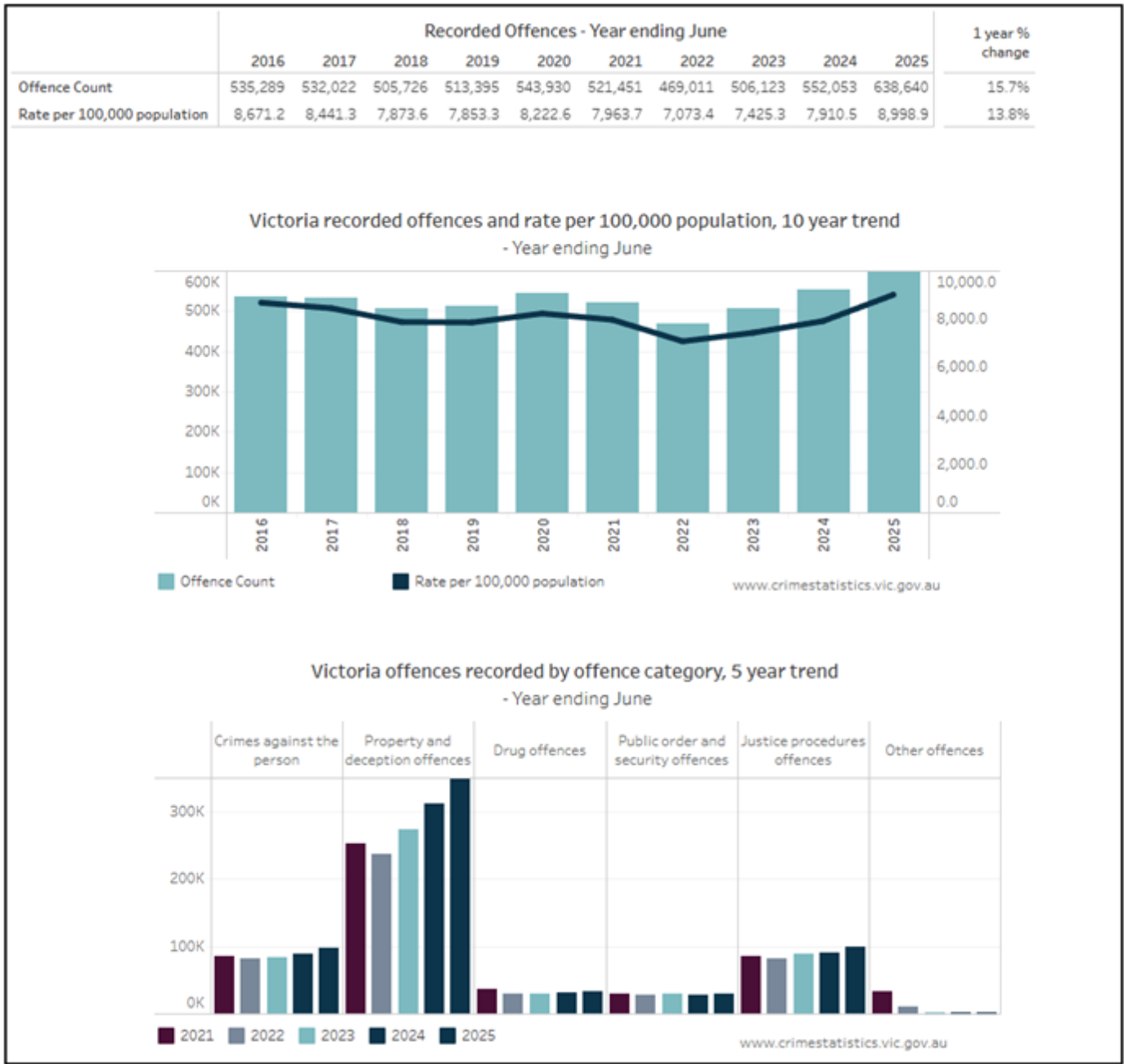
VICTORIA HAS A CRIME AND JUDICIAL PROBLEM, NOT A MACHETE HOMICIDE OR EVEN INJURY PROBLEM.

SOURCED FROM: [AFRICAN GANG PANIC IN MELBOURNE: LESSONS FROM A SCARE CAMPAIGN ONE STATE ELECTION LATER](#)

## Number of alleged offenders by country of birth



Source: Source: Crime Statistics Agency



POLITICAL POSTURING

So if there’s no compelling statistical basis for banning machetes to stop crime, why has the Victorian Government narrowed its focus on them? After all, every home has a kitchen knife and it’s a generally accepted fact that knives are the most common weapon used in homicide. Yet no-one’s calling for an outright ban on knives. To find the answer it’s impossible to ignore the political impact of the media. Gang-related crime on the streets of Melbourne is highly visible, people see it and take photos and confronting imagery of machete attacks makes powerful headlines.

By singling out machetes and, by implication, Sudanese youth gangs, politicians can grandstand about ‘being tough’ on crime. Banning machetes is cheaper than institutional reform of the criminal justice system, even at a cost of \$325,000 for every machete amnesty bin. And by tapping into a perceived undercurrent of racism and discrimination against the migrant community in Melbourne, there’s little risk the ban will lose politically valuable votes. After all, they’re just vilifying people already marginalised within society.

In reality, the cause of Victoria’s crime problem runs far deeper than machete-wielding criminals. Victorian politicians tell us there are too

SOURCED FROM: [RECORDED OFFENCES | CRIME STATISTICS AGENCY VICTORIA](#)



VICTORIA PREMIER JACINTA ALLAN, ANNOUNCING THE BAN, STANDS IN FRONT OF A PICTURE SHOWING RECENT CAPTURED WEAPONS WHICH ARE MOSTLY SMALL KNIVES;

few prison beds in the state and budget cuts in the courts means a backlog of offenders awaiting trial. So there are people on the streets continuing to commit violent offences while on bail awaiting trial. In one instance described in Hansard, an individual facing 400 charges received bail 50 times!

#### TARRER WITH THE SAME BRUSH

Reading through the political debate, it looks like many politicians thought there'd be exemptions to allow for 'legitimate use' of machetes in,

for example, 'agriculture, hunting, camping and similar activities'. Ultimately, however, the revised *Control of Weapons Act* makes little allowance for sensible people to use them for sensible reasons. One exemption is for agricultural use and the other where the machete has traditional, historical or cultural significance (native dance or similar).

And if you intend to sell one as a retailer, ensure the buyer has a lawful reason to own it. It's reported that Field and Game Victoria chief executive Lucas Cooke felt his organisation's suggestions during the consultation phase 'seemed to fall on deaf ears'. Evidently hunters' votes aren't worth much to our political leaders, so those of us who like to camp, hunt and fish have to suck it up.

So now all Victorians are stuck with a law which imposes a \$47,000 penalty for possession of a machete with minimal 'wiggle-room'. And things are made harder still as the law is vague about what actually constitutes a machete. The Act says: 'A machete is a type of knife' while police say it's: 'A large, broad-bladed cutting knife. These knives can vary in shape and size'. Not surprisingly, lots of Victorians are seeking clarity. I mean, how do you distinguish between a large, broad-bladed kitchen knife and a machete? Legal commentators agree the definition is deliberately vague to allow the ban to be applied more easily by the courts, so don't expect clarity any time soon.

#### ANOTHER WAY

Victoria's onerous restrictions were neither a necessary or inevitable consequence of its efforts to curb crime and aren't consistent with the approach taken by other states. As South Australia has shown, it's possible to 'go tough' on machetes without making life difficult for people who do the right thing. In mid-2025, changes came into effect in the SA *Summary Offences Act* banning possession of swords and machetes.

But SA accompanied this ban with a series of exemptions (22 in total). Among these is one for 'sport and recreation', making a person exempt from an offence if they use or possess a prohibited weapon 'in the course of participating in a lawful and recognised form of recreation or sport that reasonably requires use or possession of the weapon.'

Like Victoria, SA defines a machete in fairly vague terms ('large knife designed or adapted for use as an agricultural slashing tool or weapon'), though that's less of a problem when there are practical exemptions which allow law-abiding citizens to get on with life.

In all other states and territories, machetes aren't prohibited but are subject to regulation. Referred to as either a controlled weapon or restricted item, its lawful to possess one provided you've a legitimate purpose such as camping or other recreational activities. Sure, you're not allowed to carry one in public without valid reason and they must be transported securely and not accessible in public spaces without lawful excuse. But provided you're doing the right thing for the right reason, you're unlikely to fall foul of the law.

Ultimately crime is committed by people, not object. If criminals want machetes to commit crimes they'll find them, just like they'll lay their hands on any other tool, implement or item which makes it easier to do the wrong thing. In the end, criminals will continue to commit crimes until we address the root issues driving people to offend. The real problem in Victoria seems to be a 'Broken System' and banning machetes is a 'Band-aid Solution' which sounds like 'BS' to me. ●

• Research sources include: ABC News 'Record number of machetes seized in Victoria this year, police say', June 2, 2025; Cole, L. (et.al) 'How we were wrong about African gangs', June 15, 2025; Crime Statistics Agency, Victoria 'Recorded Offences', 2025; Dalton, T. 'Victoria's ban on machetes begins as knife definitions create confusion', ABC News, September 5, 2025; Smith, R. 'Chilling details emerge about youth gangs and knife crime after teen's tragic stabbing murder', news.com.au November 2, 2025; Omoke, N.I. (et al) 'Analysis of machete cut fractures in Nigerian civilian trauma setting', Naturesearch, Jan 8, 2021; Parliament of Victoria, Hansard, various dates; Pittaway, T. (et. al) 'African Youth Gangs', Curtin School of Population Health, 2021; Survival Supplies Australia 'Machete ownership: Is it legal to own a machete in Australia', website blog; Vedelago, C. (et.al) One election later, the lessons from Melbourne's 'African gang panic', The Age, November 23, 2021; Wu, D. 'More than 600 teens from 33 gangs behind Victoria's terrifying youth crime crisis', news.com.au November 4, 2025.

BUULL  
EYE!



'S

**MARK VAN DEN  
BOOGAART  
RECOUNTS AN NT  
TEAM EFFORT**

**H**unting the Northern Territory is hot and dusty work with just getting there no easy task in itself. The upside is it's a gateway to real hunting adventures, worth every ounce of effort it takes to make it happen. The reason I say this is that after our 2024 trip, good friend Frank contacted me saying he'd like to join us on our next journey north.

Frank's a good guy, the kind of person you want on an 11-day sojourn though his fitness needed some work. No use hiding the fact as it would be unfair and possibly a little irresponsible to do so. Taking our concerns on board, he decided to do something about it and set a goal to be fit enough to hunt the Territory in 2025. The good news is he made it and took a bull which we'll talk about later. For now let's focus on the Buffalo Express.

Our first buffalo hunt was in 2023 when we flew to Darwin, hired a ute and relied on the kindness of others to go hunting. We were successful, taking buffalo as well as building a lasting relationship with the property owner. Back home with buffalo horns still soaking in very smelly water, we began planning for Round Two. Next time we'd drive, take our own gear, our own camp and enough refrigeration and power to bring home more than just horns. We also started tossing around the names Buffalo Express and Average Joe Safaris.

Buffalo Express reflected our determination to get there, take buffalo and come back. The moniker Average Joe Safaris was years in the making. It started in the Pilliga where we'd spend seven days hunting that huge chunk of dirt, take everything in, carry everything out and try to bring home as much meat as possible. It was our



THINGS ARE A LITTLE DIFFERENT IN THE TERRITORY; OUR CAMP, COMPLETE WITH CAMP KITCHEN AND SEATING AREAS; JONO AND ADAM TAKE A BREAK ALONG THE BUFFALO TRAIL.



ADAM AND FRANK WITH A GOOD HAUL OF BACON, INCLUDING THE BOSS BOAR.

DIY version of a safari, something anyone could achieve, hence Average Joe. Now hunting the Territory is anything but average yet the approach remained the same: Do it yourself.

In 2024 we returned and were successful (see 'X Marks the Spot' and 'Think Twice', *Australian Shooter*, February and March 2025). Once home, even before the dust had been properly cleaned, we started planning and improving for next time. Things roll around fast and in early September we were on the road again. Meeting the rest of the crew just past Toowoomba, we convoyed up and went to it.

Ahead of us was a long yet otherwise uneventful drive. The roos weren't too bad, roadside coffee terrible and breakfast at the Barkly Homestead a welcome comfort after hours at the wheel with plenty more to go. About eight hours after the bacon and eggs we arrived at our last stop, filled up the tanks and eskies then put the bitumen behind us as we headed for camp. Three hours later we reached base camp for the week and let it all soak in. For Rob and Frank this was their first trip to the NT, Adam's second while for Ian, Jono and I it was becoming fairly familiar territory.

Buffalo can take some stopping and our big game battery included a Tikka T3 7mm Reg Mag loaded with 170-grain ammo along with the ever-reliable Beretta BRX-1 in .30-06 with match-

ing 180-grainers. There was also a Sauer 9.3x62 carting 286-grains of punch, an unmatched brace of .375H&H Magnums at 300-grains and my Chapuis X4 double-rifle, also loaded with 286-grain ammo. We also had two spare rifles, both .30-06ers along with a goodly supply of Sako and Norma rounds for all calibres. Compared to the bolt-actions the Chapuis looked like a quail gun but, as we say, it's small but mighty.

Across the expanse of the 650,000-acre cattle property the available ground water seemed much lower than in 2024. We soon realised just how much as the billabongs from last year had mostly gone, so we'd think hard and work even harder to find game. Other than walking a lot not much happened in the first couple of days, though we did locate a decent water source and assumed it had to hold buffalo.

Water is a quandary when hunting the NT. You want it for game but it can also mean unwelcome tenants like saltwater crocodiles. Freshies are fine but salties? No thanks. Consequently you want good water broken up by crossing points and we knew just the place. Backing our hunch one hot afternoon we safely crossed then headed away from the water towards a small rise.

Near the top of the low crest was a shaded tree line and, oddly, a very un-tree-like shadow. It was a young buffalo bull, something the locals refer

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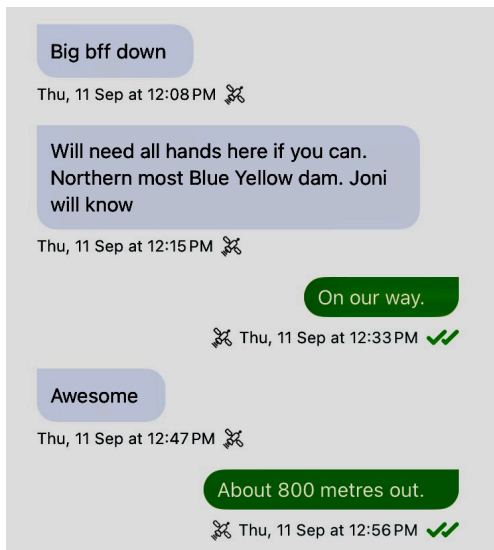
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FROM TOP: OUR AMBUSH POINT; THAT'S WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR; ROB SPOTS THE 'MICKY BULL'; ZOLEO MESSAGE; MARK WITH THE CHAPUIS WAITING FOR THE BUFF.



to as a 'Mickey'. Now Mickey makes you think mouse but even a young buff is a sizeable beast. As both Adam and I had taken a bull the previous year, we suggested Rob have a go. It was clear the bull knew something was up as he turned once, turned again then lifted his sizeable head to try and scent us.

Things were about to happen when the opening shot rang out. We have a simple rule saying the first shot belongs to the hunter, the following designed to nail that buffalo to the ground. Consequently, a series of follow-ups dropped Mickey in his tracks and we had our first game animal of the trip. After a round of photos we went to work recovering both meat and trophy then loaded it on our packs for the carry out.

After that initial success the hunt went a little quiet, though the fishing was spectacular. The same water source which produced the lone buff also provided five cracking barramundi, one of which didn't make it back to the water. Even I hooked two, a monster that snagged me and broke the line and another very respectable fish I dropped at the last moment (to be honest I was too focused on the water and what might be in there).

Fishing aside we kept searching for buffalo and a couple of days later found ourselves back on the far side of the water. It'd been a hard slog through the afternoon heat and an unexpected body of water we couldn't cross where we'd planned until, eventually finding a suitable point, we returned to our side of the river about a half hour before dark.

As often happens, we were making plans to walk back to the car when we saw an out-of-the-ordinary shape. It was long, dark and at first we thought it was a reclining buff until, to our surprise, the shape split apart and up went the cry: "Pigs!" As the bacon was a little too far for the Chapuis, Adam and Frank took the lead. It was a good-sized mob with a boss boar, sows, juveniles and a whole bunch of piglets. Once in position the pigs, dirt and even the odd ant mound erupted, with the Chapuis even having a go at some fleeing porkers who ran towards, rather than away from me.

All told the boys took out six, including the big feral boar. With light fading and our own vehicle still some distance away, we contacted the others and requested a pick-up. Our ride arrived after dark, though we still managed a photo of the afternoon's work.

The days passed and, while we had our chances, no further buffalo were taken. With only two full days hunting left, we decided to risk it and travel to another part of the property about two hours from camp. The distance meant if we wanted meat we'd have to take what came our way so, reaching the new location, we split into two groups and pushed towards likely water points. It didn't take long for the new area to produce with Ian, Jon and Rob spotting a small mob. From behind cover and with the wind in their favour, they chose a young cow buffalo as a perfect eater. Shots rang out and, after contacting our group on the Zoleo, they told us they were working on retrieving meat.

Our group wasn't so lucky and travelling in a wide arc we tracked back to the rendezvous point several hours later. Driving back to camp we spotted a massive bull, sadly on the other side of the Northern line, yet the boar wasn't so well placed and just on dark I took him with the Chapuis.

The feeling was there were buffalo to be had, so on our last day we returned to the new location. Setting off in two groups Adam, Jono and I found a fantastic water source we were sure would be a drawcard and, while we sat in wait, another hunt was playing out. Cutting along a well-used cattle track Ian, Rob and Frank followed it to water where they checked out the surroundings and, with no sign of activity, kept moving.

Along the way they picked up buffalo tracks among the dusty cattle markings and soon caught sight of more water, this time with a beast wallowing on the edge. As Frank tells it, Ian and Rob didn't initially see it, then through binoculars couldn't believe how 'bleeping' big he was. The guys took a back-up position and let Frank have his chance. While the animal continued to doze on the water's edge, Frank used the available cover to inch closer then, finding a suitable ant mound about 100m out, took a rest.

He admits it was about this point nerves got the better of him. After swapping positions, questioning the shot, questioning the calibre and



IAN, FRANK AND THE BULL.

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410 Sportsman V	V Nose	4.10	1.55	0.45	67	15	3	2
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contemplating all sorts of potential disasters he settled down, rested his rifle on the ant mound, took a steady aim and fired. It was a clean, precise head shot, deflating the buff where it lay.

Meanwhile we made right with the wind and waited for the big brutes to arrive. We were about two kilometres away and didn't hear the shot but saw the message on the Zoleo: 'Big buff down'. It was followed by: 'Will need all hands here if you can' and a location marker from our shared maps and, with that, Adam, Jono and I left our watery ambush position and double-timed it to the guys.

We first saw the blaze orange headgear followed by the trophy on the water's edge. It was one hell of a bull and it belonged to Frank. Planning, persistence and goal-setting really does pay off and, while there was still plenty of work to be done, we took a moment to celebrate his success. After that the first order of business was to move the beast off the water and with a few more hands we did manage to bring him back a little. Then Ian and Rob set off to try and bring the vehicles closer while we started butchering.

The boys returned carrying drinks for everyone and, after a quick break, we loaded up the meat while Frank hung those massive horns and skull off his pack. Back at the vehicles we split up again with Frank and co. heading to camp while the

rest of us gave it one last try. Things didn't work out as well for us as they did for Frank but, as they say, that's hunting.

Our last night in camp was spent alternatively relaxing and packing up gear. By 10am next day we were at the boundary gate saying our goodbyes to the property owner. The big drive home lay ahead of us, though we took it easy and like the trip up, all arrived safe and sound with plenty cleaning to do and some planning for next time. ●

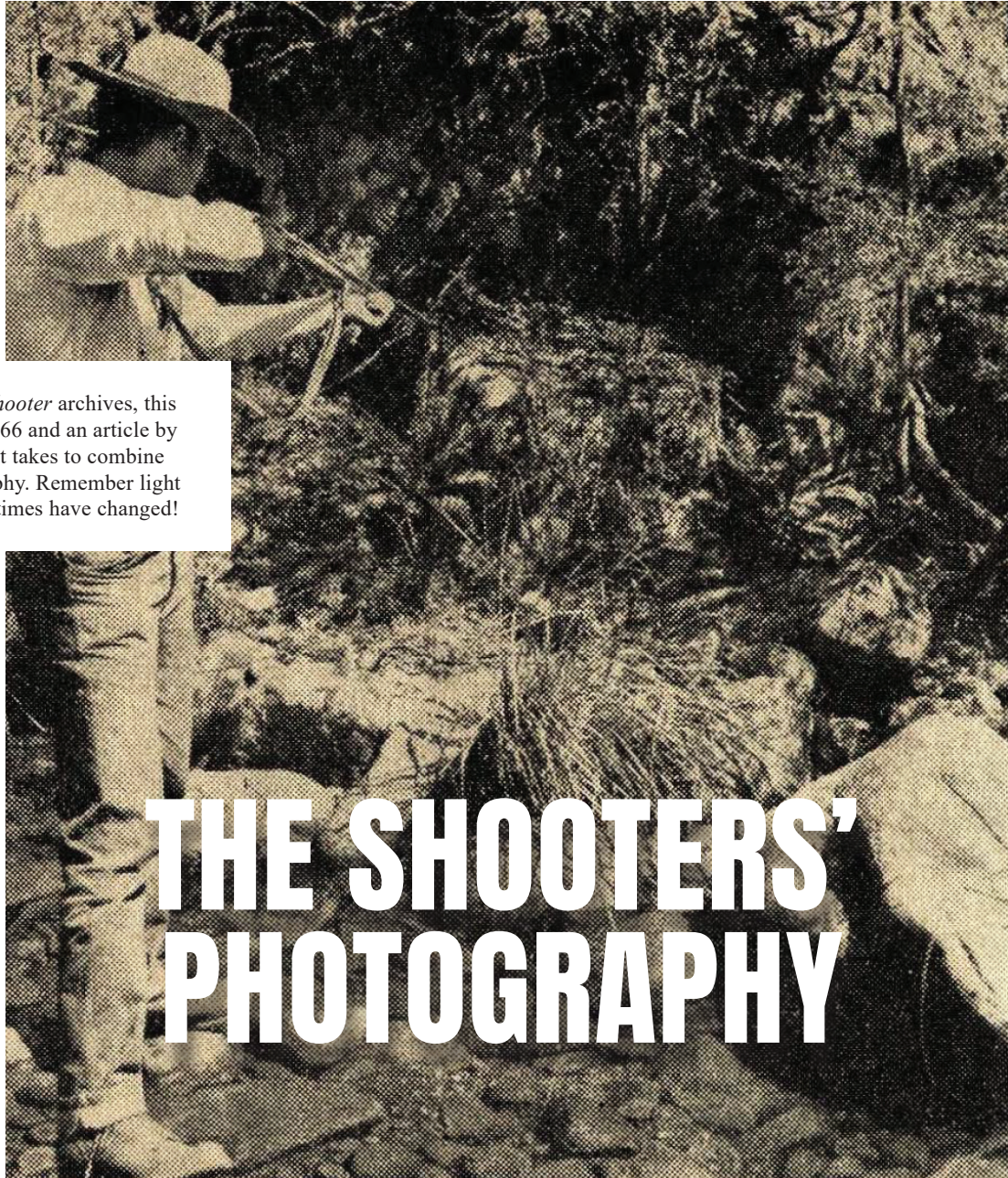


ADAM WITH A GOOD BARRAMUNDI.

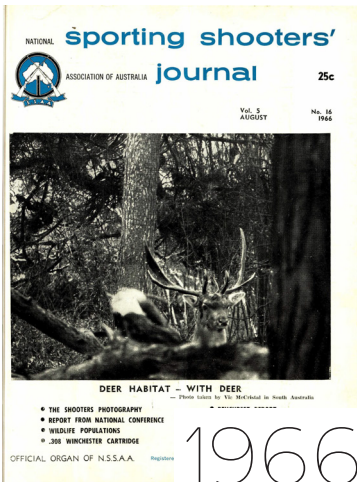
FROM THE

SHOOTER ARCHIVES

As we continue to delve into the *Shooter* archives, this month we travel back to August 1966 and an article by Vic McCristal, who outlines what it takes to combine shooting with successful photography. Remember light readings and film speed? My how times have changed!



# THE SHOOTERS' PHOTOGRAPHY



1966

FOREWORD:  
ALLAN BLANE

WORDS:  
VIC MCCRISTAL

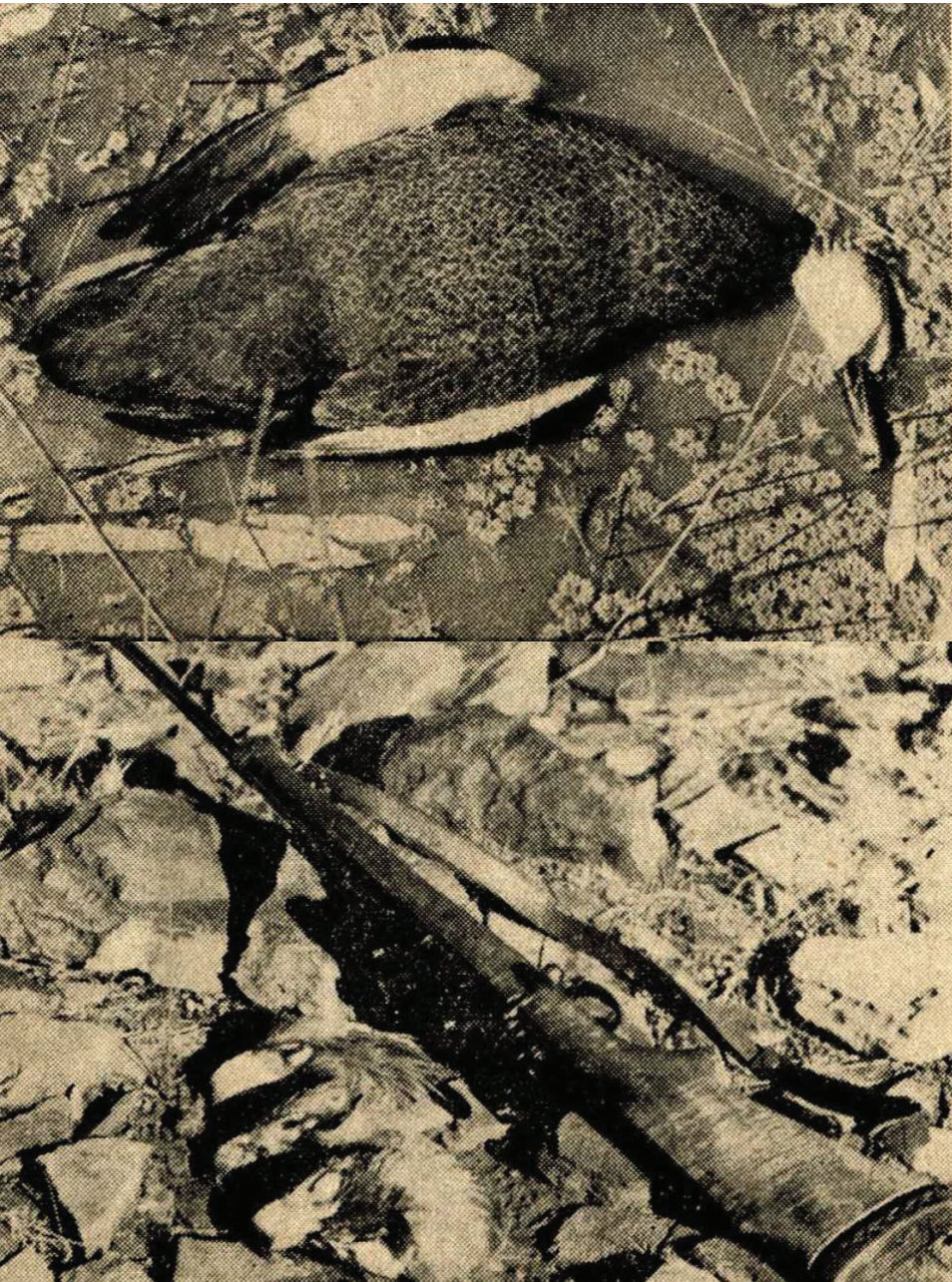
It's safe to say the average shooter is a very poor photographer. Fishermen may be even worse, yet the point is if we want to keep a record of some kind, it might as well be a decent one. It's an axiom that you can't do two things at once and I know this from hard experience, having tried many times to both hunt and take decent pictures for a story of the trip. The results have often made editors tear their hair out and one experience of recent times will illustrate the point.

A publisher was holding forth to me in his Sydney office. "Some of your pictures of that trip were excellent and some were bloody terrible. See this one of a pig charging and the dogs being

TRAPS CAN SOMETIMES BE AVOIDED BUT NOT THIS ONE. DON'T TRY TO TAKE LIGHT AND SHADE IN THE ONE PICTURE. THIS DOGGER IS AIMING AT A TRAPPED DINGO, ALMOST INVISIBLE IN SHADED AREA OF THE PICTURE.

tossed around. It's under-exposed AND out of focus." I explained the problems of taking pictures of a charging boar, only to be brought up short. "That's your problem, not ours," he snapped.

At the time I thought that was pretty tough. I know now he was right and the only way to take good pictures is to work on it full-time. If we can imagine a mythical balance of 50-50 hunting and



THREE EAGLE HEADS BESIDE A RIFLE MAKE A GRUESOME PICTURE, NOT NEARLY AS INTERESTING AS A LIVE PICTURE OF ONE OF THE BIRDS.

photography, the normal shooter should be at least 60 per cent a shooter and 40 per cent a photographer. Most of us are at least 90 per centers.

In my case the balance has had to shift the other way. If anyone's interested in the problems of my way of earning a living, it's far easier to get a story by going out with competent hunters, taking only a camera and not hunting yourself, than by trying to hunt and capture the story as well. Consequently, I'm always in the market for good stories about other people. It figures that if readers don't become bored with reading of one man's experiences, they're too easily pleased.

Down the years I've learned there are very few natural geniuses about. The good men - the 'guns' of the hunting or fishing worlds - aren't that way through any accident, they work at it and

use their experience fully. So it's only normal for many of these to rack up some terrific experiences which, however, they either don't bother to record with a camera or record very poorly.

What's wrong with the average shooter's pictures? Mostly they're static (dead) and this may be normal on a hunting trip, in which the first aim is to take your quarry. Photography must come second and unless you're really equipped, pictures of live wild animals are kind of scarce. It follows when a man is trying to take pictures from among a melee of live buffalo-catching, or after a long run behind dogs on a pig in the lignum, there's not much time to take light readings and compose pictures.

Accordingly the advice is simple: Standardise your gear for a start, using a medium speed film. I use two films in different cameras, one of 125 ASA and one of 64. If it's colour film don't waste it on faint chances and, in all cases, take your readings before the action begins. Set the camera on a moderately fast speed for all hand-held shots (say 1/250th second) and leave it there so you'll only have to adjust the aperture. Leave the camera set on a moderate distance if you don't know for sure where a picture's likely to come up, because you're after speed with the camera as much as you are with a rifle.

The thing to understand is if there's plenty of game about, say on rabbits, you can do your own shooting where the light is poor then take action pictures, candid ones of your mates in good light, either earlier or later. For normal daylight hunting we'll assume the camera is a secondary consideration, so the animal is already dead when picture time comes around. When this happens pictures can still be improved, yet not by having the shooter pose stiffly beside the victim. With a trophy or food animal dead there's no hurry any more, so time can be taken to check and pose pictures, say by having the animal in the foreground with the hunter running up in the background.

Skinning pictures should be taken at the start of skinning only, as there are few things less attractive to others than the liberal gore of a skinned animal. Later pictures may be of the skin being folded or close-ups of interesting details like hooves, claws or the peculiarities of a set of antlers.

It's only when an animal is really outstanding a 'dead' picture becomes worthwhile. Under these circumstances, even cheap cameras will take far clearer pictures than those we usually see, the point being to give the camera every chance to do a job. In shooting, for instance, we all do better with a rest and the more solid it is the better. Cheap box cameras are often working at a relatively slow speed which is inadequate for hand-held pictures, the reason we see only one clear picture from them out of every two dozen.

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'LIVE' PICTURES SUCH AS THIS OF THE WALLABY FEEDING ARE MUCH MORE INTERESTING THAN OTHERS BUT TAKE A LOT MORE TROUBLE.

Unless we're going artistic with special effects, detail is important so find a support for the camera whenever there's time. Every once in a while you'll see pictures taken by a professional with a cheap camera, who gets far better results than the usual amateur by just such simple devices.

The normal camera these days is a 35mm and, despite the small format, these can give far better results than they usually do. Yet not if you use a slow speed for hand-held shots, stand too far back from the subjects or allow unwanted subject matter to intervene in the picture. Sometimes you can't win, as with a fallow buck I photographed in South Australia. The head was all that could be seen in one picture, though others were more successful.

The big trouble with genuine pictures of wild animals is they can't be controlled by the photographer. You take what you can get, sometimes no more than a rear view, though at times things can be helped along by careful stalking or having the animals driven towards the camera. The obvious

answer is a telephoto lens and I've used these increasingly in later years. With a variety of lenses from 28mm to 400mm, you can really work on the problems.

But for the average shooter who sometimes uses a camera, the fact remains that pictures can be improved out of sight and not by spending money on equipment, merely by improving technique and giving the matter a little thought. This applies either to colour slides or black and white. It sometimes surprises people to learn I don't keep colour slides, the reason being you can't do two things at once as mentioned before.

But for those who do, the viewings of slides should be kept back to a ruthless minimum. The idea is always to leave your audience feeling they'd like to see more. With pictures which are worth viewing, I'd suggest 100 as a maximum for a full evening. If you have more, be brutal in the selection process. In photography, as in other fields, there's always room for improvement with all of us! ●



DEAR  
SHOOTER



#### AIR RIFLE ADVICE SOUGHT

I enjoyed your air rifle special edition last year and am writing to ask if any readers can offer assistance and advice on performing a complete O-ring replacement on my Weihrauch HW-100 T. The unit was bought new in 2014 and I've had a trouble-free time until recently.

The air rifle has now developed a slow leak and I'm unsure of where and how to diagnose and replace the O-ring or all O-rings. I contacted the dealer and importer the unit was bought from but they can't offer me advice or a solution. I understand O-rings will deteriorate over time so no issue there, just looking for any advice or a contact who may be able to assist with the issue and replace the O-rings as required.

William Bell, Vic

• *If you can advise or assist, email [edit@ssaa.org.au](mailto:edit@ssaa.org.au)*

#### WELL DONE THAT MAN

I'm writing to express my sincere thanks to the SSAA organisation in general and CEO Tom Kenyon in particular, for your support of the shooting fraternity during the past few months following the Bondi tragedy. Once again we've been thrown under the bus for political expediency, a move I'm sure will not go unheeded in forthcoming elections.

Special mention must go to Mr Kenyon whose media messages and communications have been clear and concise, well explained and presented. He clearly knows politics and firearms and understands the ramifications of rushed decision-making by those who lack this very knowledge.

I like the way he accepts some ideas which have merit and robustly rejects those not based on evidence or commonsense. In the words of my father, which I endorse wholeheartedly: "Well done that man!" Darrell Evans, Tas.

• I just want to say a huge 'thank you' to Tom Kenyon for all he's been doing over the past month or two. His updates and balanced, steady views and guidance on what we needed SSAA members to do have been a guiding light during a stressful time. Thanks again mate, the whole firearms community really appreciates your leadership on this one.

Alex Hall, via email

#### KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK

At a time when many lawful firearms owners have felt a great deal of unrest, I've observed a significant increase in presence from SSAA in advocating on our behalf and keeping us informed. I understand the SSAA can often be the subject of criticism from a vocal minority within the community, and I think your performance throughout this turbulent time should silence some of those critics.

I almost never provide feedback of any kind but, as a SSAA member in the ACT from the very beginning of acquiring my licence, I feel we've gained access to a great deal of resources for our membership fees and am further thankful for your work recently.

I'd also like to extend an additional thanks to CEO Tom Kenyon who's been notably present in the media in updating us with videos and announcements. This appeals to a younger generation of shooters. I'm sure the additional stress and workload comes at great personal expense as individuals and to your families, so many thanks from an ongoing supporter.

Semo Seif, ACT

#### A VERSATILE OPTION

In the December 2025 issue of *Australian Shooter* was a great article by Tom Kenyon (The awesome four-some). In the section on the .223, he says he's used a .223 for deer, goats and pigs and there's no minimum calibre for deer hunting in SA. I'm also a South Aussie and he's right in saying you can shoot deer with a .223 (I've taken fallow with a .222 on smaller private blocks) and there's no minimum calibre required in SA.

However, if you're a member of the Australian Deer Association (ADA) as I am, you must use a minimum calibre of .243 and projectile weight of at least 80-grains for goats and smaller deer species (fallow, chital and hog). We also need a minimum calibre of .270 with minimum 130-grain profile to hunt on ADA blocks for red, rusa and sambar.

Although I'm not a member of SSAA's Conservation and Wildlife Management, I'm fairly sure they have the same or similar calibre requirements as the ADA for their culling needs. I just felt this is worth considering if any reader's planning on buying a .223 rifle.

Geoff Atkins, SA

• You're right of course Geoff, it's best not to target deer with a .223 and I never go out looking for them with one. However a couple of times while hunting other species, I've been confronted by deer at close range with only a .223 on hand. I've been confident of a head shot and have taken it, though I'd let it pass if I didn't feel I could do that.

I was only trying to highlight the versatility of the .223 which, in my view, is an incredibly adaptable round. I wasn't recommending it as a 'go-to' deer hunting calibre. If I'm specifically after deer, I take my .303 or .338 Win Mag and now the left-handed .308 I finally bought myself.

Tom Kenyon

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SEND LETTERS TO:  
[edit@ssaa.org.au](mailto: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](mailto:jdgroves@iinet.net.au).

**Benchrest Four-Gun National Championships**

April 1-6, 2026  
Dairyville, Coffs Harbour, NSW  
Program: April 1-2: Practice days; 3: Unlimited; 4: Sporter; 5: Light Barrel; 6: Heavy Barrel. Facilities: Camping, toilets, showers, kitchen, barbecue. Full details on National website. Contact: Ian Thompson 0499 212 260.

**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@sdrcc.com.au](mailto:info@sdrcc.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 Rimfire Hunting Rifle followed by 40 shots Centerfire Hunting Rifle. April 4: Dawn to 8.30 practice and weigh-in, 9am 80 shots centerfire. April 5: Dawn to 8.30 practice and weigh-in, 9am 80 shots rimfire. April 6: Dawn to 8.30 practice and weigh-in, 9am 80 shots Air Rifle. Prizes: Medals all grades including ju-

niors, 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:bfjdoherty@bigpond.com) or 0409 831 258 (A/H); Gary Beling [beling.home@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:paulee06@bigpond.net.au) or 0403 436 905.

**Gallery Rifle State Championships**

June 12-15, 2026  
Para Range, SA  
Program: Friday, June 12: Practice from noon-4pm. See National website for full event details. Facilities: Camping, canteen, barbecue on Saturday night. Contact: Dave McCarthy [atm3855@yahoo.com.au](mailto:atm3855@yahoo.com.au)

**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](mailto: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.

**WA**

**Steel Challenge State Championships**

March 14, 2026  
Kukerin Practical Pistol Club, WA  
Classes: Open Auto, Standard Revolver, Production, Standard Rimfire, Standard Auto, Open Revolver, Open Rimfire. Range open March 13 for practice. Facilities: Full canteen on Saturday, barbecue packs on sale for Saturday night, breakfast packs for Sunday (cook your own), camping on range. Full details on National website. Contact: S. Marris 0427 183 299 [ssmarris@westnet.com.au](mailto:ssmarris@westnet.com.au) or P. Fitzgerald 0407 773 286.

**Trap Shotgun State Championships**

March 29, 2026  
Jarrahdale Sporting Shooters, WA  
Program: 100 targets, start time 9am, adults \$65, juniors free. Prizes: Perpet-

ual trophy and sash for high gun, 2x \$100 vouchers. Medals in accordance with National rule book. Facilities: Free tea and coffee, cold drinks and snacks on sale. Contact: Nigel Youens 0466 341 379 or John Graham 0409 084 973.

**Registered Fly Shoot State Championships**

April 11-12, 2026  
Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA  
Program: Saturday, April 11: 500m LG and HG centrefire. April 12: 200yd rimfire. Range open 3pm Friday for practice and CF flag set-up. Facilities: Barbecue lunch and cold drinks included in fee. See National website for comprehensive event details. Email contact: Stuart Pethybridge [s\\_pethybridge@hotmail.com](mailto:s_pethybridge@hotmail.com)

**Precision Rifle State Championships**

April 17-19, 2026  
Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA  
Program: Friday 3-6pm range set-up; Saturday 8.45am Rimfire Precision Rifle match; Sunday 8.45am Stage Centrefire match. Full program on National website. Prizes: Medals for first three in rimfire, centrefire and overall. Facilities: Meal supplied Saturday and Sunday (barbecue lunch), camping with toilets, barbecue facilities, limited power. Contact: Sam Hacking 0424 189 215 or [precisionrifle@ssaawa.org.au](mailto:precisionrifle@ssaawa.org.au)

**Tower Shotgun State Championships**

April 19, 2026  
Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA  
Program: 15 target DB, 15 target SB, 15 target points, score and pairs. Total: 75 targets. Nominations: Adults \$55, juniors \$30, available on the day from 7.30am, competition starts 8am. Prizes: Sash for overall high gun, medals in accordance with National rule book, 2x \$100 vouchers. Facilities: Hot food and cold drinks on sale, free tea, coffee and biscuits. Contact: Neil Cobb 0404 040 357 or [neilcobb@bigpond.com](mailto:neilcobb@bigpond.com).

**Shotgun Skeet State Championships**

May 24, 2026  
Jarrahdale Sporting Shooters, WA  
Program: 100 targets, nominations 9-10am, adults \$65, juniors free. Prizes: Sash for high gun, 2x \$100 vouchers, medals in accordance with National rule book. Facilities: Free tea and coffee, cold drinks and snacks on sale. Contact: Nigel Youens 0466 341 379 or John Graham 0409 084 973.

**PROMOTE YOUR EVENT**

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

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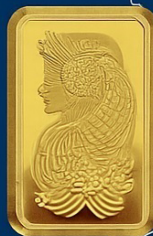


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Anthony Rumball, ACT

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Veronica Trimmer, NSW

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# ENGLISH HUNTERS PAYING THROUGH THE NOSE

WORDS:  
MARK VAN DEN  
BOOGAART



It's early January and the family and I are in England. York to be precise. Arriving a few hours earlier, we drove down ever-narrowing streets to reach our Airbnb accommodation. Shoehorning the rental car into a parking space a few metres from the diminutive front door, we carry our gear into a true two-up, two-down terrace conversion, now a little bigger and more modern than its original design. We're all downstairs as oddly, in this house, warm air sinks, so we're staying low.

Two weeks prior and a couple of hundred kilometres away, I caught up with good friend and hunting mate Steve at the Simpsons Brothers gun shop just outside Peterborough. Thanks to Covid and other challenges, it's been a five-year break between hunts for Steve and I. After enquiring about each other's families and respective businesses, we were soon voicing the usual nonsense which fills the gaps time creates between old friends.

Simpson Brothers is a fine gunshop and after meeting the team (as well as some of the customers), the conversation turned to Bondi. As the resident Aussie, people sought my view yet I was as confused as everyone else. Good people went to the beach and didn't return. Not victims of a rip or some force of nature, they were murdered. Worse still it was premeditated, planned, prepared and executed with horrendous intent.

Stunned, we watched an elaborate calculation unfold. Every piece of data, analysis and commentary was fed into a formula which, against

all logic, produced a conclusion that ignored cause and effect, while unfairly damaging the Australian recreational shooter and hunter. But as you read this it's already old news and whatever happened has happened, so let's turn to other matters.

Over the years I've enjoyed several hunts in England and what strikes me every time is the differences in approach. It's as if the 10-hour time disparity is reflected in the practices themselves, with things similar yet at the same time noticeably different. Take suppressors. Carrying a rifle without one is, in many cases, illegal. Consequently, suppressor technology is ever-evolving. On this trip I used a titanium, 3D-printed suppressor, feather-light and astonishingly effective. In Australia, the mere mention of such a device brings on an attack of the vaporous among our bureaucrat class.

Then there's the use of thermals, the optical kind. In England, daylight hunting (admittedly low and grey daylight) is conducted with thermal in hand, scanning for heat signatures and watching the landscape come alive. When game is located shots are taken, or in my case missed, thanks to an awkward dance involving shooting sticks, thermal and traditional optics and cold fingers. And for those interested, at distance, a fresh cow pat looks a lot like a hedgehog.

But the real 'a-ha' moment relates to access. Back home I enjoy private admission through the tried and tested method of beer for a gate key, which I combine with regular public land hunts in New South Wales. In



STEVE WITH TYPICAL ENGLISH DEER-HUNTING GEAR.

England everything revolves around access and, if you want it, you pay. Landowners with long-winded titles and estates older than Australia offer something called hunting rights, granted through an agreement akin to a lease. To meet the cost and earn the right to hunt, a syndicate is formed of likeminded individuals who pool their resources and pay the ongoing annual fee.

I was invited to hunt a 1500-acre working forestry block covered by a such a lease. The local gentry owned the land and the timber, syndicate members the hunting rights. Controlled through smartphone technology and sign-in book at the gate, members were able to hunt as often as they pleased. More importantly, they also had rights to the meat. In many parts of England hunting is access only, the deer isn't yours. If you want the meat you pay again.

Aside from paying twice to take home venison, the syndicate model presents some interesting benefits for those seeking reliable access. Could such a model work in Australia? Certainly. I'm sure some of you already have a comparable arrangement with a local landowner, whether formally or informally.

So how might it become more widespread? Public land is a wonderful opportunity to hunt, though it's not a reality for everyone. While the fight for public land should never be forfeited, perhaps we can learn something from the English model of syndication. It's worth considering if we want more people to enjoy our sport and way of life.

All of which brings me back to my own hunting adventures and soon, with the family, I'll be heading south again to try my hand at pigeons and other feathered quarry. Don't worry, I'll let you know how I get on.

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