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AUSTRALIAN

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06



Firearms licensing delays no longer acceptable

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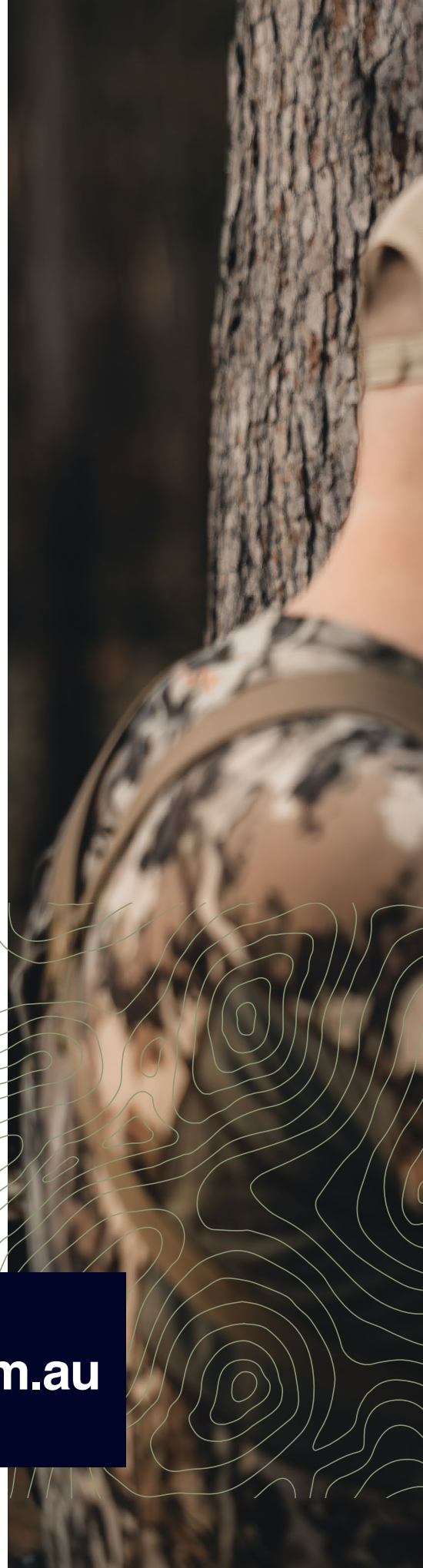


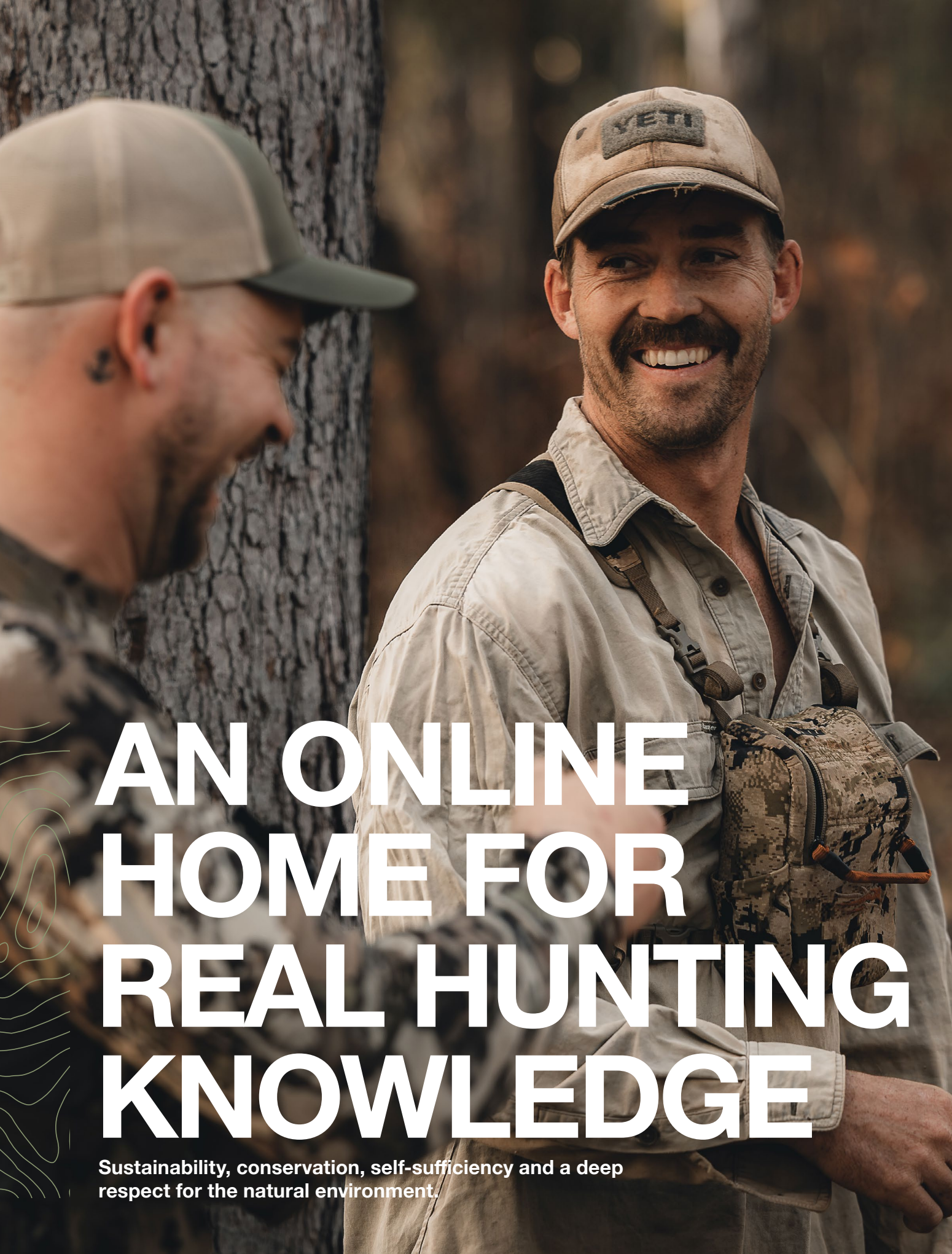
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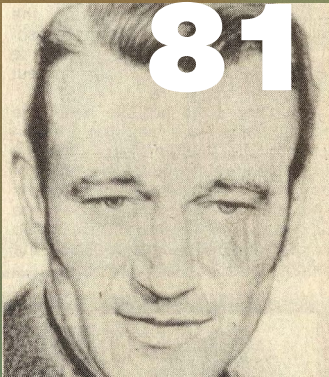
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AUSTRALIAN Shooter

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EDITORIAL

Allan Blane
edit@ssaa.org.au

ADVERTISING

Travis Allen
0448 413 618
advertising@ssaa.org.au

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

CHIEF OF STAFF
MANAGING EDITOR
ASSOCIATE EDITOR
PRODUCTION COORDINATOR & SENIOR DESIGNER
SENIOR GRAPHIC DESIGNER
SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER
ADVERTISING & PROMOTIONS
WEBMASTER
MEDIA AND POLITICS OFFICER
SENIOR CORRESPONDENT
SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

Tom Kenyon
Julian Nuske
Allan Blane
Thomas Cook

Elizabeth Tyson
Alex Heptinstall
Tammy Michalski
Travis Allen
Mark Fieldhouse
Charlotte Fox
John Dunn
Rod Pascoe



ABN 95 050 209 688

CONTRIBUTORS

THIS ISSUE
Scott Heiman, Laetisha Scanlan, Mark van den Boogaart, Charlotte Fox, Chris Redlich, Derek Nugent, Dick Eussen, Julian Nuske, Brendan Atkinson, Daniel O'Dea, Rod Pascoe, Nigel Matthews, John Dunn, Leon Wright, Ben Unten

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ROYAL COMMISSION MUST GET IT RIGHT

WORDS: TOM KENYON
SSAA CEO



Our sport is under attack in a way it hasn't been since 1996. The package of law changes introduced around the country in the immediate aftermath of the Port Arthur tragedy were significant. The headlines were all on the banning and buyback of semi-automatic rifles, yet the things which brought the greatest improvements in gun safety went largely unreported and, in the ensuing 30 years, uncredited.

The three things which make the greatest contribution to firearms safety (according to academics) are background checks, safety training and secure storage of firearms. The

1996 laws mandated all three in each state and territory across Australia. Tellingly, the Bondi terror attack involved a failure of one of those three pillars of firearms safety, namely background checks.

As we all know by now, there was a failure of communication between the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) and NSW Firearms Registry. Information that Sajid Akram's son Naveed was associating with radical Islamists appears to have been unavailable to NSW Police. Had it been available, they had the powers to prevent Akram Snr. being granted a firearms licence.

Even if that had occurred, it's unlikely this would've been enough to prevent the attack. The terrorists had bombs they attempted to use which, thankfully, failed to explode. In the event they were unable to access legal firearms, they'd most likely have sought other means such as illegal firearms, knives, cars or trucks. The terror attack in Western countries with the highest number of deaths during the past 10 years was at Nice in France, where a man drove a truck into a crowd and killed 80 people. Not a firearm in sight until police showed up.

If we've reached the point where we're debating the type of weapon a terrorist is using, we've missed the point and it becomes far more difficult to prevent another attack. Why were people who were prepared to kill Australians allowed into the country in the first place?

How is it they were radicalised and no-one noticed? Why was relevant information ASIO had, not shared between the federal and state governments?

These questions are a lot easier to ask than they are to answer and the people responsible for protecting us have a difficult job with finite resources. That doesn't mean they shouldn't be asked and there should certainly be an attempt to answer them. That's the role of the Royal Commission so let's hope they do their job properly.

So far it's not looking promising. The recently-released interim report said in paragraph 8.7: "No agency, either Commonwealth or state, advised that urgent legislative or regulatory reforms are required in order to prevent, detect or respond to an attack of a similar nature to the Bondi attack. No agency has suggested the current legislative framework prevented intelligence or law enforcement agencies from taking action that may have prevented the Bondi attack." This reinforces what we've been saying right from the start: Firearms laws don't have to change because they weren't the problem.

Despite this, with no evidence or much discussion, recommendations 13 and 14 advocate respectively that the National Firearms Register proceed (as it already is) and state and territory governments implement a buyback. Let's hope the full report is a lot more rational and thoughtful.

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02 8805 3900
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PO Box 282, Plumpton, NSW 2761

NATIONAL CONTACT INFORMATION
Please mail all correspondence for the SSAA
National Executive to ssaa@ssaa.org.au
SSAA, PO Box 282, Plumpton, NSW 2761

STATE CONTACT INFORMATION
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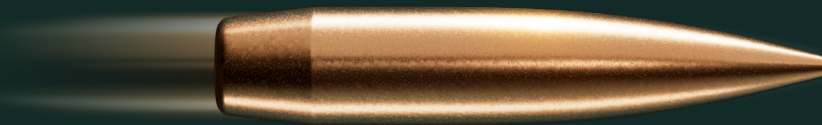


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OPEN
SEASON

HUNT PROTESTORS UP THE ANTE

WORDS:
MATTHEW GODSON



Reports from the opening of the 2026 duck season have again highlighted an issue many hunters are becoming increasingly familiar with: A rise in protestor vandalism and deliberate interference in our lawful hunting activities. With incidents reported across multiple states, this is no longer an occasional inconvenience. It's a pattern of activist lawlessness hunters need to be aware of, prepared for and proactive in responding to.

For those who headed out during opening weekend, several incidents reported across social media sounded all too familiar. Boats and vehicles left at access points were targeted overnight, with damage ranging from graffiti through to tampering and destruction of hunting gear. In some cases essential equipment, such as boats, was rendered unusable before hunting had even begun. This is not just frustrating for those impacted, it also directly affected their ability to hunt safely and effectively.

Hunting infrastructure was also targeted. In Tasmania, hunters reported widespread destruction of shooting hides, with dozens burned over recent years. Anyone who's put time into building or maintaining a hide knows the effort involved, particularly when working with landholders and within regulations. Losing that investment is more than an inconvenience, it disrupts hunt activities and enjoyment.

Access to hunting areas was another pressure point. There

were reports of public roads being deliberately blocked, including instances where trees were dropped across access tracks. Our SSAA Victoria branch has labelled this behaviour for what it is, environmental vandalism. Beyond the obvious frustration, blocked access can create genuine risks, particularly if emergency vehicles need to get through.

More concerning were incidents of direct interference while hunting was under way. Activists entering hunting areas, blowing whistles, waving flags and attempting to 'rescue' birds are all tactics being used to disrupt hunts. Aside from being unlawful, this behaviour creates genuine safety concerns and I'm sure in the event of an emergency, activists would be quick to blame hunters for any injury they may sustain.

Hunters operate under strict safety practices such as identifying targets clearly, maintaining safe shooting zones and ensuring humane dispatch of downed birds. When someone deliberately enters that environment, it introduces unpredictability. It also risks prolonging suffering if birds are interfered with after being shot, before they can be retrieved and dispatched properly.

Official bodies such as the Game Management Authority have reinforced via the media there are clear legal boundaries. In Victoria, for example, protesters mustn't come within 10m of a hunter, though many feel this is inadequate. Damage to property, trespass and obstruction all carry significant penalties and should be enforced vigorously.

For hunters the key takeaway is to stay within the law, while protecting your safety and interests and report everything you see that's illegal. Vandalism, interference or suspicious activity should be reported to police or relevant authorities immediately. Document incidents



SAFE AND LEGAL DUCK HUNTING IS A LEGITIMATE PASTIME.

by taking photos, recording time-stamps and locations. Consider undertaking surveillance by using wildlife cameras at access points, hides, parked boats or camps, to act as both deterrent and evidence gathering. Where possible, avoid leaving gear unattended overnight in high-risk areas and always stay calm and disengage from those causing trouble, to prevent or escalate confrontations in the field.

Duck hunting in Australia is a regulated, lawful activity built on sustainability frameworks, season limits and compliance. Most hunters understand their responsibilities and take them seriously. What we're seeing from a small but active group of individuals, is an attempt to disrupt our lawful activities through intimidation and damage.

It's important not to lose sight of the bigger picture. Hunters have a strong story to tell around conservation, wetland stewardship and responsible harvesting. That story is undermined if situations escalate or hunters are drawn into conflict. The reality is this: You have a right to be there, provided you're hunting legally and safely. Others have a right to protest, though this doesn't include damaging property, trespassing or interference.

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FOOD, FUEL AND FORETHOUGHT

WORDS:
SCOTT HEIMAN



For natural disasters and declared states of emergency, we need to have enough food and other consumables at home to last for five to seven days. After all, power outages can drag on for days and roads can be unpassable in times of fire and flood. Yet how many of us are adequately prepared?

Given the predominantly urban lifestyle led by the majority of Australians, most of us probably expect to have fresh meat, fruit and vegetables available on demand - all the time. We go shopping on the way home from work as there's 'nothing in the fridge.' Or we simply throw money at the problem and buy takeaway. Relatively few people maintain sufficient food in the freezer and non-perishable goods in the pantry to keep them and their family properly fed, regardless of the situation.

As the saying goes: 'Failing to plan is planning to fail' and, for me, prepping is a way of life. In our home we don't need the weatherman to tell us the sky's falling before we act. We don't wait for the declaration of a pandemic to ensure there's sufficient toilet paper in the house. And we don't leave ourselves vulnerable to someone starting a war on the other side of the planet which affects Australia's supply chain.

While our house is located in the middle of suburbia, the garden offers a fully-functional food source, scattered with fruit trees, herbs, native Australian bush-tucker and a designated veggie patch. And we keep chickens to provide fresh eggs. We also have a 300-litre freezer (supported by a generator if needed), where I store my wild harvest along with meats I've bought at

'quick sale' mark-down prices in the supermarket.

Indeed whenever I go to the shops, I keep my eyes peeled for goods on sale I can store away for later. After all, items like kitchen roll and toilet paper last forever. Meanwhile, some foods have a 'best by' date of one to two years in the future but, to be honest, they'll be edible long after this.

Then there are canned fruits, vegetables and beans which can have a shelf life of up to six years, while a bag of rice or dried pasta (stored properly) can last up to 25 years. When I see these things 'on special' I buy more (two or three) than we need for our family's immediate use. We also keep the water tank in the camper full, have extra kerosene for lanterns and have a few spare (full) fuel jerries at all times.

As we've seen recently, fuel prices rise every time there's a national disaster and when international events threaten oil supplies. So it makes sense to set aside a little extra fuel to protect against unexpected fluctuations in price and availability. But a word of caution. It makes no sense to establish a miniature fuel depot in your garden shed. For one, doing so could void your house insurance, while fuel stored in jerry cans will go off quicker than food.

Fuel degrades naturally when exposed to oxygen, heat and moisture, leading to oxidation, gum formation and varnish deposits. So using old fuel can cause engines to run poorly, clog fuel lines, damage injectors and create rust. While the shelf-life will vary with storage conditions, the following figures provide a guide on what to expect:

- Ethanol blends such as E10 degrade quickest, often lasting



CHOOSE WISELY WHICH FUEL YOU STORE AND HOW YOU STORE IT.

less than three months without additives.

- Unleaded typically lasts three to six months without stabilisers, though can last 12-24 months with stabilisers.
- Diesel generally lasts 6-12 months but with proper storage and stabilisers can extend to 18-24 months.
- Kerosene or heating oil can last one to two years when stored properly.

Fuel stabilisers can be used to increase longevity, while it also helps if you store jerry-cans in a cool, dark, dry and ventilated place. Whoever we are and wherever we live, we need to plan for the unexpected. Sure, if you live in an apartment your 'prepping' options may be more limited, though you can still store bottled water and non-perishable food in nooks and crannies. And don't under-estimate the potential of a balcony or courtyard garden. For those of us with more space, it's time to think creatively about how we can future-proof ourselves against the effects of natural and man-made disruptions to our daily lives. So ask yourself: Is there more I could be doing? Food (and fuel) for thought.



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LEARN THE BASICS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS

WORDS: LAETISHA SCANLAN



Q I'm reasonably new to Skeet shooting and find that while everyone at the gun club is lovely and helpful, I'm receiving an overload of advice from members as to how to improve. Yet I feel this just makes things more complicated and I start shooting worse. So I'm wondering how you'd recommend starting out. I don't want to develop bad habits but also don't know whose advice to listen to. Would you recommend a coach to teach me the basics or are there particular drills or exercises I can do myself? Just trying to work out what direction I should be heading in.

Lauren D, via email

A Hi Lauren and welcome. You've already picked up on one of the biggest challenges for shooters starting out - everyone at the club genuinely wants to help! Yet the sheer volume of advice can quickly become contradictory, confusing and honestly, a bit overwhelming. Too many voices at once can make you second-guess yourself and actually make you shoot worse, which sounds exactly what you're experiencing.

My first tip would be to consider coaching from the outset. A good coach will set you up with solid fundamentals, how to stand, how you mount the gun, where to look and how you should move. These are the building blocks of good shooting and establishing them early on is a huge advantage. It's far easier to learn properly first time than trying to fix bad habits later on.

If a coach isn't an option right away, next best thing is to be selective about whose advice you take. As the old saying goes, too many cooks spoil the broth and that's



CHAMPION SHOOTER LAURYN MARK HAS SOME SOUND ADVICE ON YOUTUBE

exactly what can happen on the range. Try sticking with one person whose shooting you respect, ideally someone in AA grade, as they've developed enough consistency and understanding in their own shooting to guide others effectively. Following one voice will provide clarity and allow you to build confidence in a single method, rather than constantly switching approaches.

One of the best things about Skeet as a discipline is its repeatability and predictability. You always know where the targets are coming from and where they're going, which means success comes down to consistency in your technique. That's why building strong fundamentals is vitally important.

For some extra guidance, I highly recommend jumping on to the GoShooting YouTube channel and checking out videos by Lauryn Mark. She explains Skeet funda-

mentals in a really clear, practical way, covering things like hold points, foot positioning and understanding lead. It's free, reliable advice and you can revisit the videos anytime you need a refresher.

When it comes to practice, keep it simple and purposeful. At home you can work on gun-mount, aiming for a smooth and consistent movement. On the range pick one thing to focus on each session, just one, then give it your full attention. Small improvements in the basics add up quickly. Most importantly be patient with yourself, as progress in Skeet shooting comes with consistency, not from trying every new tip you hear. Good luck and I hope this helps.

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TOP SHOTS

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Q Years ago a mate gave me an empty powder tin labelled '2201 Smokeless Rifle Powder', the only other markings being 'Packed by Super Cartridge Co' with an address in Victoria (see photo). From the '22' number I deduced it was made by ADI before they added the 'AR' prefix, so can you tell me what the powder was and why it's no longer around?

Clive G., Vic

A Your question has raised a number of interesting points worthy of a full article in Australian Shooter, though I'll do my best in the available space with a very brief

history. 2201 was produced by the Mulwala Explosives Factory in southern New South Wales as the propellant to fill the 7.62x51mm NATO cartridge. This had been specifically developed for Australia's new service rifle, the L1A1 Self Loading Rifle (SLR), in the late 1950s.

The factory at that time was entirely owned and operated by the Australian Government and overseen by the Department of Defence. After intense lobbying, a small quantity of 2201 powder was released to the SSAA for testing in sporting firearms. This was because high-quality, locally-made powder was urgently needed to replace some of the current sporting powders used by reloaders, all of which were imported from the US and Europe and were expensive and in short supply.

Following successful testing, 2201 was released as a commercial powder to Australian shooters. Selected distributors and retailers (gun shops) were sold bulk quantities of the powder, which they then decanted into smaller, 1lb tins as in your photo, bearing their own label and sometimes advertising to sell to reloaders.

The SSAA continued to lobby the government, including the Minister for Defence Support, to develop and release more commercial powders with a wider range of burning rates to cover a greater range of ammunition, even though 2201 itself was a fairly versatile product and used in a wide variety of cartridges.

Again the SSAA was heavily involved in testing a range of new powders and their feedback to Mulwex, as was their commercial branding, led to the development of four new powders. These included the first improved powder off the production line (AR2206) and later AR2207, which were both faster-burning than 2201, along with AR2208 and AR2209 which were slower. With these new powders now on the market, Mulwex withdrew 2201 from production and I believe AR2206 eventually replaced 2201 for the military's 7.62mm F4 round. The rest, as they say, is history.

Rod Pascoe



Q I've inherited this old Webley Bulldog revolver and was wondering if you can help me with some identification in your Top Shots section.

Bill Waldron, WA

A Thanks for the question Bill about your old revolver. It is indeed a Webley 'British Bulldog' as you suggest and is the Metropolitan Police model as indicated by the markings on the left front of the frame. Although it's a bit hard to pick out, the Webley 'flying bullet' stamp is there, as well as the 'pair of handcuffed hands' which signify the MP model. Also the ejector rod has the later 'acorn' button on the end instead of the earlier flat version.

Max Slee in his Service Arms of the SA Police notes that in 1885, Webley wrote a letter to South Australia Police, offering to supply the revolver the London Metropolitan Police had adopted in 1883 at a discount, stating Victoria and Queensland had agreed to purchase this gun. SA adopted the S&W as an alternative, though NSW apparently bought 2150 of them and many turn up in US auction houses.

Geoff Smith

Q What's the advantage of using boat-tail based bullets versus flat-base for hunting? A couple of mates reckon boat-tails are far superior.

Mike G, NSW

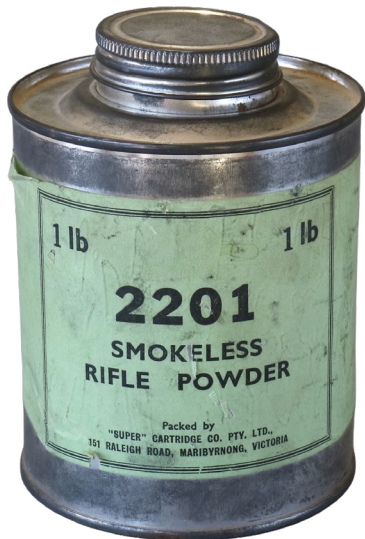
A Your mates are right Mike, when they say boat-tailed bullets are superior to flat-based. It's about aerodynamic efficiency and ballistic co-efficients. This efficiency only shows up at longer ranges than most hunters should be shooting at game. Target shooters, especially at longer ranges, appreciate these designs as they shoot flatter and cheat the wind more effectively at extended ranges.

For hunting, there are some nice bullets specifically designed for this, which incorporate a boat-tail design like Hornady ELDX that's based on their ELDM match bullet. Other makers like Nosler and Sierra have comparable offerings, so it becomes a matter of choosing the right one for the task. These hunting projectiles are super-accurate as are the match bullets they're based on, though never use the latter for hunting as they're not designed for that.

The other thing I like about the boat-tail is it's better for reloading, as it sits much more easily in the cartridge neck prior to seating the projectile. I wish Hornady or Nosler would make boat-tail projectiles in .17 calibre for use in my favourite .17 Remington.

So for practical hunting ranges, flat-base bullets do the job just fine. Once you extend the range, boat-tails start to show an advantage. So do your research and experiment to see what works best for you.

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.



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FROM MILITARY TO MENTAL HEALTH MENTOR

WORDS:
CHARLOTTE FOX

A lot of SSAA members have dedicated themselves to serving in either the military, law enforcement or emergency services. **Dan Nair** is one of them. He's been in the army, served 20 years in law enforcement, is committed to delivering better mental health outcomes for military and emergency services personnel, is doing a PhD and is a passionate hunter. Charlotte Fox sat with Dan to hear about his career and hunting experiences, as well as how he and his organisation are helping those who've given so much to our country and communities.

What do you do and how did you get where you are?

In terms of current role, I'm the Wellbeing and Clinical Lead at Military and Emergency Services Health Australia (MESHHA). I grew up in Fremantle with one brother and my whole family has a history in military or police.

When I started university I was studying law, though felt at that point I was too young and wanted to see the world a bit. So I initially got into working in correctional services and found that space really interesting, especially from a forensic perspective, which is what prompted me to undertake undergraduate psychology qualifications. I continued working in the corrections environment until I joined the army.

Did you transition your psychology skills into that?

I went through Duntroon and graduated as infantry, then went across to the psychology core where I completed further qualifications, mainly in clinical training. It included patient care such as mental health interventions, cognitive behavioural therapy, understanding people and trying to help them with their mental health.

A lot of my role there was related to organisational factors, such as screening for sensitive



areas within the military and running programs to help personnel in terms of mental health. This included resilience and preventative areas pre- or post-deployment once they've come back from active operations.

Then you moved to law enforcement?

Correct. After a number of years in the military, I joined South Australia Police (SAPOL) and spent 20 years there. During that time I was 100 per cent in operational roles, with about half in metropolitan areas and the other half in regional. I'd quite a lot of contact with firearms through my time in those regional areas, especially as officer in charge of a station engaging with farmers, firearms registration and related issues.





I completed my forensic psychology qualifications two or three years ago, started further study in neuroscience and a PhD. In terms of PhD research, I'm looking at neuroimaging factors to study the brain and how trauma affects it in military and first responders. It's an incredibly interesting area and is how I came across MESHA and found out they'd a role available in the wellbeing space.

What does your MESHA role involve?

In plain terms it's essentially the nuts and bolts of delivery, review and research of programs to help first responder and military personnel. I'm performing the role of a psychologist in terms of the psychological welfare of participants in the MESHA suite of programs, as well as looking after the welfare of facilitators who also have experience in those services.

All MESHA programs are delivered by either emergency services and/or military personnel, current or former. With that lived experience come strengths in terms of building trust and collaboration with participants. While it's a massive advantage, one of the challenges of that dynamic is there's also potential transference of trauma in dealing with that kind of heavy material.

How did you become interested in hunting?

My father grew up in Malaysia and was a hunter and, to fund his studies in Australia, he did lots of culling monkeys on banana plantations. I was intrigued by the stories he told us. He tried to hunt groups of monkeys, find the alpha male and disperse them from a plantation. I was also fascinated by the fact that's how he funded travel and study in this country.

I never hunted a great deal when I was young but always liked archery. When I left the military I enjoyed the mindfulness of archery practice and physical aspect of the discipline. I did it to clear my mind and have mental clarity, essentially as a grounding technique. Then a good friend of mine who once owned an archery store in Adelaide suggested I try bow-hunting.

What was your first hunt?

Goat hunting in the Flinders Ranges on a mate's property. It was days before I took my first one - I never realised how difficult it was to actually harvest an animal with bow and arrow. It was also an interesting mixture of feelings including victory, regret, remorse and respect for the animal. Mainly it felt like an epiphany for me and I've been chasing that feeling ever since, by hunting all over the world.

I also began the Capra (World) Slam which is probably the most ambitious thing I ever started. The Capra Slam is a really challenging milestone in mountain hunting, requiring the pursuit of 12 different wild goat species worldwide. There are only seven guys in the world who've achieved it and so far I've harvested five of those species. No Australian has reached the milestone with bow and arrow and it's probably going to be a 10-year project for me.

What's the most elusive in that challenge?

For me it's either the Bezoar Ibex which is in Turkey or the Sind Ibex in Pakistan. They're quite difficult to locate. There are five Slam species in Spain, which is great and a lot easier to travel to than places like the Middle East.

You say you feel grounded. Is that what you enjoy most about hunting?

I enjoy a couple of things. The peacefulness of training with bow and arrow and physical pursuit which keeps me grounded, especially in relation to what I do for work. It gives me inner clarity. I also enjoy the self-reliance. It's a very solitary pursuit and a lot of the time you're on your own.

The nature of pursuing an animal with bow and arrow means just by virtue of that it takes a long time, so you spend countless hours in the field observing animals, their ecology and behaviour. If anything, I've gained an even greater respect for them. Those seriously into hunting under-



stand you've no choice but to develop a reverence and respect for the animal every time.

Your most memorable hunting experience?

I hunted a mid-Asian Ibex in Kyrgyzstan which was memorable, especially with regard to immersion in a completely different culture. The guys assisting me could only speak Kyrgyzstan, none of them spoke English. So I found myself in a remote part of the world, hunting probably one of the most elusive animals at 6000m altitude. Coming from sea level in Australia, I had to take medication just to deal with that.

I was with about seven guides, some of them in their sixties wearing Wellington boots. Meanwhile, I'd been training for two years to be fit enough to tackle those mountains and these guys are walking up them like it was nothing. We were on horseback a lot of the time, though in places it was so steep we'd dismount and walk. And when I say walk I mean basically crawl, it was that hard going.

How did you even find guides to assist?

Largely word of mouth and from contacts around the world. On that occasion I'd help from a successful Spanish bowhunter, so I could benefit from his knowledge and by him vouching I was fit enough to handle the conditions. I've found more obscure hunts definitely work via networks and word of mouth, as you can't simply look up Google or social media for 'Who outfits mid-Asian Ibex with a bow in Kyrgyzstan'.

How would you describe Kyrgyzstan?

It's not far from Afghanistan and bordered by Tajikistan, China and Kazakhstan. I needed multiple flights to get there via Qatar and eventually into Kyrgyzstan. I'd say it was a fairly poor country and primarily Muslim. The people were lovely and super-friendly, though there weren't many who spoke English and most had never heard of Australia.

What's your experience in terms of training and using firearms for law enforcement?

It's highly procedural. Obviously there are strict protocols and procedures designed to govern firearms use if required. You also have to keep in mind in the line of duty, you only use a firearm in the most stringent of circumstances, to defend yourself or another person from death or injury.

With SAPOL, I was a firearms training instructor for the best part of a decade. It's interesting in that role, as a lot of police have never used fire-





arms prior to their role, so don't have a preceding understanding unless they're ex-military or grew up on a farm. The training protocol is designed from the lowest common denominator, up to ultimately enabling them to potentially use a firearm in difficult circumstances and in a public space.

What was it like in law enforcement regarding firearms?

Obviously there are tasks such as proactive checks, where you know someone's a licensed firearms holder to ensure they're compliant with legislation, that the firearms match their licence and they're qualified.

Having said that, I'd do this much less frequently in the metropolitan area for a couple of reasons. One, the volume of tasking for police in cities is higher and they're responding to a triage of more difficult, complex jobs. There's also the support of the firearms branch, who'd do a lot of those types of checks in the metropolitan area, as opposed to a regional location where you'd undertake those jobs yourself.

In country areas you'd be more involved in the licensing process as well as registration and checking firearms. I was always mindful that a lot of the people I'd engage with in regional areas were farmers who need firearms as tools for their work. So I always approached that collaboratively, including helping them stay up to date with any legislation changes.

In law enforcement, how did you see the firearm space change?

For the first decade I was involved there weren't significant changes in terms of enforcement. As time progressed, you'd see the regulation of firearms being influenced by significant incidents, such as the Bondi terrorist attack that would become politically charged.

Terror-related incidents definitely have an impact, though violence and causing harm comes down to individuals, not firearms. When things like that happen we need to ask ourselves 'why do people want to be violent and how do we address that?'

MESHA also has a research side so how does that assist with health service provision?

We've won several awards for our work in that space, including the Prime Minister's Award for contributions to mental health of first responders and veterans. Our research is specifically about issues concerning the mental wellbeing of emergency services, first responders, military personnel and their families. We conduct this in-house,

which also translates into targeted programs we deliver and design.

An example of research which has informed our programs, is building further understanding about how trauma intergenerationally affects the children or families of first responders and military personnel. We use our research to identify best practices and techniques we can use to create best outcomes. We also have clinically aligned programs like GEARS (Group Emotional and Relationship Skills) for personnel who have, through their service, been exposed to trauma and are perhaps not functioning as well as they'd like.

What are the challenges in that role?

The single greatest challenge relates to mental health literacy and the decades of stigmatization around the subject. For example in law enforcement, if you disclose you're not doing well, the first thing that's done typically is to remove you from operational duties. That person is then often stigmatized and not put back in an operational environment. The problem with that approach is the environment those members are being taken away from, is where they have peer support and it's their family and identity.

The biggest operational challenge we have is destigmatization. It's also why the MESHA lived experience model is so powerful in helping build informed and evidence-based programs to drive better outcomes.

How can we support each other in relation to mental health?

The best thing is to find people with a common interest you can share your experiences with and find peer support. Being able to share with people you're close to when having a difficult time is extremely helpful. Peer support is one of the most powerful mechanisms to support mental health. A lot of SSAA members will be out in the environment, which is also positively associated with good outcomes for mental health.

How can military and emergency services personnel contact MESHA?

All information about the organisation is on our website, including our programs, though I'd also strongly encourage them to reach out via phone (08) 7002 0880 or email contactus@mesha.org.au or programs@mesha.org.au

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MICHAEL THOMPSON AND FAMILY WITH HIS CHAMPIONSHIP TROPHY HAUL.

Thompson dominates Benchrest Nationals

BRENDAN ATKINSON

The National Benchrest Championships were held in April at the Dairyville Range near Coffs Harbour. This would have to be the country's most picturesque SSAA range, set in a rainforest and surrounded on three sides by tall trees and impenetrable bush. Despite the fuel crisis it was pleasing to see more than 50 competitors in two of the events, with an encouraging number of younger shooters testing their skills at this deceptively tricky venue.

UNLIMITED CLASS

The first event on Good Friday was the Unlimited class with many rail guns seen on the benches. This event calls for 10-shot groups and some remarkable targets were marked up by our National Scorer Ian Thompson. The best of these was a .161 by Darren Parsons who went on to win the aggregate with a score of .2328 from Milan Morrell and Gavin Marshall.

At the longer yardage it was again Parsons who shot the smallest group of .385, though the aggregate win went to Michael Thompson on .2387 from Parsons and Marshall. Grand aggregate winner on .2549 was Parsons who received the Ron Marsden Perpetual Shield, ahead of Thompson on .2709 and Marshall on .2883.



DARREN PARSONS WON THE UNLIMITED EVENT FROM MICHAEL THOMPSON AND GAVIN MARSHALL.



MICHAEL THOMPSON WON THE SPORTER CLASS FROM JOHN BABIC AND KEIRAN GRABHAM; MITCHELL TALLAR WON THE LIGHT RIFLE CLASS IN FRONT OF MICHAEL THOMPSON AND BRENDAN ATKINSON.

SPORTER CLASS

Easter Saturday saw the Sporter Class contested. This is the lightest class though that doesn't mean they're less accurate. Tiny groups were the order of the day and the best of these was an excellent .121 by Michael Thompson. He went on to win the aggregate with a range-measured new national record of .1916, from John Babic and Brendan Atkinson.

At 200 yards it was the same story with more exceptional groups the order of the day, Keith Sewell sending down a .205 on his last card to record the smallest. Babic won the aggregate with another National record, his .1889 putting him ahead of Thompson and Keiran Grabham. Babic was awarded the Alan Peake Memorial Trophy for his yardage win.

It was no surprise when Thompson took the grand aggregate and Den-Lo Park Trophy with yet another national record of .1949, well clear of Babic who also broke the old record with .2128 and Grabham third on .2615.

LIGHT RIFLE

Battle resumed on Easter Sunday and once again tiny groups went under the measure, best of the lot a .109 by Trevor Brown. The aggregate saw a runaway win for Mitchell Taller on .1920, ahead of Thompson and William Greer. The 200-yard contest usually sorts them out, Keith Sewell showing the way with a .2588 aggregate just ahead of Colin Farquharson and Atkinson. The grand aggregate saw Taller lift the Top Gun Manufacturing Trophy with .2395 from Thompson on .2522 and Atkinson on .2635.



KEITH SEWELL WAS WINNER OF THE HEAVY RIFLE CLASS FROM MICHAEL THOMPSON AND THOMAS THOMPSON.

HEAVY RIFLE

Easter Monday brought the final day of competition with conditions mild and tiny groups expected. Any five-shot group under a tenth of an inch qualifies for a 'Screamer' patch and, at 100 yards, there were three of them. The smallest of these was a .081 by Morrell, while Josh Russell shot a .084 and Greer a .098, showing just what accurate rifles can do in the right hands. Aggregate winner was Russell on .1706 closely followed by Atkinson and Babic.

A 'Screamer' at 200 yards must be under .250 and there were an astonishing four recorded. Sewell shot two of them along with Tom Thompson and Sonia Frost, Thompson's .185 the best of these. The aggregate was always going to be small and Sewell took the honours with .1808 from Tom on .1869 and Michael Thompson on .1942. Sewell picked up the Harry Madden Memorial Trophy for the aggregate win as well as the Catalyst Legal Trophy for the grand aggregate victory on .1998, ahead of Michael Thompson on .2018 and Thomas Thompson (no relation) with .2047.

TWO-GUN TROPHY

The John Dark Memorial Two-Gun Trophy for light and heavy classes went to Michael Thompson on .2270, ahead of Sewell on .2402 and Atkinson with .2463

THREE-GUN TROPHY

The Max Coady Memorial Three-Gun trophy for sporter, light and heavy combined went to Michael Thompson on .2160, from Babic on .2384 and Sewell on .2562

FOUR-GUN CHAMPION

The overall champion for 2026 brought a well-deserved winner in Michael Thompson, who simply out-shot everyone over the weekend. His .2302 (another National record) was miles ahead of second-placed Babic on .2676 with Russell third on .2806, well-tuned guns and knowledge of the range paying dividends. Once again the SSAA Coffs Harbour branch turned on an exceptionally smooth and well-run shoot, so thanks go to all involved, especially those behind the scenes. You know who you are and we appreciate your efforts. ●



MICHAEL THOMPSON LIFTED THE TWO-GUN TROPHY FROM KEITH SEWELL AND BRENDAN ATKINSON; THE THREE-GUN TROPHY WENT TO MICHAEL THOMPSON AHEAD OF JOHN BABIC AND KEITH SEARLE; MICHAEL THOMPSON WON THE OVERALL FOUR-GUN TROPHY FROM JOHN BABIC AND JOSH RUSSELL.

Licensing delays no longer acceptable

JULIAN NUSKE

Across Australia, firearms licensing and permit processing delays have moved beyond inconvenience and into systemic failure. What was once a regulated, though reasonably efficient, administrative process has, in several jurisdictions, become characterised by prolonged waiting periods, growing backlogs and declining service standards. For law-abiding firearms owners, primary producers and sporting shooters, the situation is increasingly untenable and it's well past the time something was done about it.

SNAPSHOT OF THE PROBLEM

Recent data paints a stark picture of inconsistencies and delays across the states and territories, with South Australia having experienced the most dramatic deterioration. Average processing times (at time of writing) have reportedly blown out to 277 days for a new licence, 200 days for renewal and 57 days for a Permit to Acquire (PTA). These figures represent a massive increase from just a year ago, when new licences averaged 58 days.

NO EFFICIENCY IN THE SYSTEM

While Queensland's waiting times could be argued as moderately competent, they're also clearly not good enough at around 14.7 weeks (103 days) for new licences and roughly 14 days for PTAs, with New South Wales currently sitting somewhere in between.

Licence processing typically begins after a mandatory 28-day waiting period, which is fair and reasonable, though can extend significantly beyond this. Since the draconian laws which were introduced following the Bondi terrorist attack, the opposite has occurred to the intended change in legislation, with more people now applying for a firearms licence.

PTA times have recently increased to around 27 days, effectively doubling in a matter of months, and this'll only get worse unless something drastic is done to rectify the inadequacies of failing bureaucracies. Both the Labor Party and Liberal Party in most states continue to be toothless on the harm being done to the industry, though with the rise of One Nation perhaps there's a silver lining in our sport and industry's future.

Victoria indicates PTAs can take up to 28 days with extended delays in complex cases. Western Australia provides no clear benchmark, acknowl-

edging there's no fixed processing time at all, yet another failure of unnecessary legislative restrictions on law-abiding sporting shooters and recreational hunters.

Viewed together these figures demonstrate a fragmented national picture, certain jurisdictions functioning with some level of competency, while others are clearly struggling under administrative pressure. We're not talking rocket science here, it's clearly the failure of government and their reluctance to recognise we have a problem.

WHY THIS ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH

Firstly, administrative delay undermines the Rule of Law. Australia's firearms system is built on strict compliance. Applicants must demonstrate a 'genuine reason', complete safety training and pass background checks. In return, the state has an obligation to administer the system efficiently and fairly and not subject law-abiding firearm owners to unnecessary delays and bureaucratic dogma.

When processing times stretch into months or nearly a year, the balance breaks down. A regulatory system which can't deliver timely decisions risks becoming arbitrary in practice, even if sound in principle. The underlying consequence of this is law-abiding citizens bear the burden. The individuals most affected by delays aren't criminals they're sporting shooters, farmers requiring pest control tools, recreational hunters and firearms collectors.

These people are already vetted and compliant, yet face months-long waits to exercise lawful activities. Meanwhile, with various jurisdictions having either already changed their laws or debating if they should, no mention has been made of the fact there's little evidence such delays meaningfully impact illegal firearm acquisition. As anyone with an ounce of intelligence knows, the illicit market overwhelmingly occurs outside the licensing and regulatory system.

ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES REAL AND GROWING

Delays aren't merely administrative, they have direct economic impacts. Reports indicate dealers in South Australia are being forced to warehouse hundreds of firearms awaiting permit approval, tying up capital and disrupting cashflow. When businesses can't complete sales and customers can't take delivery of legally-bought goods, you





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...reforms have strained the registry to the point where additional staffing is urgently required. This indicates a recurring pattern of legislative tightening without corresponding administrative capacity.

have the beginnings of a systemic failure, potentially costing millions of dollars to the economy and ultimately a large part of society. As an example, for primary producers, delays can also mean reduced capacity to manage pests, directly affecting agricultural productivity which can impact livelihoods, communities and families.

The question should be asked as to what's happening with the Australian Federal Government's commitment of \$161.3 million over four years (starting in the 2024-25 Budget), to establish a National Firearms Registry in partnership with state and territory governments. Seriously, what are they spending the money on, as clearly it hasn't gone on the administrative processes which matter.

BACKLOGS SUGGEST STRUCTURAL FAILURE

The scale of delays, particularly in South Australia, points to deeper systemic issues such as insufficient staffing, inefficient digital systems and policy changes introduced without adequate resourcing. Even in New South Wales, recent reforms have strained the registry to the point where additional staffing is urgently required. This indicates a recurring pattern of legislative tightening without corresponding administrative capacity.

UNJUSTIFIABLE INCONSISTENCY

Australia operates under a broadly harmonised national firearms framework, yet administrative performance varies wildly. Again, they've been given money to fund the resources and staff needed to do the job, so what's happening? The inconsistency across all jurisdictions raises a fun-

damental question: Why should a citizen's access to lawful licensing depend so heavily on postcode?

BROADER POLICY FAILURE

The current delays also highlight a deeper policy contradiction. Governments have frequently tried to justify stricter firearms regulation on the basis of public safety. However, the available evidence suggests criminal firearm use is largely linked to illicit markets, not licensed owners, and administrative delays primarily impact already vetted individuals. In this context, extended processing times don't enhance safety, they simply degrade service delivery.

To restore confidence and functionality, several reforms are necessary. Governments can start by resourcing firearms registries properly, with staffing levels reflecting application volumes and the legislative complexity apparent in Australia's firearms laws. There should be national service benchmarks introduced, so consistent maximum processing timeframes across all jurisdictions can be achieved. With the role out of the National Firearms Registry, all digital systems will need to be reformed and made uniform.

The current failing licensing platforms must be fixed or replaced, particularly where inquiries have already identified deficiencies. Again this isn't rocket science, it's well-regulated administrative procedures and practices. You might argue if they can't get this right, what other government institutions are on the verge of failure?

Publishing real-time processing data and backlog figures to ensure accountability (which is currently being attempted in several states) does nothing if improvements aren't being made along the way. At the moment the problem is just becoming increasingly worse.

CONCLUSION

Australia's firearms licensing system is often described as 'world-leading'. In legislative terms that may be true, yet administration is where policy meets reality and right now that reality is falling well short, all to the detriment of all law-abiding firearms users.

Waiting nine months for a licence or several months for a simple permit isn't a minor inconvenience, it's a failure of public administration. The purpose of the \$161.3 million was to upgrade state and territory firearms management systems, digitise paper-based records and build a national, interoperable database. So what's going on? Surely the obvious starting point here is to have your administrative processes running like clockwork first, yet Australia is seeing nothing of the sort.

A system which demands strict compliance from citizens must meet an equally high standard itself. At present in several parts of Australia, it simply does not. Governments across our great country are hereby on notice, as the law-abiding firearms community and industry are large and will lodge their votes where they know they'll make a difference. ●

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WEATHER . . . BEATEN!

OUTDOORS ENTHUSIAST BEN UNTEN HAS GONE UNDERCOVER

Camping in the rain is a bit like a stay in hospital: Sometimes it can't be avoided and it's not a lot of fun. However, if we waited until the conditions and forecast were perfect before leaving the house, we'd never leave the house! Some bad weather is inevitable in the Aussie outdoors and, unless you want members of the hunting party sitting in individual vehicles communicating on UHF radios, some form of weather protection is essential.

I've tried pretty much every tarp option available from the el-cheapo, two-dollar shop offering where the eyelets pull out almost immediately and the tarp flaps and frays into blue strips of confetti during the drive home, to the expensive extra-heavy duty options, where the 'heavy' refers to the weight and bulk of the tarp (and the eyelets still pull out).

Then you have the issues of finding perfectly positioned trees, or the overhead rack on the ute or a thousand poles and ropes to secure everything. And the tarp still flaps like a stunt parachutist performing tricks. And of course it's almost impossible to avoid water pooling on top during heavy rain.

Despite trying everything to avoid it, from internal spreader bars to tennis balls impaled on tent poles, you still end up patrolling the tarp like a guard on sentry duty. Remember poking pools of water with a rounded stick, causing mini-waterfalls just large enough to splash the camp kitchen, chairs or worse, fellow campers. Well, the Hexatarp has solved all those problems.

WHAT IS IT?

Made of lightweight waterproof material, the Hexatarp (so-named due to its hexagonal shape) is a lightweight camping tarpaulin designed with Aussie conditions in mind. The first thing you'll notice is the weight, or lack of it and bulk, also the lack of it. It's available in two sizes, large and medium.

The large one (tested) is 6.5x5.55m at its widest point and weighs 3.5kg in the supplied carry bag, while the medium is 4.8x4.15m at its widest and weighs 2.9kg in the bag. Both include two 2.4m sectioned poles, each divided into four lengths, with a spigot fitting on the top section and a foot on the bottom. There are also eight ropes (including two double ropes) required for tie-down.

The Hexatarp comes without pegs which I

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initially thought was a drawback, though this allows you to match the appropriate pegs for their application. These can be short, hook-end ‘hammer-ins’ for the traditional camper, screw-pegs for the modern battery-tool camper or sand-anchors for the beachgoer etc. And most of us have pegs to spare, especially when you consider the Hexatarp requires only six to secure it.

SET-UP

Of high-quality construction using lightweight, waterproof materials, the quality of the Hexatarp is apparent straight out the bag. Initial set-up is a little slower, as ropes need to be permanently tied to the premium eyelets. Further, the foolproof set-up system using the poles as measuring sticks for the pegs set-out needs to be learned. But after initial set-up you’ll become a ‘Hexpert’ and will soon realise this is a one person set-up in less than 10 minutes, even in breezy conditions.

The Hexatarp requires only two poles and six pegs, the clever design meaning it’s almost impossible for rainwater to gather and pool on the tarp if set up correctly. Once done you’ll find enough space to rollout your swag, prepare your camp kitchen and even have enough room for everyone to gather for a yarn or a bite in bad weather.

In terms of versatility, it also offers the option to lower one or both sides if required, to help protect you even further from the elements. And of course bad weather doesn’t just mean rain and the Hexatarp is fantastic in warmer conditions, providing shelter from the sun with excellent crossflow for any relieving breeze.

IN THE FIELD

We travelled from New South Wales down to Victoria for a family camping trip in late summer. Daytime temperatures were pretty warm at around 30 degrees and we received about 15mm of rain during our stay. The Hexatarp was outstanding. It provided us with a cool place to hang out during the day, a dry area during the wet and, by rolling our swags out beneath it at night, we avoided any additional moisture from overnight dew. In fact it did such a good job, a tribe of other campers came over to ‘have a look’. They ended up bringing camp chairs and sticking around during the rain to take advantage of the dry space the Hexatarp provided.

Perhaps my only small criticism of the large one tested, is I’d have loved it to be about one metre wider and maybe a metre longer, as it didn’t quite fully cover two double swags at night. And with our camp kitchen also set up underneath, while there was just enough room for four of us on camp chairs to fit, it was a little tight with



the two double swags. But this really wasn’t a problem as we all know swags are designed to withstand rainfall, so we simply shuffled them out from under the tarp during the day, which left plenty of room.

I eventually worked out, sadly after the rain had passed, that by reducing the length of the end poles by removing one section (down from roughly 2.4m long to 1.8m), the reduction in height allowed for the pitch to be flattened enough to increase the width. This could be further improved by upgrading the supplied poles with fully adjustable ones to enable the height to be customised, while adding two extra poles could lift the side wings to expand the undercover area.

COVERS TWO DOUBLE SWAGS (JUST).

CONCLUSION

In terms of durability the people at manufacturer Drifta claim, and I’ve no reason to doubt them, to have set up a Hexatarp for three months to test the quality of stitching, resistance to fading and robustness of the eyelets etc. The unit passed all tests with flying colours and that three-month duration could equate to years of casual or occasional use.

The ease, speed and simplicity of set-up make this tarpaulin a real winner. Coupled with effectiveness in preventing water buildups, minimal flapping and reduced bulk and weight, I can envisage many uses beyond camping. The Hexatarp could act as an alternative for a full-blown marquee or any outdoor gathering, sporting events, sign-in tables, work sites etc. And while it may not turn camping in the rain into fun exactly, it makes it sociable and far more tolerable. The Hexatarp medium retails for around \$210 and the large about \$246. More at drifta.com.au



START THEM EARLY

In the world of books for younger people, *I Am a Deer Hunter* stands as an original contribution. Through poetic storytelling, cultural depth and genuine reverence for the natural world, the book weaves together themes of personal responsibility and the deep connection between people and nature. It invites young readers to see themselves as part of a larger living world, one they're responsible for understanding, respecting and caring for.

Author Rob Baldinger approaches the topic of hunting with a sense of balance, ensuring the story has both educational value and emotional resonance, something you'd be hard-pressed to find in a dedicated picture book. Stylistically, Baldinger's prose draws inspiration from the world of bush ballads, as well as traditional Australian children's stories like *Mulga Bill's Bicycle*. The result is a rhythmic,

action-driven bush yarn which follows a young hunter in pursuit of deer. The verse is lively and musical, making it engaging to read aloud while maintaining a gentle pace that mirrors the ebb and flow of a day spent in the high country.

Moments of stillness and anticipation are handled with care, allowing young readers to feel the significance of the experience. This emotional honesty is one of the book's greatest strengths. It acknowledges the seriousness of hunting while presenting it through a lens of patience, awareness and respect for both animal and environment. Complementing the story are many fine illustrations from small, detailed depictions of equipment to expansive two-page hunting scenes, the artwork enriching the narrative and offering additional layers of interest for the reader.

For many readers the story will sit firmly within their real-world experiences. It speaks to families who hunt, offering familiarity, validation and pride, yet also has the power to open doors for young people from non-hunting backgrounds. In assessing the book, I decided to ask the opinions of two young reviewers. Mr 10 Years is my youngest. He's not a hunter and doesn't really have any interest in hunting, while Mr 13 Years is most definitely a young hunter.

MR 10 YEARS

"I like how, at the start, the words rhyme so the story runs more smoothly. I like the animations, especially the deer hunter. I really like the part where she crawls along the ground to get close to the deer, but it doesn't see her. When she finally gets close, the deer has no idea she's there and then she shoots. I also like it when she hangs up the meat and puts it into the bags along with the deer skull in her backpack. It looks really cool."

MR 13 YEARS

"The style the book is written in is perfect for engaging both younger and older readers because it's short but still effective. The same goes for the illustrations. The drawings are detailed but still cartoony, which makes them interesting for all ages. What I really like is the narrator (subject of the story) referred to

the skull as a 'trophy' instead of just calling it a 'skull'. I was also intrigued by the fact she was upset about killing the deer, though I guess everyone feels differently about things and that's okay. In conclusion, the book was intriguing and I enjoyed reading it."

STANDOUT DEBUT

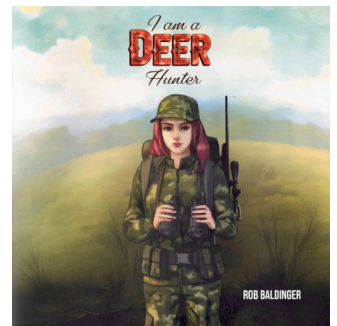
For parents and educators, *I Am a Deer Hunter* offers rich opportunities for discussion. It can spark conversations about where food comes from, what it means to hunt and how people can interact with animals in respectful ways. The poetic format encourages repeated reading and its rhythm makes it suitable for bedtime, campfire or classroom.

This book is engaging, grounded and culturally meaningful. It breaks new ground in reading material for young people, offering a respectful representation of hunting and the hunter. Its combination of lyrical writing, thoughtful themes and a strong sense of place makes it a standout debut in what the author promises will be an impactful series. Whether read by hunting families or those drawn to stories of nature, adventure and heritage, Rob Baldinger's *I Am a Deer Hunter* leaves a lasting impression, one which honours both the land and those who walk quietly through it.

REVIEW: MARK VAN DEN BOOGAART

I Am a Deer Hunter

By Rob Baldinger





Vorn to be wild

DEREK NUGENT TRIALS TWO TOP-END BACKPACKS

Consider the humble backpack, a 'must-have' item for students, tourists, trekkers and hunters. This ubiquitous piece of kit represents a modern-day iteration of the late 16th century German/Dutch knapsack/knapzak, combining 'knappen' (to bite or eat) and 'sack/zak' (bag), essentially meaning the eating bag carried by soldiers of the era.

The term knapsack entered the English language around 1600, to describe these small provision-carrying bags which would eventually morph into the well-designed, feature-packed carryalls of today. *Australian Shooter* was given the chance to review a premium, if not world class example of the modern knapsack, in the form of a pair of Vorn Quick Release Rifle (QRR) hunting backpacks from Premium Hunting Products.

PREMIUM HUNTING PRODUCTS Canberra based, this is a dynamic new business dedicated to making quality European accessories available to Australian hunters. The enterprise was established in 2025 by father and son team Dirk and Will Noordewier, both experienced hunters and outdoorsmen. They sell equipment of the very highest standard, something which became abundantly clear during testing.

They're Australia's only authorized agent for Vorn, a high-end Norwegian firm priding itself on developing products which can be depended on season after season with no compromise in terms of design, function or quality. Their flagship QRR line is available in more than 30 countries and in use by more than 100,000 hunters globally.

In reintroducing Vorn products to Australia, Dirk has started with the innovative and well regarded QRR backpack line. He also stocks the Vorn SR10 hip pack and hopes to import



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.223 Rem | .243 Win | .308 Win | 6.5 CM

ZERO TECH

THRIVE 3-12x44

Mildot Rifle Scope

WARNE

Vapor Horizontal 30mm

Medium Matte Rings



Calibres: 223Rem, 243Win, 6.5CM 308Win



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the Vorn Dynamic Load System (DLS) range of modular, frame-based, heavy load carrying backpacks. Ultimately, he intends to offer a comprehensive range of premium hunting gear from a variety of European sources, to give Australian hunters a choice beyond the typical US offerings.

Complementing the existing manufacturer's five-year warranty, Dirk guarantees that in the unlikely event of a product or part failure, a replacement will be dispatched within 24 hours. For Canberra-based buyers, he's happy to arrange collection or free door-to-door drop-off and assist with fitting the QRR backpack to individual clients and firearms. Simply exceptional product confidence and after-sales service.

QRR HUNTING BACKPACKS

The Vorn range includes three hunting backpacks in the EV45, EV30 and LT12, with the EV30 (RRP \$584.99) and LT12 (RRP \$470.99) provided for review. Three aspects differentiate the range starting with capacity, with one being 30L and the other 12L. As for purpose, the EV30/EV45 have a rigid, impact-resistant fiberglass re-enforced frame, designed to tote larger heavier loads and featuring MOLLE attachment points, while the frameless LT12 is designed to facilitate fast, unimpeded movements. And finally comes fit with only the EV30/EV45 having a height adjustable shoulder harness, though thoughtful design means the LT12 will comfortably fit most people. And because it features a removable hip belt, tote capacity can be increased to a handy 16L by buying a MOLLE belt and two additional pouches.

Both backpacks are exceptionally well-made, their quality self-evident to both eye and touch. They're made of V-Tec fabric which is a three-layer material of 390 GSM, thus V-Tec's classified as a dense heavyweight fabric which translates into impressive durability. The front fabric is silent Twill polyester while the rear is 300D Ripstop polyester. The central layer is a TPU (thermal polyurethane) membrane fusing all layers together and providing a tough waterproof barrier.

The result is a versatile fabric that's durable, flexible and waterproof with a 40,000mm water column rating, meaning it can withstand pressure equivalent to a 40m-tall column of water before leaking. This ensures exceptional waterproofing suitable for the most severe conditions imaginable, like tropical downpours or heavy snow. Both packs also feature double stitched, water-resistant, PU-coated YKK zippers, well-padded shoulder and hip straps, an internal hydration bladder compartment and multiple storage options.

Most enticing for hunters is the inbuilt rifle scabbard, featuring a patented quick-release mechanism and adjustable buttstock holder. Also included is a separate barrel protector for use in inclement weather or when traversing potentially damaging terrain. It's this innovation which elevates the Vorn QRR range above its rivals.

The QRR mechanism was launched in 2012 and features a blaze orange release handle built

into the pack's left shoulder strap, which prompts two spring-loaded release pins to disengage when activated. Several highly desirable hunter-friendly advantages immediately manifest themselves.

Firstly, the system allows for safe and secure portage of a firearm in the field, while ensuring protection from adverse conditions or misadventure. Secondly, the firearm can be quickly and quietly released from or replaced in the scabbard without removing the pack. Thirdly, the firearm is conveniently and immediately to hand when the opportunity for a shot presents.

Finally and most significantly, the system frees up both hands to allow for concurrent use of accessories like binoculars or hunting sticks, to safely navigate challenging terrain, or carrying home that trophy head. Vorn's QRR system has the potential to make your hunting experience easier, safer and more efficient, which was certainly my experience in the lead-up to and during the 2026 red deer Roar.

PACK AND RIFLE: VORN AFIELD

The Vorn QRR backpacks functioned as would be expected of such a high-end product: faultlessly. I tested them myself and also enlisted fellow hunters to give them a workout, the 'terrific' verdict being unanimous. The various compartments are generous, accommodating and secure with straps, buckles and padding allowing significant flexibility when tailoring the packs to the build and needs of each individual. This facilitated comfortable, fatigue-free stalks. If you intend to use a hydration bladder you'll have to look carefully for the hose exit port, as it's sensibly over-sewn to prevent water ingress and located on the top left side of each pack.

Using the QRR system takes both consideration and practice. From a safety point of view the manufacturer warns not to carry a firearm with a chambered round in the scabbard. You need to adjust the buttstock holder so the butt of your rifle doesn't trail low enough to contact the back of your legs or obstructions like rocks, logs or other vegetation when crossing terrain.

When 'fitting' your rifle to the pack, ensure bipods sit clear of the top of the scabbard and your scope's about 20mm below the top, to enable deployment of the firearm without it catching or snagging. On this note there are three ways of drawing a firearm from the scabbard, by the barrel, sling or buttstock. Thought also needs to be given as to how to position your rifle's sling, my preference being to have it sitting outside the retaining clips so as to be immediately accessible on release. The size of the rifle, fitted accessories and personal preference are going to dictate what works best for each shooter.

I had utmost confidence in the system to securely carry and protect my rifle in all circumstances I encountered afield and, as expected, it did afford me a 'hands-free' advantage when trekking. My preference though was to have the rifle in my hand while actively stalking, as opposed to



OPERATING THE QRR SYSTEM TO RELEASE A FIREARM FOR ACTION.



Sniper XR Magnum

Brocock's innovative semi-bullpup range has a super high-power version in the shape of the more powerful XR Magnum. The Sniper XR delivers up to 55ft/lbs of energy and uses an advanced regulator system which is exclusively supplied to Brocock by Dutch regulator maestros HumaAir.

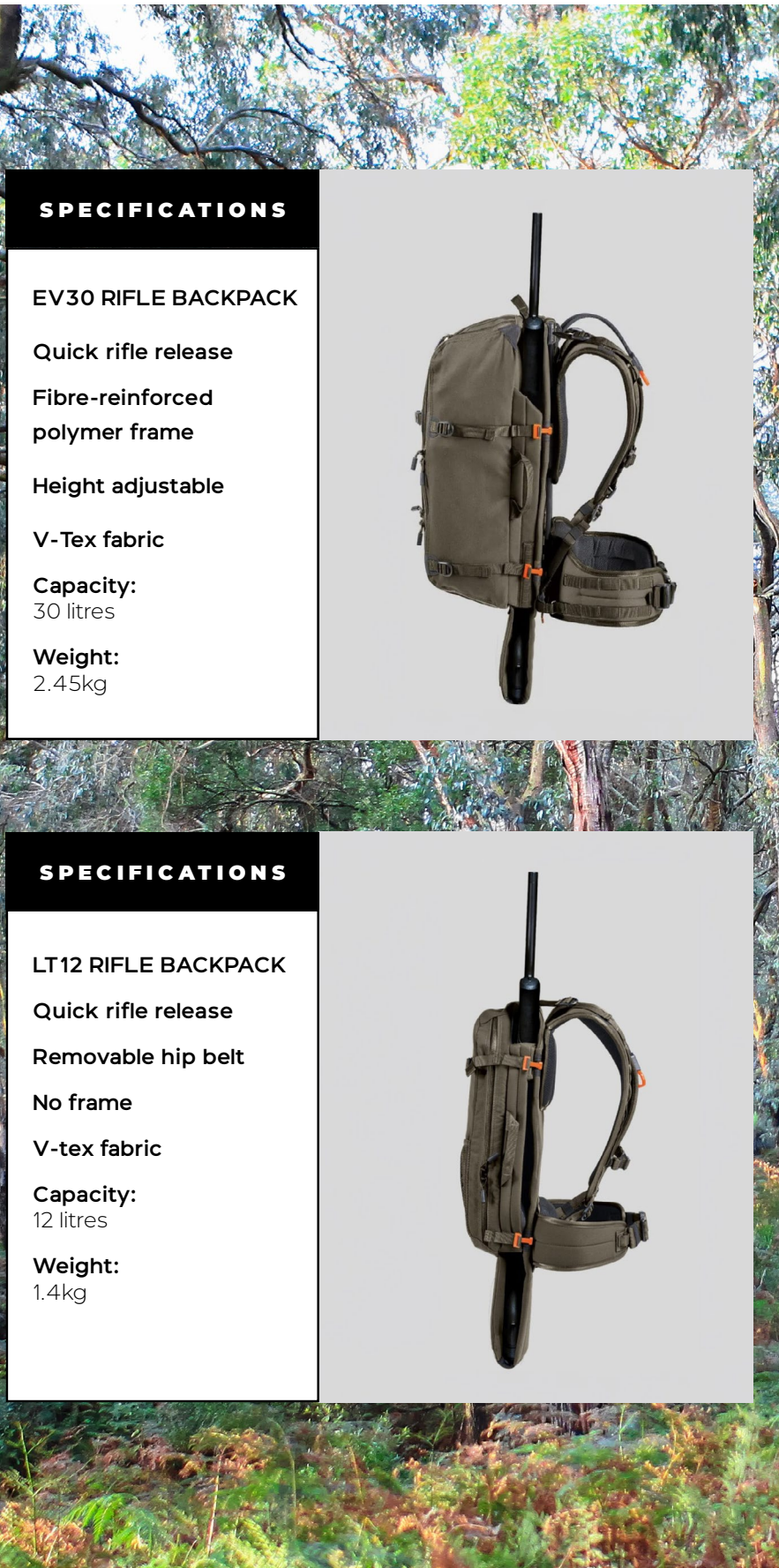
Available in Calibres .22 and .25

Features:

- Ergonomic sidelever operation
- Precharged from a dive cylinder or high pressure pump
- Power adjuster
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- Ballistic Polymer Black
- Adjustable cheek piece
- 2D adjustable butt pad
- Match grade trigger
- Resettable safety catch
- Picatinny rail
- Precision Huma Regulator



RRP \$2,465



SPECIFICATIONS

EV30 RIFLE BACKPACK

Quick rifle release

Fibre-reinforced polymer frame

Height adjustable

V-TEX fabric

Capacity:
30 litres

Weight:
2.45kg



SPECIFICATIONS

LT12 RIFLE BACKPACK

Quick rifle release

Removable hip belt

No frame

V-tex fabric

Capacity:
12 litres

Weight:
1.4kg



being secured in the scabbard. This represents the personal habit of a lifetime on my part rather than any issue with the QRR system, though it's a sensible, practical and useful innovation that's sure to appeal to many hunters.

As a longtime user of the QRR system, Dirk advocates investing time in practicing drawing a firearm from the scabbard in order to develop muscle memory, so the process becomes habitual, akin to cycling a bolt. His experience is that, as a result, the time taken to shoulder a firearm from the scabbard is roughly the same as that for a traditionally slung rifle. I must admit that's something I'm yet to master but hey, practice makes perfect. I'd also add the release mechanism was easy to access, operate and worked flawlessly.

Based on my experience the choice of a general all-rounder for a day's trek would be the LT12, as it complemented my existing hunting harness perfectly. It had ample capacity to carry those extra sundries required for a day in the field, while functionality of the QRR system was in no way compromised by being on a smaller, lightweight pack. However I will state the LT12 is not the pick if your stalks are primarily devoted to game meat recovery.

My venison hunting is usually done with a crew of three and, in this circumstance, we all carry larger capacity backpacks for game meat retrieval. In this respect I tested the EV30, found it comfortably up to the task though the capacity a little restrictive. As such I'd recommend the dedicated game meat harvester would be better served by stepping up to the larger capacity EV45, particularly if hunting solo.

IN THE END

Each hunter will have their own view of what represents value for money in any accessory, which is as true of boots, binoculars and knives as it is of backpacks. Vorn's offerings are expensive but you're investing in a well-designed, functional and durable item which incorporates features not seen in rival products.

They're exceedingly good quality, promise a working life measured in decades, not years, and cope comfortably with the rigours of time spent in the wild. In addition, Premium Hunting Products is a business which 'walks the walk' as well as they 'talk the talk', so clients will enjoy a thoroughly professional and friendly experience in dealing with them, just as I did.

So the question becomes do you want to buy a cheapie backpack which, with hard use, may fail at a crucial moment or need replacing every three years? Or do you invest in a premium product designed and manufactured to give a lifetime of service and satisfaction? Ultimately the choice is yours. More at premiumhuntingproducts.com or email info@premiumhuntingproducts.com

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Get the picture?

MARK VAN DEN BOOGAART'S BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO TRAIL CAMERAS

I was an early adopter of trail cameras. What that really meant was at the time, I paid top dollar for cutting-edge gear whose average price point would eventually become so low it made me question my life choices. Back then, if you wanted a trail camera you had two options: Gamble on an obscure online hunting store with postage costing more than the camera, or drive laps around the local gun shops hoping they had one on the shelf. Today you can find 'two for three' trail camera deals at your favourite German supermarket.

Yet cost and availability weren't the only hurdles. There was a time when trail cameras carried, for a vocal minority, the same accursed scent that thermals do today. The arguments were predictable: Cameras make it unfair, remove the mystery, cheapen the hunt, they'll be the end of deer or, in other words, the sky would fall in.

Thankfully those days are behind us. Most hunters now regard cameras as a useful tool, landowners rely on them for monitoring gates

and fencelines while wildlife watchers use them to catalogue visitors. I even once set up a camera to understand what our labrador got up to at night. Aside from a single 2am toilet break, he slept the whole time. Hardly David Attenborough stuff but at least we knew.

Trail cameras aren't magic and don't capture everything. A world of animal behaviour still happens just out of frame, beyond sensor range, or in the blind spots you never realised you'd created. But they tell you a lot. They make you a more efficient hunter by showing you what's around, giving insight into how animals behave, when they move and why they choose one path over another. So here's how I use trail cameras, what years of experimenting have taught me and how I make the most of them.

CHOOSING A CAMERA

My trail camera goal is to build a long-term picture of red deer populations on the Brisbane Valley properties I hunt. Numbers, patterns,



behaviour and the seasonal rhythm of their movements. When I'm choosing a camera, I want one with high-resolution stills and decent video. Now the gap between budget and premium has narrowed massively but I still want clean images, recognisable antler detail and video clear enough to read posture and intent.

Next is power and I prefer units which run on standard AA batteries. These are available in bulk and, with a large enough battery compartment, the camera will keep running for months and in some cases a whole year. Night capability is basically standard now, though not all IR systems are equal. Good range and clean nighttime images matter, especially when animals linger at distance or when fog, drizzle or low contrast make things tricky.

Over the years I've changed the type of equipment I use. My Generation One cameras were the traditional book-style layout, where you secured the camera in place then opened it like a book. Inside was the control panel and viewing screen and honestly, they were a bit of a pain. You'd have

to set them in shooting mode, take a shot, open the camera back up, check everything was right, adjust as necessary and repeat until you were happy with the result.

My Generation Two versions incorporate a forward-facing screen on the front of the camera, protected by a hinged cover. Think 'selfie' on your phone where you can see what the camera's seeing. It makes set-up a lot easier, especially when mounting at tough angles over gullies, on steep banks or tight against a game funnel.

SECURING THE CAMERA

Most units come with both a strap and more permanent metal screw-affixed mount with a ball-jointed mounting arm. I never carry the permanent mounts as they aren't really suited for bush conditions. I used to use the supplied strap until Queensland summers put a stop to that. Rain, heat and humidity meant they rotted fast.

My solution was 600mm (or longer) heavy-duty cable ties. I buy them at the same place as the

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A 2026 PAT TERN STARTS TO APPEAR AS DEER TRAVERSE THE SAME GAME CORRIDOR; THE OLDER BOOK-STYLE LAYOUT WORKS BUT THERE ARE BETTER OPTIONS; DEER VISITING WATER IN LATE AFTERNOON; SOMEONE'S A CURIOUS ROO; RED DEER STAGS MOVING ALONG THE GAME CORRIDOR; A CURIOUS RED DEER STAG STILL IN VELVET.

batteries. One tie is usually enough for a medium tree with larger trunks getting a cable tie 'daisy chain'. The ties don't rot, they're light, reliable and if you leave the tail accessible, you can cinch them tighter throughout the season.

HOW MUCH SHOULD I SPEND?

My advice is to check out the budget range of cameras, as today's cheap options are as good or better than mid-range units from a few years ago. Unless you're chasing professional-grade footage you'll never notice the difference. As for cellular cameras, the ones that text you photos, I skip them. They're power-hungry, expensive to run and will send you hundreds of shots of wind-blown grass or curious cows. If you must have real-time alerts fine, but expect noise and lots of it.

The main reason I buy cheap is numbers, as two cameras see more than one and five see more than two. I run seven and plan to add more. When one fails, and they all do, I'm not heartbroken and replacing them doesn't require a loan. How do they fail? Seals go, housings warp, water creeps in, spiders take up residence and ants build empires in the battery compartment.

I've found the seal at the top of the camera is usually where the rot sets in, especially in the older 'opening book' ones. When I inspect a camera and find water inside I clean it up, make sure it still works then remount it upside down. The photos come out inverted, though I can fix that later and I often squeeze another six to 12 months out of it before its done.

LAYING THEM OUT

Where I hunt, the red deer roar peaks around the first week of April, though I start setting cameras out in October. It takes months to build a reliable picture and longer to confirm patterns. I begin with known hotspots like old rubs, established trails, fence crossings, water sources and shaded ridge paths. I generally mount cameras to trees and even once built a rock cairn and installed one inside, to watch over an otherwise treeless dam. I avoid fenceposts as cows and fences have a long, destructive relationship. No need to put a camera between them.

I check cameras every fortnight. Sometimes I move them, sometimes I leave them as a bone-dry creek might fill again and draw animals. Cattle can turn a game trail into soup and cameras track these changes better than I ever could. I like using two per site, angled about 60 degrees apart, as I want to create an overlap for better understanding of movement. I usually have one set for still imagery and the other for video. The former gives clarity and the latter records behaviour and movement.



MAINTENANCE

Simple but essential. Before taking my cameras out I make sure they have fresh batteries, reformatted SD cards, clean lenses, sensors and housing along with a couple of cable ties. In the field I watch battery levels closely. High-resolution video drains quickly and summer heat certainly adds to that power drain. If a camera will be unattended for a long stretch I adjust settings to shorter clips, fewer bursts and longer delays.

MANAGING DATA

I buy mid-range 16 and 32GB SD cards in bundles and run two cards per camera, one in the unit and one in my kit. When checking a camera I preview images, decide whether to move it and swap cards. The camera stays active while I take the old card home for proper review.

THE RESULT

What you get from all this is a deep, ever-developing dataset on everything that moves. Deer, foxes, pigs, hares, dingoes, curlews, echidnas, cattle and even the occasional 'roo punch-up. Sometimes you might capture a two-legged visitor and in the Valley mostly everyone knows everyone. In late 2025 during my first check of the season, I caught a group of young red stags forming a bachelor mob. They wandered off towards another camera and, sure enough, they'd all passed it, seven animals clear as day.

As I write this in January, I'm somewhere high above the Middle East with my eldest asleep slumped against me after watching an inflight *Jurassic Park* movie marathon. As my mind drifts back to the Brisbane Valley hills, the good news is my trail cameras will be doing their job and give me a pretty good idea of what kind of April I can expect when I get home. ●

• Update: Check out the images from my first trip back to the Brisbane Valley for 2026. Things are looking up.

NEWER-STYLE CAMERA WITH PROTECTED FORWARD-FACING SCREEN; TRAIL CAMERA WITH A BUSHCRAFT CAMERA ANGLE ADJUSTER; LOTS OF MEMORY CARDS. SOME COME WITH THE CAMERAS, THOUGH I PREFER A REASONABLE QUALITY SHOP-BOUGHT CARD.

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RAZOR. SHARP.

BRENDAN ATKINSON ENJOYS A TOP- END JAPANESE SCOPE

Shooters contesting longer distance events are now spoiled for choice when it comes to selecting a high-quality scope. How much magnification?

Whether to go first or second plane. Is illumination required? The list goes on. So the subject of this review is the Japanese-made Vortex Razor HD Gen III in 4-24x44 power, which has many of the features demanded by serious competitors.

Opening the box reveals the scope along with a set of lens covers, a sunshade for the objective lens and throw lever for the power ring for those who prefer them. There are also a couple of Allen keys and a lens cleaning cloth. A highly comprehensive product manual contains everything you need to know about this scope, while there's also a manual explaining the EBR-7D MRAD reticle and how to use it.

So let's look closer at the main features of this model. It's certainly compact at a mere 318mm in length and weighs .916kg, the main tube being 34mm which allows for plenty of turret travel. Looking at the scope from the front, on the left is a capped and lockable windage turret, while

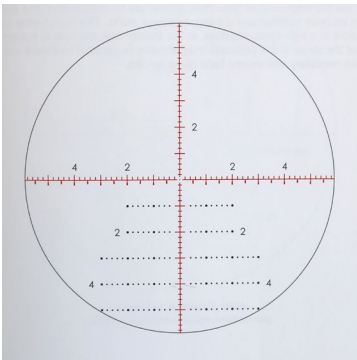
on top is the lockable elevation turret, which requires you to lift it up before attempting to rotate it. Once a setting is reached, just push it back down and it'll stay there. On the right is the parallax adjustment knob. This dial also incorporates the battery compartment which requires a CR2032 battery for illumination of the reticle. One is supplied with a protective seal which must be removed to activate the system.

Moving towards the rear of the scope we find the magnification ring which requires a firm hand to turn it, though a throw lever is supplied and can be attached to make adjustment more accessible. At the rear on the ocular lens, you'll find a fast-focus eyepiece with graduations marked out for quick reference.

This model features a First Focal Plane (FFP) which is preferred by many longer distance shooters. The main difference between first and second focal plane is that with the former, the reticle will appear to grow and shrink as the power changes, while the second focal plane stays the same over magnification alterations. The advantage with FFP is the sub-tensions used for



THE SCOPE COMES SUPPLIED WITH DUST CAPS, THROW LEVER, ADJUSTMENT MULTITOOLS AND LENS SHADE.



THE ILLUMINATED MRAD RETICLE MAKES LONG-DISTANCE SHOOTING EASY (WITH PRACTICE).

holding over remain the same no matter what the power, which offers several plus points for an experienced shooter.

Vortex offer their Gen III in either Minute of Angle (MOA) or Milliradian (MRAD). For those unfamiliar with these, 1MOA is equivalent to 1.047" at 100 yards, whereas 1 MRAD is equivalent to 3.6" at 100 yards. The Gen III under review having MRAD means that at 100 yards, one click of adjustment will move the impact .36 of an inch or .1 MRAD.

The reticle in this scope is the Illuminated EBR-7D MRAD, referred to by some as the 'Christmas tree' reticle for obvious reasons when first seen. The reticle is laser etched on to a glass surface to ensure accuracy of the sub-tensions. It looks extremely 'busy' but, once you get used to it and what it can offer, everything falls into place. It can be used for ranging a target and this is fully explained in the owner's manual. It involves a series of formulas which require you to know the height of the target and, from that using the sub-tensions in the scope, an accurate distance to target can be obtained. Coupled with this of course, you have to know your bullet drop with the cartridge being used to ensure hits at distant targets. At the lowest power setting it's a little difficult to see the reticle, though I imagine with experience this shouldn't present a problem.

Illumination of the reticle has variable intensity to suit the user. There are 10 levels of brightness to choose from and once you settle on a desired intensity, it can be locked in for future reference.

So how does it perform in the field? I took the scope down to the Monarto silhouette range in South Australia, which has a clear 500m to the target mound. I must say the clarity of this unit is right up there with the best I've seen. Targets at 500m were no problem and, at full magnification, .30-calibre holes could be seen with some concentration. The splash plates for metallic silhouette shooting stood out well, allowing the sub-tensions for hold-off to be used when sighting-in at this distance. I'd certainly recommend this scope for such disciplines as Precision Rifle Series and Metallic Silhouette, where hold-over and 'knowing' your scope are essential requirements.

CONCLUSIONS

This is an excellent example of what's now on offer for the long-distance shooter. With the current popularity of such disciplines as Precision Rifle Series, demands for top-quality equipment is paramount. Naturally, quality such as this commands close to top dollar and I've seen this scope advertised in the region of \$4500 but, as I always recommend, look around for a competitive price. ●



Step out of the Shadow

ROD PASCOE APPLAUDS CZ'S LATEST TARGET PISTOL

Christmas came early for many shooters when their long-awaited pistols arrived in the country. Winchester Australia, importers of CZ firearms, had been taking backorders for most of 2025 after the CZ Shadow 2 Target was launched at SHOT Show in Las Vegas earlier in the year. This is CZ's latest addition to their specialised competition range, with the hype surrounding it attracting many pistol shooters to what CZ is claiming as their best yet.

Winchester Australia had promised shipments to their dealers would start arriving in November and they didn't disappoint. The new handguns are available in 5 and 6" barrel variants, with *Australian Shooter* receiving a 6" version for review after all back orders were filled.

BACKGROUND

The new model is based on the legendary CZ-75 which has changed little since its arrival in 1975. It's one of the most enduring pistol designs, replicated worldwide by several manufacturers. The Czech-made CZ-75 was dubbed the Wonder Nine back in the 1970s. Ceska zbrojovka, the origin of CZ, kept to the original design when many pistol manufacturers were jumping on the striker-fired, polymer-framed bandwagon in the '80s.

But CZ later caught up with some of the changing trends, such as producing pistols with optics-ready slides and an accessory rail to carry a light or weights. The first Shadow 2 version of the CZ-75 appeared in 2016 and were targeted (excuse the pun) at practical target shooting events. They did this by adding features to make the pistol easier and more comfortable to hold, including checkering on back and front straps, higher and longer beavertail and undercut trigger guard to give more room to the second finger.

These additional features also made the Shadow 2 the basis for building specialised custom pistols for IPSC, WA1500, Action Pistol and other practical/action events. This is where compensators are fitted to custom barrels, complex trigger jobs are performed and frame-mounted optical sights added.

But here's where the Shadow 2 Target is different: The clue's in the word 'Target'. CZ aren't attempting to cater to the home defence or law enforcement market with this one. Where the flagship CZ Shadow 2 Orange and TS 2 Orange models were the Production and Standard Division specialists in IPSC, the Shadow 2 Target pistols are intended for precision bullseye target shooting - straight out the box - with no modifications required.

DESCRIPTION

As stated, the Shadow 2 Target is available in two barrel lengths, which determines what competitions they're best suited for. With some matches such as WA1500 a 6" barrel is allowed and regular, fully adjustable target sights are a must, no white dots, no coloured fibre optics, just a black LPA rear sight with front Patridge blade.

Having a longer slide, the review pistol has the added sight radius of a 6" barrel, though both models are supplied with two blades of varying widths at 3.5mm and 3mm. The 5" version has all the features of the other, but has a barrel length which fits the rulebooks of multiple matches such as IPSC Standard Division for example. Yet the list of suitable matches goes on and the Shadow 2 Target covers most of them.

The CZ Shadow 2 Target is a single-action only (SAO) hammer-fired, all-steel pistol weighing 1.25kg. Target accuracy starts with the barrel and this one is cold hammer-forged with a redesigned, sharp-edged protective crown that's hand-fitted to the slide. The barrel carries a lifetime warranty. The slide has deeper, diagonal cocking serrations front and rear, while easily accessible grub screw trigger adjustments change the amount of take-up and over-travel.

Pull weight can be adjusted between 1.3 to 3.8lbs (590g to 1723g), while the straight trigger shoe is adjustable to customise length of pull. The slide rail mates with the frame for the entire length with a snug engineered fit. The Target's steel frame has been redesigned to have a larger undercut on the trigger guard and more comfortable front and rear strap checkering. The frame's underside is drilled and tapped for adding weights.



THE 5" VERSION HAS ALL THE FEATURES OF THE 6" BUT WITH A BARREL LENGTH WHICH FITS THE RULEBOOKS OF MANY MATCHES.



GRIP PANELS HAVE A SIMILAR TEXTURE TO THE AGGRESSIVE BACK AND FRONT STRAPS; STRAIGHT TRIGGER SHOE IS ADJUSTABLE TO CUSTOMISE LENGTH OF PULL; THE BARREL HAS A SHARP-EDGED PROTECTIVE CROWN AND IS HAND-FITTED TO THE SLIDE.



TESTING WAS CONDUCTED FROM A BARRICADE AT 25M AS SHOT IN WA1500 MATCHES.

Controls have been redesigned for this specific model, including a new slide stop on the left and lower-profile magazine release that's reversible for left-handers. The large safety lever is ambidextrous. Custom grip panels have a similar texture to the aggressive back and front straps and are made of durable G10, a high-pressure fibreglass laminate material. Magazine capacity is 10 rounds and three are supplied with each pistol. It comes with an instruction manual, cleaning brushes and rod along with trigger adjustment keys and a bag of spare recoil buffers.

TO THE RANGE

I selected seven commercially loaded ammunitions across five different brands and multiple bullet types and weights for testing and, as this is a new gun, I gave it a thorough clean and lubrication before heading out. Once set up on the range I gave the pistol (and me) some time to settle in, plinking from a rest at short range.

The pistol showed it was ready for work straight out the box with absolutely no hesitation to feed, fire, extract and eject all ammunition types. The sights needed little adjustment, though I did swap the front for the thinner 3mm one which I preferred. After about 200 rounds I stripped the gun to look for any signs of wear and powder residue build-up, checking on how the lubrication was standing up, especially on the slide/frame rail.

At this point I was pleasantly surprised that, apart from some residue inside the front of the magazine well directly below the chamber, the firing mechanism and underside of the slide were reasonably clean. The barrel was pretty filthy and needed cleaning before I started being a bit more serious on accuracy testing. I recruited a couple of club members with proven ability, especially with open sights, to help out.

Testing was conducted from the relative steadiness of a barricade at 25 and 50 metres as shot in WA1500 matches. The supplied pistol didn't have



ONE CARTRIDGE STOOD OUT AT 50M, THE FEDERAL SYNTech 124-GRAIN.

a barrel weight as standard, however a fellow Shadow 2 Target owner had one fitted and quite noticeably reduced barrel flip with his handloads.

Accuracy varied among the factory branded ammo, however anyone contemplating serious competition would be handloading not just to suit the gun, but the rule book too. Nevertheless, one cartridge which did perform slightly better than the rest was Federal Syntech 124-grain with synthetic coated lead bullets. The Shadow 2 Target not only performed superbly it was accurate, comfortable to shoot and handled well.

CONCLUSION

CZ stuck their neck out to produce a specialised target pistol, in a world where competitive pistol shooting doesn't enjoy a large slice of the handgun market. The Shadow 2 Target does everything it was advertised to do in a gun straight out the box. Serious target shooters will find either the 5 or 6" version will suit multiple functions.

Customisation is certainly an option though may void the warranty, which is generous for an unmodified pistol. Similarly, tailor-made ammunition will prove more beneficial than factory loads. At a little over \$3000, this is great value for those not requiring an optics cut in the slide, however that in itself is no deal breaker, as there are increasingly more aftermarket options for popular handguns such as the Shadow 2 Target. ●



ALIEN 2: THE SEQUEL

AUSTRALIAN & NEW ZEALAND

HANDGUN

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

ISSUE 24

**OUT
NOW**



Hi-velocity pioneer

DICK EUSSEN PAYS HOMAGE TO A GROUNDBREAKING CARTRIDGE

American experimenter Charles Newton invented the .22 Hi-Power cartridge by necking down the .25-35 Winchester case, then Savage chambered its Model 99H Featherweight lever-action rifle for it in 1912. The cartridge was well accepted and popular in the early stage of its introduction, though Savage dropped it in 1930. It was the first .22 centrefire cartridge loaded with smokeless powder.

The rifle was ahead of its time with a slim, flat profile and a first-of-its-kind internal five-shot rotary magazine. It was the first lever-action designed to handle spitzer-type bullets with a coil spring, faster lock time and a window on the side of the magazine well with a cartridge indicator, a pin hole which showed if the bolt was cocked and an 'F' to indicate if the round had been fired. It suffered from cleaning issues and was removed in later models.

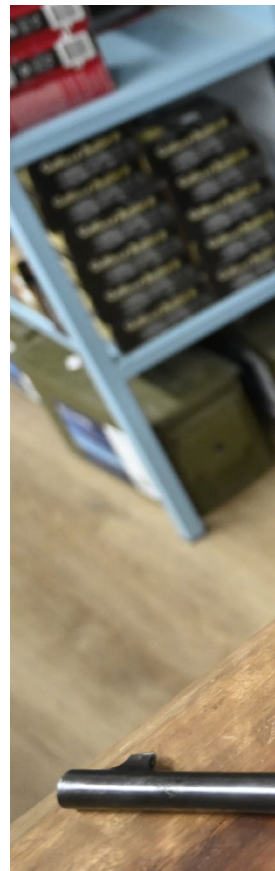
It was more popular in Europe than the US, where many custom rifles were built for the round on Mauser and Martini actions. Rifle and shotgun combinations were also chambered in 5.6x52Rmm (as the Europeans named the .22 Hi-Power) and several European companies made ammunition for the round.

The original .22 Hi-Power was loaded with 70-grain expanding and full-patch bullets for a velocity of 2770fps. It was designed as deer cartridge, a job it did remarkably well, though only Savage persisted and chambered it in six different Model 99 rifles. Winchester and Remington produced ammo for it, bullets being 0.288", an odd size considering .22 rifles all use 0.224" diameter projectiles.

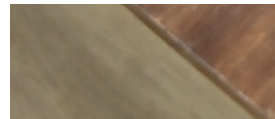
Due to the two-piece stock, accuracy was marginal yet hunters used it in Africa and Asia where they successfully took lions and tigers. Reports on its effectiveness were divisive and while it was a perfect small game round, it gained a reputation for failure on larger quarry. But tell that to the late Harry Caldwell, a Methodist missionary who shot several tigers with it, while big game hunter and author W.D.M. Bell's favourite round for Scottish red deer stags was the .22 Hi-Power. He used a custom-built Rigby based on a 98 Mauser action and also took many African buffalo with it.

And while not recommended for large game that made no difference to Pastor Caldwell, a writer, hunter and naturalist. He didn't see his interests of evangelism clash with his identity as a hunter, which was seen as nothing out of the ordinary in those days. He hailed from Tennessee where he grew up stalking and hunting deer and was an excellent shot. After being ordained as a missionary, Caldwell and his family migrated to Fujian, China in 1900 where they lived for 24 years. Sadly his work as a missionary was relatively unsuccessful, as many locals resented the intrusion into their cultural beliefs and only a handful attended his church.

Others were more interested in his adventures as a hunter. Prior to leaving home, Caldwell bought a .303 Savage Model 99 rifle with a supply of ammunition and also took a 12-gauge shotgun.



THE MODEL 1914 BREAKS DOWN INTO THREE SECTIONS FOR EASY CLEANING AND TRANSPORT.

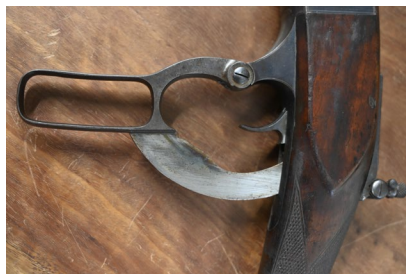


THE FRONT SIGHT HAS AN IVORY BEAD; A TANG APERTURE SIGHT WAS ON ALL EARLY MODEL RIFLES; THE PIVOTING LEVER OF THE SAVAGE ACTION IS STRONG AND RELIABLE; THE SAVAGE RIFLES HAD V-REAR AND TANG APERTURE SIGHTS, COCKING INDICATORS AND ENGRAVINGS.



SAVAGE MODEL 99

Savage produced more than a million Model 99 lever-action rifles from 1899 until 1979, including 25 variants in the Model 1892, Model 1895, Model 1899 and Model 1914. The original was available with a choice of 20-26" barrels and originally had a five-shot rotary magazine, though later models have a five-shot detachable. Savage chambered the .303 Savage, .32-40 Winchester, .300 Savage, .30-30 Winchester, .25-35 Winchester, .250 Savage., .22 Savage Hi-Power, .22-250 Remington, .243 Winchester, .308 Winchester, .358 Winchester, 7mm-08 Remington, .284 Winchester, .38-55 Winchester, .375 Winchester and .410 bore. The rifle also saw service in WWI. Early models had open or aperture sights, followed later with scope-mounting provision fittings, the 3X Weaver being favoured by hunters.



SAVAGE MODEL 1914

The Savage take-down Model 1914 was highly customised and shows excellent workmanship. To disassemble it the forearm is removed by a simple clip (like a shotgun), the lever pulled down and barrel removed with a half-twist. The rifle shown belongs to Clif Bertoldo who owns The Spring Loaded Gunshop at Mareeba in Queensland. The Model 1914 is fitted with a fully adjustable rear sight, a bead front sight and backed by a fully adjustable for windage and elevation aperture sight mounted on the tang. It has a five-shot rotary magazine, ammo and cocking indicator and deep checkering on the selected walnut stock. The original rifle came in a leather travel case.



CLIF BERTOLDO WITH HIS SAVAGE MODEL 1914 TAKE-DOWN CHAMBERED IN .22 HI-POWER.



THE ROTARY MAGAZINE ENABLED THE SAVAGE TO SHOOT SPITZER BULLETS, UNLIKE TUBE-FED LEVER-ACTION RIFLES; A SOLID BOLT AND LOCK-UP SYSTEM MADE THE SAVAGE THE STRONGEST LEVER-ACTION RIFLE OF ITS TIME.

So what set him apart from other missionaries? Firstly, he was a pioneering wildlife filmmaker and excellent photographer. His recorded footage and photos are rare historical documents of military, farming and daily village life in China between 1911 and 1949.

In 1924 Caldwell published his first book, *Blue Tiger*, which recalled adventures and challenges of hunting big-horn sheep, wapiti, wild boar and tigers. It was his skill in hunting the latter which endeared him to Fujian villagers who were under siege from the big cats, especially local farmers. He also wrote about surviving clashes between soldiers and bandits when villagers were caught between warring factions.

Caldwell once attempted to capture a 'blue-morph' Maltese tiger for science, though it proved too cunning and he eventually shot it. Tigers were plentiful in southern China at the time as was game, with the family living on boar, deer and smaller quarry. Older and lazy tigers, instead of hunting their normal prey, targeted people instead and acquired a taste for human flesh.

Not long after their arrival, the family heard about a girl who was killed by a tiger. Caldwell took his shotgun and despatched the culprit with buckshot at close quarters, paving the way for his legendary status among locals. He shot eight tigers with the .303 Savage and, when word got out, Savage were so impressed they sent a .22 Hi-Power Model 99 Featherweight rifle and supply of 70-grain soft-point bullets to China.

Soon after, a boy was killed and Caldwell hunted the killer armed with his new rifle, the tiger despatched with single shot to the chest at close range as it charged. The 1912 Savage catalogue featured a photo of Caldwell, the tiger and the Hi-Power. Yet he'd taken a high risk using the unproven rifle on the tiger and had no idea if the cartridge was up to the job. He later wrote the .22 Hi-Power was a better round for tigers than the .303 Savage, and he should know as he shot close to 40 with the rifle, all one-shot kills inside 30m.

Other hunters also shot big game with the .22 Hi-Power. Emily Parsons, married to a British Army officer stationed in India, was a keen huntress and remarkable outdoors woman. She took several tigers and leopards with the .22 Hi-Power and reported no second shot was ever needed.

And let's not forget Walter Dalrymple Maitland (Karamojo) Bell, a man who made a living from hunting ivory. He shot more than a thousand elephants, the vast majority taken with the diminutive .275 Rigby, also known as the 7x57mm Mauser. He was a fan of the .22 Hi-Power and wrote that he shot 23 buffalo with the rifle to feed hungry villagers. His book *Karamojo Safaris* is a rip-roaring tale of a boys' own adventure packed with sound hunting advice.

The introduction of the .220 Swift in 1935 was a blow to the .22 Hi-Power, Savage dropping it from production in 1941. Renowned American hunter Robert Ruark took four rifles to Africa, one a .220 Swift, his decision influenced by its similarity to



inside story
on the
Savage 99
lever action big game rifle

Model 99-J Featherweight . . . \$116.75
Model 99-K . . . \$113.65
Model 99-N . . . \$116.75

Exclusive rotary magazine and action are fully enclosed . . . loads and unloads quickly, easily . . . cartridges protected from dirt and moisture . . . balance the same no matter how many rounds in magazine. Unique cartridge count indicator shows number of cartridges in magazine . . . safety indicator tells instantly by sight or touch whether hammer is cocked.

Available in 3 great models (each drilled and tapped for popular receiver and 'scope mounts) and 5 great calibers: .250-3000 Savage, .300 Savage, .243 Win., .308 Win. and .358 Win. There are Savage, Stevens and Fox shotguns and rifles for every shooter and every kind of shooting. Write for free rifle or shotgun catalog, Savage Arms Corporation, Chicopee Falls, MA, Mass.

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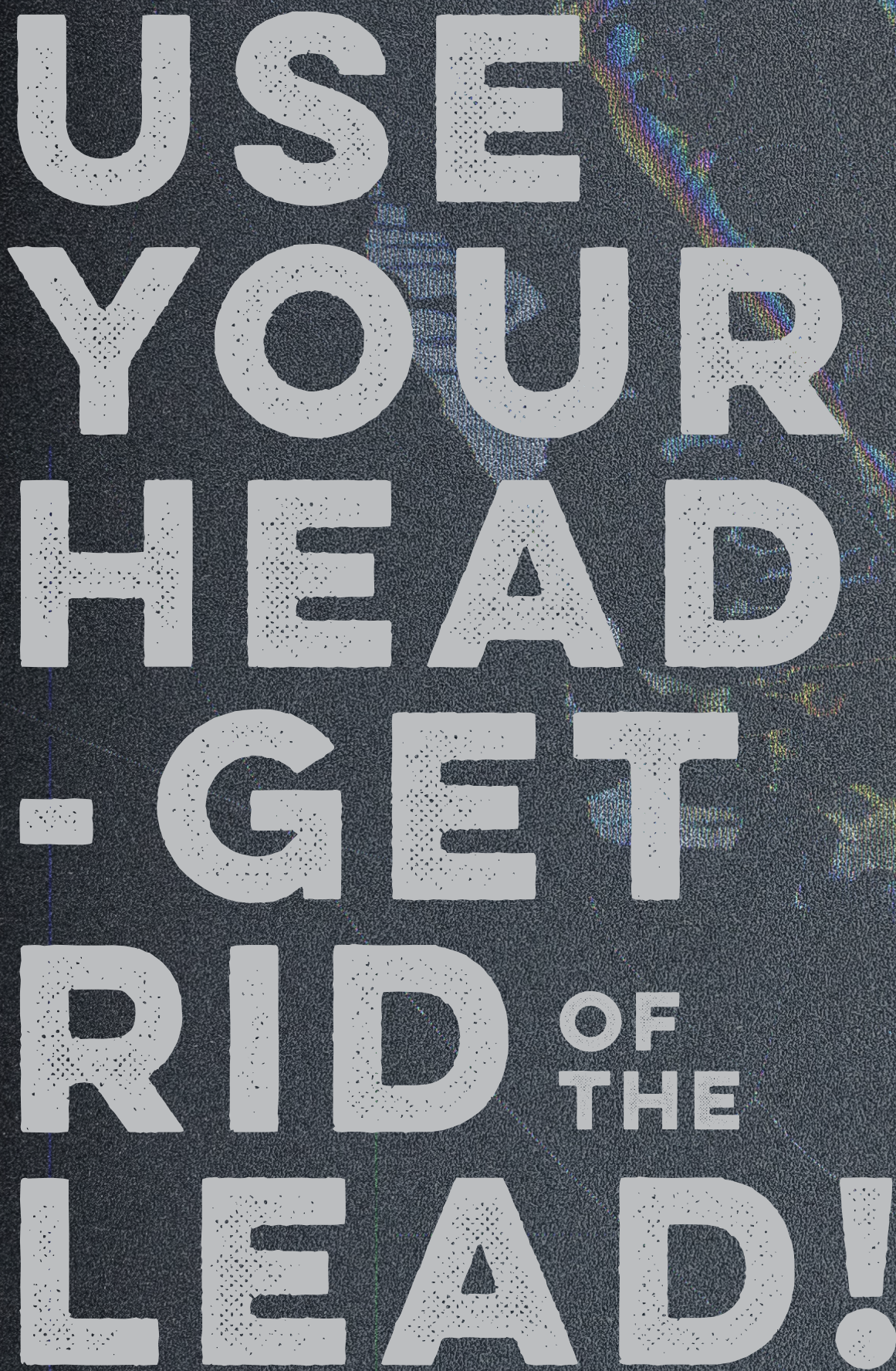
the .22 Hi-Power. Yet the more powerful Swift let him down, with bullets reportedly 'exploding' on the skin of animals or failing to penetrate.

So what set these two calibres so far apart? The .22 Hi-Power was purpose-made for light game with bullets having strong jackets designed for penetration. This was the same as current European loadings, which are successfully used there on deer and boar in rifle/shotgun combos and single-shots. By comparison, the .220 Swift was designed for long-range varmint shooting and fired lightly-built bullets, coupled with high velocity at more than 4000fps, which failed to penetrate.

Norma and Sellier & Bellot make 5.6x52R ammunition, while reloaders can neck down .30-30 Winchester cases using a 25-35 die, followed by a .22 Hi-Power die trimmed to a length of 2.045". You can mould your own and achieve good results by using gas checks, while custom-made copper-clad soft-point bullets are available from US firm Northern Precision (they make 70-grain bonded and non-bonded projectiles). Some Australian dealers stock Norman and Sellier & Bellot factory ammo, while .228" 70-grain soft-point projectiles and unprimed cases are also available from Europe.

It's of note that some later custom rifles were built with .224" diameter barrels instead of .288" for the .22 Hi-Power, so if you have a late-model rifle it's a good idea to slug the barrel to ensure you have the right projectile. Just another aspect of the fascinating .22 Hi-Power legend. ●

THE SAVAGE MODEL 99 WAS A POPULAR RIFLE IN ITS DAY AND IS WORTH A LOT MORE THAN EARLIER MODELS; HARRY CALDWELL SHOT THIS TIGER IN CHINA WITH WHAT APPEARS TO BE A DOUBLE-BARREL SHOTGUN.



USE
YOUR
HEAD
- GET
RID OF THE
LEAD!

WHILE THE CHANCES OF FALLING FOUL OF THE POINTY END OF FIREARMS ARE PRETTY LOW, DANGERS STILL EXIST WHICH COULD CAUSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS TO OUR HEALTH. AS SENIOR CORRESPONDENT ROD PASCOE REPORTS, SHOOTERS ARE EXPOSING THEMSELVES TO CHEMICALS SUCH AS LEAD AND OTHER EJECTED RESIDUES WITH LITTLE REGARD FOR THE ALMOST INVISIBLE RISK THAT LURKS.

We might automatically think of lead as being the obvious culprit when it comes to chemicals we're exposed to as shooters. Yet lead is only half the story. I spoke to an industrial chemist specialising in personal protection equipment (PPE), about how some chemicals are released into the atmosphere from shooting firearms then absorbed and stored by the body.

Frankly I found what he was saying scary as it showed that I, for one, have been ignorant of the potential risks throughout my shooting career. And it seems it's not just the action of firing a shot that stirs up dangerous chemicals, as some things we may have thought of as being safe are actually not good for us either. Read the warning label on any firearm cleaning solvent and you'll see what I mean.

As a casual range officer, I'd been routinely tested for blood lead levels as part of my employer's duty of care. I never heard anything after the tests and assumed 'no news is good news'. Right? Then following my latest test, again I heard nothing from my employer. Instead, I received a letter from the NSW Health Department stating I had a lead (Pb) level of 6.3 ug/dL or micrograms per decilitre.

As it turns out, in NSW at least, pathology labs are obliged to report elevated lead levels to Public Health Units. While my lead level only

just exceeded the minimum reportable level of 5 ug/dL, it was enough for me to think about what I have, or haven't, been doing for the past 55 years of shooting.

The letter went on to outline what steps to take and included an information sheet for 'Firearm and Ammunition Users'. As you can imagine this was a wake-up call. After talking with colleagues in similar circumstances, one pistol shooter who spends a lot of time on indoor ranges, had recorded a level of 14 ug/dL. Another, who manufactured lead projectiles, had lead levels 'through the roof' he told me. Exposure to lead can have serious and wide-ranging effects on the human body, particularly concerning the nervous system, organs and development.

When a gun is fired, it produces a cloud of dust and fumes made up of combustion by-products, metal particles and unburnt residues. These substances are not only toxic, like lead and carbon monoxide, they're also extremely fine, making them easy to inhale and difficult to detect without specialised equipment. Pistol shooters are particularly prone to chemical contamination as they're much closer to where gasses are released (at the muzzle).

Primer residue is more likely to be mixed with combustible gases from burning powder or, in the case of percussion cap and ball firearms, residue is released from around the cap and nipple. Combustion

AFTER THE SHOOT

Cleaning firearms is one of the highest-risk activities for lead exposure due to direct contact with contaminated surfaces and the potential to stir up fine dust. Consider the following.

- 1:** Wear disposable nitrile gloves.
- 2:** Wear a respirator or an N95 or P100-rated mask to avoid inhaling lead dust or solvent vapours.
- 3:** Work in a well-ventilated area and avoid cleaning in kitchens, bedrooms or living areas.
- 4:** Use lead-removing products like D-Lead wipes or cleaners to capture and neutralise lead particles.
- 5:** Never blow parts with compressed air as it spreads dust. Use damp cloths or lead-specific cleaning wipes instead of dry rags.
- 6:** Wash hands, arms and face with cold water and lead-removing soap.
- 7:** Clean tools and work surface with wet wipes and don't forget the floor of your cleaning area.
- 8:** Handle contaminated clothing and rags separately from household laundry.
- 9:** Store cleaning rags and towels in sealed bags until they can be washed or disposed of.
- 10:** Avoid cleaning where food is stored or children are present.
- 11:** Consider using a portable cleaning mat you can wash or wipe down.
- 12:** If you clean guns regularly (especially if you reload and shoot often), ask your doctor for a blood lead level test annually.



BLOWBACK RESIDUE FROM BREECH GASES ESCAPING REARWARD AND EMITTING PRIMER FUMES AND MICROSCOPIC PARTICLES.

tion residue from propellant, be it black powder or modern smokeless, typically produces particulate matter such as soot and unburned powder.

Modern single-based propellant contains nitrocellulose, along with double-based powder which includes the addition of nitroglycerin. These gases can be toxic or asphyxiating, particularly in poorly ventilated indoor ranges. Bullet fragmentation can also be released from the muzzle, as the exposed lead base of the bullet is heated from gas pressure, creating lead dust along with other components such as copper and zinc particles. The health risks include inhalation and ingestion of these heavy metals.

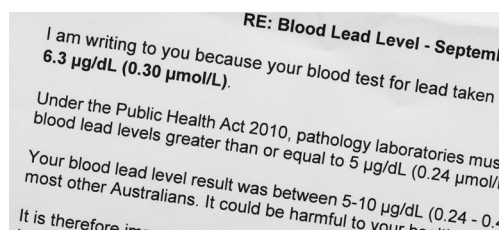
Fine particulate matter such as soot, unburnt powder and metal residue forms a cloud around the muzzle, with lung damage and chronic respiratory issues being obvious health risks. Blowback residue (towards the shooter) from breech gases escape rearward, emitting primer fumes and mi-

croscopic particles which contact the face, hands, arms and clothing. Eye and skin contamination is the main concern. Residue accumulates on hands and forearms, firearm frame and grip, ammo boxes and cartridge casings, clothing and gear.

These surfaces release secondary airborne particles during cleaning or handling, adding to the total exposure. Residue not only clings to firearm components including the muzzle, chamber and breech, but also shooters' hands and clothing, ejected cartridge cases, ammo boxes and other range surfaces.

Children are especially vulnerable, even at low levels of lead, as they absorb four to five times more than adults. Their developing brains are far more sensitive and can be a cause of lower IQ, behavioural issues such as hyperactivity and aggression, learning disabilities and developmental delays. In adults the list includes memory loss, cognitive decline and numbness, tingling or pain in the extremities. There's no safe level of lead exposure in children, according to the World Health Organisation.

Other parts of the body affected by contamination include the kidneys, as lead can damage renal function, especially from excessive or long-term exposure. The reproductive system can also suffer and in men can lead to decreased sperm count and abnormal sperm. In women, contamination can be responsible for miscarriages, premature birth or low birth weight.



PATHOLOGY LABS ARE OBLIGED TO REPORT ELEVATED LEAD LEVELS TO PUBLIC HEALTH UNITS.



PISTOL SHOOTERS ARE CLOSER TO THE CLOUD OF CONTAMINANTS.



RESIDUE ACCUMULATES ON HANDS AND FOREARMS, FIREARM FRAME AND GRIP, AMMO BOXES AND CARTRIDGE CASINGS, CLOTHING AND GEAR; AFTER SHOOTING, WASH HANDS AND ARMS THOROUGHLY WITH LEAD-REMOVING SOAP LIKE D-LEAD.

Lead is stored in bones and can re-enter the bloodstream, especially during pregnancy, lactation or with ageing. Lead interferes with haemoglobin production, potentially leading to anaemia. Acute lead poisoning (usually from high-level exposure) can cause abdominal pain, vomiting, seizures and even coma in extreme cases. Follow these tips to reduce lead exposure when shooting.

Choose outdoor ranges when possible. For indoor ranges, ensure there's modern HEPA-filtered ventilation flowing from behind the shooter towards the bullet trap. Avoid ranges with poor airflow or visible dust accumulation.

Choose lead-free primers and non-lead bullets (e.g. copper, frangible rounds). These significantly reduce airborne lead at the source.

Use PPE. Wear disposable nitrile gloves when cleaning firearms. Use respirators or masks rated for fine particulates (N95 or better) at indoor ranges if ventilation is questionable.

Do not eat, drink or smoke at the range. Wash hands, arms and face thoroughly with cold water and lead-removing soap (like D-Lead) immediately after shooting. Change clothes after shooting to avoid bringing lead dust into your car or home.

Store range clothes separately and don't wear them at home. Wash shooting clothes separately from household laundry. Clean gun bags and gear regularly with wet wipes or HEPA vacuums.

Clean guns and workspaces in well-ventilated areas. Use wet cleaning methods or HEPA vacuums. Never dry sweep or blow with compressed air, as this spreads lead dust.

Shooters who frequent ranges or reload ammo should consider regular blood lead testing, especially if symptoms like fatigue, irritability or headaches occur. Those who cast their own bullets or do it commercially, are especially exposed to lead contamination from breathing in particulates and by skin absorption from handling lead bullets.

Yet there is a brighter side to the story. The colleague I mentioned earlier with the elevated blood lead level of 14, has been following just a few of these recommendations to avoid lead absorption, including fewer visits to the indoor range and being more aware of his personal hygiene. His latest reading was almost half the previous one after just six months. There's no safe level of lead exposure, especially for children. Shooters, reloaders and range workers should take precautions seriously to protect themselves and those around them. ●

My trusty second in charge

LEON WRIGHT FONDLY RECALLS HIS 'NO.2' RIFLE

Our deer season was almost over for another year so we decided on one last hunt. The clover had all but gone to seed and seeing that was the main reason sambar were visiting my mate's property late at night, they'd decided to feed on the lush grasses lining the gullies and hillside instead. These were adjacent to the paddocks where we were waiting in the blind. By 8pm with still no movement in the paddock, we opted to head back to camp for a quick cuppa before venturing down to the other paddock.

About 50 metres from camp we stopped in our tracks, as we'd run slap bang into a small herd of sambar moving down the game trail, a customary honk alerting us to their presence. While my son-in-law switched on the handheld thermal, I quietly loaded the rifle and set it up on the shooting sticks. "There's three of them," he whispered and, after turning on the night vision, I took a

young spiker with a ridiculously easy shot before the rest bolted back up the hill.

Back at camp we sat around a small fire discussing our venture to the other paddock. A quick walk had us sneaking through the open gate, as a look through the thermal revealed a number of deer already feeding there. We wanted three sambar this trip so I lined up a big hind and fired. I knew the shot was good yet it bolted into the darkness, and it took a good half hour before we found it piled up in a nearby gully.

With two to our credit we headed back to camp and while my son-in-law brewed some tea, I headed across to the first paddock for a final look.

LEON'S MATE HADEN MACAULEY WAS ALSO AN ADVOCATE OF THE RUGER .300 WIN MAG FOR SAMBAR.





I spotted a big hind feeding along the bush line and quickly added it to the others, making that the three we were after.

The rifle I was using was a Ruger M77 Mk.II in .300 Winchester Magnum. I bought it in the late 1980s after losing a big stag while using another Ruger, that one in .270 calibre. You'd think it's easy buying a .300 Win Mag yet this wasn't the case as I'm left-handed and, around that time in the firearm world, left-handed rifles were pretty scarce. Sure, most gun shops advertised them, though it was a different matter when you tried to buy one, so eventually I had it freighted down from Brisbane.

Then while on holiday on the Gold Coast I tried to buy a Tasco 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ x5 variable scope to accompany the rifle. This too had been advertised in a shooting magazine just prior to my holiday, though had sold just an hour before I walked into the gun shop. To avoid missing out on a sale, the assistant took one off a 30/30 he had in the rack, so both of us were happy, he had a sale and I the scope I considered perfect for this rifle.

At the time we were hunting in north east Victoria and, while there were worthwhile numbers of sambar there, it was pretty wild country and any shot offered had to be close and probably while the target was on the move. Being used to running shots on game such as pigs this didn't worry me, though the wider ocular lens on the low-powered variable would be a definite advantage. As winters came and went I continued to find this choice of rifle and scope perfect for my type of shooting, verified by my strike rate on sambar.

Synthetic stocks were just starting to make an appearance on the hunting scene and, seeing as a gunsmith mate was attending a gun show in the US, I asked him to bring me one to replace the rifle's wooden stock. The synthetic one soon arrived and, while the Ramline proved a bit heavy, I was happy to persevere with it.

I hunted with that synthetic stock for a few years but never really liked it. Eventually it cracked just under the bolt handle, which gave me a good reason to get rid of it. In the meantime, a hunting mate I'd given my old wooden stock to

had sold it to a local gun shop. Luckily the shop still had it and I was able to acquire it for the same price he'd given my mate. I didn't lose any sleep over binning the synthetic stock as it was too heavy and too cold, so I put the whole thing down to experience.

It was around this time I had the urge to try a heavier calibre, not that I wasn't happy with the .300 Win Mag, I just wanted something different. After working through the pros and cons of various calibres, I settled on the popular .338, well proven on sambar. For a number of years we got along famously and, if I did my bit, the .338 certainly played its part, with a number of stags and plenty more hinds falling to it. I thought it was in the gun safe to stay until the cost of factory ammo starting creeping up.

Things eventually came to a head one day when, after exhausting my supply of ammo, I went to buy more and had a real shock. "That'll be \$102 mate," the salesman said. "I only want a box of 20," I told him. That was quite a few years back so goodness knows what the price is now. Reloading was out of the question so sadly it was goodbye to the .338.

Luckily I had the old .300 Win Mag barrel squirrelled away in the gun safe, so it was a simple matter of having it replace the .338 barrel and all was well again. I reasoned to myself that barrel had a good 60 per cent of life left in it, which should see me out as far as sambar hunting was concerned. I also had the muzzle of the barrel crowned just to make sure.

About this time the owner of a nearby animal park rang me up, asking if I'd take care of one of the buffalo bulls which had an argument with another bull and, after breaking out of its enclosure, took off. We found it the following day settled in a neighbour's farm dam, warily watching us as we approached. I had along the .300 Win Mag but was using PMC 180-grain ammo and wasn't really that confident in them. Yet as that was all I had at the time I thought it best to move in close just to be sure.

After sidling out the car I walked towards the beast, which decided I hadn't come for a friendly visit and headed off. At 40 metres it was an easy head shot and down it went, though it was quick to get up until an immediate follow-up shot finished the job and John had lots of buffalo steaks on hand.

...there's not much I haven't taken with the .300 Win Mag including a buffalo, sambar, fallow and red deer, donkeys, goats, pigs, foxes and wild dogs.

FOR BUSH-SHOOTING SAMBAR, LEON HAD AN OLD TASCO LOW-POWERED VARIABLE SET UP ON THE RUGER .300 WIN MAG; THE RUGER NOW HAS A 4-16X VARIABLE FITTED. INSET: THE RUGER .300 WIN MAG HAS A LIKING FOR FEDERAL 180-GRAIN AMMO.



THE RUGER M77 IN .300 WIN MAG HAS ACCOMPANIED LEON ON HUNTS FROM THE VICTORIAN HIGH COUNTRY TO NORTHERN WA.

Apart from continual use as my main sambar rifle, it accompanied my son and I on a camel hunt west of Lake Eyre, helping account for a couple of nice bulls during a different but rewarding hunt. An old mate living in WA owned the pet food company operating out of Carnarvon and invited me to join him on a hunt for camels and donkeys, which I eagerly took him up on. He also arranged for the property letters which allowed me to take the .300 Win Mag.

I'd never seen so many goats as we did while hunting the wild country associated with the Kennedy Ranges. The Ruger .300 Win Mag was naturally a bit heavy for goats but, as that's all I had, we made do. Yet it was perfect for the donkeys we encountered north of The Gasgoyne. Places like Meekatharra Station, Pyramid Station and others were unique properties we got to hunt, which made for a memorable experience.

When we started a bit of sambar control work some years back, the .300 Win Mag was the obvious choice. While I stuck with the Ruger M77, my brother splashed out and bought a Tikka T3, also in .300 Win Mag. I toyed with buying a thermal scope but settled for a Sytong night vision instead, mainly because attaching and re-

moving it to the scope was simple, leaving me with the rifle free for stalking. I also opened my wallet and replaced the old Tasco scope with a 4-16x variable Zeiss, which made for a good combination with the night vision.

I decided to have a muzzle brake fitted to lessen recoil when there was the need to fire multiple shots, which proved a smart move, as the .300 Win Mag is certainly not for recoil-conscious hunters. But if you can handle a bit it's a great round, especially when shooting over a longer distance. For me, 300m is a long way and I take such a shot very rarely.

When I look at the overall picture, there's not much I haven't taken with the .300 Win Mag including a buffalo, sambar, fallow and red deer, donkeys, goats, pigs, foxes and wild dogs. Overall I'm pleased I bought the Ruger M77 Mk.II in .300 Win Mag all those years ago as my No.2 rifle and, if you're wondering what my No.1 is, that's of course the Tikka in .22-250 Rem. ●



THE .300 WIN MAG WAS A GOOD CHOICE FOR TAKING DONKEYS IN WA; LEON'S BROTHER GREG AND SAMBAR STAG TAKEN WITH THE .300 WIN MAG.



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On the horns of a dilemma

DANIEL O'DEA LOOKS AT TOUGH CHOICES FACING NSW SHOOTERS

If you're a firearms licence holder and are resident in New South Wales, it seems in the very near future you'll be forced by the State Government to make what some might find untenable decisions: Namely, which guns to keep. Now to non-gun owners the following comparison may border on the ridiculous, yet to some firearms owners these decisions may feel akin to having to choose between which family members to discard.

Of course, I say this metaphorically and you might even ask how you can form attachment to an inanimate object of timber, polymer, metal and steel and that such attachment is purely emotive. In the same breath you could retort the decisions which have brought us to this point are based on that same imperative: No rational thought, just pure emotion.

It was famous US firearms instructor and gun scribe Col. Jeff Cooper of Gunsite Academy fame, who's said to have coined the term 'hoplophobia', defined as a morbid or irrational fear of guns or weapons. This is a term we should readily adopt as it aptly describes some politicians, whose hoplophobia is so extreme it extends to a fear of firearms which don't even exist (the NSW Government's now infamous Belt-Fed Shotgun ban to hold up as prima facie evidence).

Although by business I'm a licensed firearms dealer, I've a long history of ownership dating back beyond the two decades I've been so. As a SSAA life member, active member and volunteer RSO for St Mary's Pistol Club and avid hunter and landowner for primary production, I've shot and had involvement in multiple shooting disciplines.

For many years I was an active clay target shooter, becoming a life member of the Orange Clay Target Club. When I started writing more than 25 years ago for a rival publication, almost all my articles were hunting-related and many of the leading players in said stories were my personally registered firearms. Perhaps a lifetime in shooting would explain why the number of firearms I now own extends somewhat past the newly-proposed NSW limits.

Some in government loudly proclaim: "No-one can justify owning such numbers of firearms," yet like the mythical belt-fed shotgun, this only goes



to further express ignorance of the matter. As for the notion of 'taking guns off the streets', I'd love to know where they all are. You see, I've a good eye for such things and am sure I'd have noticed. With the exception of a broken air rifle rescued from a council clean-up as a six-year-old in the 1970s, I've never seen any 'guns on the streets'. Just like the imaginary belt-fed shotgun, it's nothing more than hyperbolic hoplophobia.

Every gun I own has a story. So which ones am I to dispose of? Am I to give up dad's old 'Three-O' he shot 26 bulls with at 1000 yards at the Queens Shoot in Liverpool in the 1950s? Perhaps the 8mm Rem Mag I hunted dusty red boars up the Kimberly with, or that Sako 30-06 I took my first real trophy red stag with? Maybe the 300 Wetherby I chased tahr and chamois with in the NZ Alps. Or the .308 I carried on many trips around Cape York years ago, along with the bag of tusks it took? And what about the several guns I've been bequeathed, left as precious keepsakes and memories from cherished friends now passed. I have several.



THE DISAPPOINTED SOULS
(1892) - BY SWISS ARTIST
FERDINAND HODLER.

On a personal note and something I rarely speak of. Many years ago I was having a rifle built on a rescued commercial Mauser action and the timing coincided with the birth of our first child, my daughter Rachael. I decided to have the rifle built for her in the hope that, when of age and if so inclined, we could hunt together and she'd have her very own rifle. It was engraved with her name, though tragically we lost Rachael at 12 months old to leukemia. It's not a firearm I use much but naturally it holds great sentimental value. To some that may seem silly, though I'm sure many would understand the attachment. Anyway, my firearms fall into four categories as follows.

TOOLS

These are guns I use on the farm, knockabouts, truck guns, respected and well maintained but I won't cry over any bumps or bruises. There are several across three categories (A, B and C) and all are used regularly for pest control.

COMPETITION

Both handguns, rifles and shotguns I own specifically to participate in competition disciplines I shoot either regularly or occasionally. Am I supposed to give up the ability to participate now and then in disciplines I don't frequent?



DANIEL SHOTS IPSC PRODUCTION, MULTIPLE PISTOLS REQUIRED IF SHOOTING MULTIPLE DIVISIONS IN THIS ONE DISCIPLINE ALONE.



PHOTO OF THE QUEENS SHOOT IN LIVERPOOL IN THE 1950S. DANIEL'S FATHER AND HIS .303 COULD BE IN THERE SOMEWHERE.

RECREATIONAL HUNTING

These are quarry and environmental specific rifles, chosen for targeting certain species in differing habitats. The rifle I take long-range hunting in the NZ Alps differs from the one I use in the Nyngan lignum swamp. When chasing rabbits I don't use my 22/250 heavy varmint for strolls around the paddock, that's the .22 Brno's job. Different roles or horses for course as they say.

HEIRLOOM AND SENTIMENTAL

As expressed earlier, be it part of your family history from fathers, uncles, grandfathers or grandmothers, bequeathed from an old mate etc. Many of these guns are seldom used, dad's old .303 gets the odd run on an Anzac Day shoot, yet they're held dear and cherished by their owners. To discard them is to destroy your heritage.

So what's next in this Orwellian nightmare: "Sorry, too many cars on the road. The road toll's unacceptable and we need to reduce the number of cars 'on the streets'. No-one can

justify owning so many, some have examples as fast as race cars (or 'dangerous cars'). As of tomorrow you can only have one, nothing over 2L in capacity, go-fast parts and accessories are banned from import, workshop manuals can't be downloaded from the internet. At some time, yet to be determined, we may buy back your now illegal vehicles, but no guarantee on what we'll pay or whether we'll compensate for spare tyres and fuel." That's the hand we've been dealt as law-abiding firearm owners.

A recent article I read from a well-known Canberra Think-Tank (he says ironically), which promotes itself as non-partisan but is stacked with Lefties and Greens, proclaimed with much hype a 'loophole' in gun laws, being that some self-manufactured number of recreational licence holders don't shoot regularly, this being a loophole to firearms ownership.

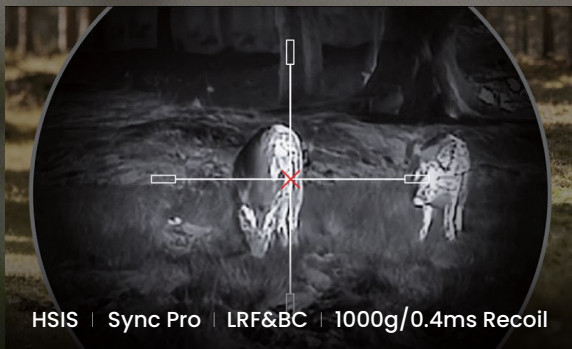
All well and good but how many own golf clubs and don't play regularly. Blunt force injury statistically kills at more than twice the rate of firearms in



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OPTICS





DANIEL'S FIRST .22LR, A SINGLE-SHOT ANSCHUTZ HE TAUGHT HIS KIDS TO SHOOT WITH; BUILT FOR SOMEONE SPECIAL.

Australia, so should we ban golf clubs too? I enjoy fishing and have a licence I've renewed twice since I last used it (too busy hunting). I've broken no laws yet should I be forced to sell my fishing rods?

As I write it's still early days, with a Bill passed but regulations yet to be finalised in NSW with other state and federal positions likewise not finalised. In NSW, calls for review of the new laws are to date falling on deaf ears but, just like a hangover, reality may be yet to hit home with parts of the Bill arguably unworkable.

For example, five back to two-year licence increase renewals by 250 per cent alone. For a firearms registry already working hard under previous workloads, what'll that mean? We can only hope sanity will prevail and an evidence-based approach will be taken. There's zero evidence that reducing licence terms from five to two years will increase public safety outcomes.

In similar vein and, to be fair, although much criticism has been laid at the feet of the NSW Firearms Registry post-Bondi, the fact remains we don't know how or why it came to be that a known associate (the father) of a known Islamic extremist (the son) was issued a firearms licence. Unfortunately, in lieu of transparency, conspiracy abounds.

As sceptical as we might be, we can only hope the upcoming enquiries and commissions deliver the required transparency. In the meantime it should be remembered the same registry in recent years delivered NSW licence holders Gun Safe. It's an online portal you could argue (up until recent events) was considered the gold standard in Australia for firearms management, having produced excellent outcomes in transacting between all stakeholders, something for which they should be highly commended. I for one hope the baby isn't thrown out with the bathwater in the forthcoming regulatory response.

By nature, Australian shooters are among the most law-abiding citizens, also arguably among the most scrutinized and maligned individuals in the country. Evidently it's much easier to scapegoat the firearms community than take on the core issue of dealing with radicalised sectors of society.

The only avenues open to we, the law-abiding, is to respectfully lobby the political class while remembering the disdain with which we've been treated by some at the ballot box. The news cycle moves swiftly these days, so the time for political apathy within the shooting fraternity has to be over. ●



ANOTHER STUDY OF DISSAPPOINTMENT BY FERDINAND HODLER. SOUL (OLD MAN) DISSAPPOINTED (1891). SAME, MATE. SAME.



Spot on!

CHRIS REDLICH GETS UP CLOSE WITH A ZT SPOTTING SCOPE

It was after my first hunting trip in the mountains of New Zealand more than a decade ago, I truly realised the necessity of a spotting scope. Now, with several Alpine trophies including a large NZ red stag proudly displayed in our living room, it's clear to me that without being able to examine horns or antlers through a spotting scope first, I may well have returned to Australia empty-handed.

A good set of binoculars should always be an inclusion for locating game, yet for taking a closer look at potential trophies, a spotting scope is just as important. Likewise, the latter lends a genuine advantage to anyone spending hours testing rifles and ammunition at long-range targets or simply sighting-in a scope much closer. My introduction to ZeroTech optics began almost seven years ago and, now that pleasantries have well and truly passed, it surprises me how they continually turn out new quality products aimed at all budget levels. Products made in China are sometimes stigmatised, though ZeroTech maintains rigorous quality control through its Australian R&D team. And with some of their higher-end gear also produced in Japan, the company has established a solid reputation for reliability and excellence.

The last ZT product I reviewed was their Trace HD and, while it was a great scope for long-range shooting, I didn't feel it was best-suited to hunting. I first laid eyes on the new Thrive spotter during a recent visit to Tasmania's largest gun store, the Sports Hut. A truly impressive place, they cater to all hunters' needs, including Thrive spotting scopes and I thought then that if I ever had the chance to review one, I'd jump at it.

SUE-ANN STANDS WHILE VIEWING IN THE HILLS DURING A HUNT.



That chance duly arose and, as per ZeroTech standards, the scope came in a well-presented padded box which included front and rear rubber lens caps, a lens cleaning cloth, shoulder strap and real nifty, zip-removable neoprene cover. The inclusion of this cover shows ZeroTech are serious about protecting their gear, which is intended for rough use on a hunter's journey. I like the way it can be unzipped so the scope can be used without complete removal.

This scope appears quite large at first glance, though not unexpected for a spotter with an 85mm objective lens. The increased field of view and light transmission from the big glass is a real advantage for tracking objects clearly at long range. In fact, the specs reveal a broad 33m field of view at 1000m on 20x magnification and 16m when wound out to its full 60x zoom, providing plenty of viewing window for tracking and observing game.

The tubular prism lenses combined with large multi-coated objective lens are intended to enhance image quality and reduce glare, which they do very well. A manual extender sunshade which sits as a sleeve over the objective, slides out squarely and will further reduce invasive glare.

The cylindrical magnification dial and centre focus wheel are large with chunky rubberised grip

lines. Both rotate firmly and combine to fine-tune images on varying zoom and ranges. Unlike some other brands the ZT Thrive is only available in an angle model. Now I've always found angle-style spotting scopes most practical for glassing in the mountains, though equally useful at the range when sighting-in rifles or testing ammo.

Unlike my Swarovski ATS spotting scope which has an interchangeable eyepiece, the Thrive's eyepiece is fixed. It has a twist-up eyecup which caters to three levels of eye relief and for those who wear glasses. The eyepiece sits at a 45-degree angle to the scope body's centre axis and is fully adjustable, while twisting a thumb-lock screw allows the rear eyepiece section to be moved and locked left and right, for viewing all manner of targets from all kinds of awkward positions.

I find this rotating feature particularly handy when shooting from a bench, which allows me to view my shots by simply leaning and looking, without the need to be directly behind or above the spotter. I've found this especially useful when glassing hills on a tripod, whether sitting or standing. The rotating centre piece also includes a standard camera 1/4-20 UNF metal thread for tripod mounting, while the opening on the neoprene cover allows the scope to be mounted completely unobstructed while remaining fully protected.

THE SPOTTER WAS COMFORTABLY POSITIONED DURING NUMEROUS RANGE TESTING SESSIONS.



I'm unclear of the exact materials used in tube manufacture, though it appears to be mostly polycarbonate with some smaller alloy and metallic components. I'm sure this was a decision taken to not only help reduce weight, but also building costs as well making the unit affordable and more appealing to the backpack hunter.

The scope exterior has a firm, rubberised protective coating, though this was my first time testing a new hunting optic which isn't advertised as fully waterproof. The specs reveal what's referred to as 'IPX5 rating' waterproof, which I'd best describe as water-resistant only. This means it won't handle being completely submerged though can tolerate water jets, so I reckon it'll cope with showers. Full submersion would be extremely rare in any case, though my advice would be not to drop it the drink or risk testing its fogproof ability in extreme conditions.

The Thrive is 425mm long, weighs just on 1.9kg and, not surprisingly, was much bulkier than my Swarovski ATS 65. Despite being proportionately larger however, it'll still tuck away comfortably in most mid-sized day packs. During an extended testing time it hitched a ride in my 25L pack, the same one I'd used many times in New Zealand. It did use a little bit more room though not enough to be a pain, and the 85mm

objective lens provided clear imagery with a noticeable increase in field of view, particularly when glassing targets at long range.

I found all adjustments operated well when fine-tuning in on targets whether stationary or moving. At full magnification, though not entirely unusual, was noticeable miraging which can have an adverse impact on image resolution. Not everything was negatively affected by this phenomenon though, as my ability to observe game remained consistent. Miraging was more of an issue on hot days, when trying to accurately read groups on paper targets at ranges beyond 150m.

It wouldn't make sense for me to compare the Thrive with optics like my Swarovski spotting scope, as they're not meant to compete at the same level as high-end European gear. However for a unit priced around \$699 at time of writing, it's highly appealing for anyone seeking good performance in its category, or perhaps a cheaper introduction to that first spotting scope.

ZeroTech have established a firm foothold in the Australian market and I enjoyed putting the new spotter through its paces regularly at the range and in the hills. As with all other ZT gear, the Thrive is protected by their robust 'Any Owner, Any Problem, Always Covered' lifetime warranty. More at zerotech.com.au or tsaoutdoors.com.au ●

NIFTY ZIP-REMOVABLE NEOPRENE COVER PROTECTS THE SCOPE FROM ROUGH FIELD CONDITIONS; EXTENDER SUNSHADE IS A MUST FOR REDUCING GLARE; THE CENTRE FOCUS DIAL AND ANGLE ADJUSTMENT KNOB MOVED AND SECURED WELL.

Go like a pro

NIGEL MATTHEWS ON SWITCHING FROM RECREATIONAL HUNTER TO PROFESSIONAL PEST MANAGER

Many conservationists (hunters) develop strong, practical field skills which translate well into professional vertebrate pest management. And the question many hunters eventually ask themselves is: Can I do this full time? The short answer is yes, however professional pest management operates differently from recreational conservation. While the foundational skills many hunters already possess are valuable, working professionally in pest control requires a broader understanding of safety, regulation, landholder needs and integrated pest management practices. Let's address some common queries about turning pro.

WHAT IS THE VPMA?

Vertebrate Pest Managers Australia is the peak body for professional vertebrate pest management technicians. The Association advocates for the professional pest management industry with government, works to improve regulation, promotes professional standards and supports members through networking, mentoring and industry representation.

WHAT WORK DO PROFESSIONAL PEST MANAGERS UNDERTAKE?

Professional vertebrate pest management is broader than many people realise. The industry operates across six main areas as follows:

- Ground shooting: This is the work most similar to hunting.

- Aerial control: Large-scale pest programs carried out from helicopters.

- Harvesting operations: Animals such as kangaroos, goats and deer enter regulated supply chains for meat or other products.

- Industrial and commercial pest management: Control of small and medium-sized pests on non-rural land such as warehouses, hospitals, airports, mines and other industrial sites.

- Animal welfare and humane destruction: Humane destruction of animals, often in public or residential environments.

- Baiting and Trapping: Large-scale or single animals.

I ALREADY HUNT PESTS. WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

The main difference is where you shoot and you can be paid for your work. SSAA members support conservation efforts in rural environments on private land with permission, while professional pest managers often work in more complex environments. These can include public and residential areas, peri-urban land, government land, industrial sites and infrastructure corridors. Working in these places requires planning, risk assessment and compliance with workplace safety systems.

I DON'T GET PAID, WE JUST 'TRADE'

Some people believe if money doesn't change hands it's not considered professional work.

THE RESULT OF A NIGHT'S RABBIT CULLING.



This is not true. Bartering shooting in exchange for fuel, ammunition, meat, access to land or other goods or services is considered a form of payment, which can create several problems. It may void your SSAA member insurance coverage, during both private activities and SSAA programs such as Farmer Assist, and may also place you outside the conditions of your firearms licence 'genuine reason'. In addition, you may now have obligations under work health and safety legislation. These under-the-table arrangements are always informal and problems only arise when something goes wrong. As many professionals say, it's never a problem until lawyers are involved - and invariably they are.

WHAT LICENCES OR TRAINING DO I NEED TO GET STARTED?

Requirements are state and territory dependent, though there are common elements across Australia. As a minimum, professional operators should hold AHCPMG304 (use firearms to safely and humanely destroy animals) or, if working in harvesting programs, AMPGAM303 (use firearms to safely and humanely harvest wild game) is also required. Both courses include accuracy and proficiency assessments most regular hunters will comfortably meet. Firearms licences should include contract shooting or professional pest control as a genuine reason. Each state and territory manages access to public land differently. Some do this through additional genuine reason categories such as business (non-rural), while others use permit systems for shooting on public land.

DO I NEED DIFFERENT EQUIPMENT TO WORK PROFESSIONALLY?

Usually yes, though many people start with equipment they already own. Professional operators often run up multiple identical platforms for different tasks. When working remotely or undertaking high-volume culls, having alternates to rotate through and spare rifles is common practice.

IF I BECOME A PROFESSIONAL CAN I USE CATEGORY C, CATEGORY D FIREARMS OR A SUPPRESSOR?

Becoming a professional pest manager can provide a pathway to accessing additional equipment, though it's not guaranteed. Applicants normally need to show they're operating as a legitimate business. This usually includes having an ABN, business bank account, insurance and professional presence such as a website. Different states apply these rules differently. Some provide clearer pathways for professional pest controllers, while others have stricter interpretations of



necessity. Becoming a professional doesn't automatically grant access to Category C, Category D or suppressors, though may provide a legitimate basis for an application.

IS PROFESSIONAL PEST MANAGEMENT FULL-TIME WORK?

For some operators it becomes a full-time career. For others it starts as a side business and grows over time. Demand varies depending on region, pest species, agricultural cycles, and government programs.

WHAT PAPERWORK OR BUSINESS REQUIREMENTS ARE NEEDED?

Professional pest managers normally operate as a company to reduce risk. This normally includes:

- Registering a company or, as a minimum, having an ABN.
- Maintaining professional public liability insurance.
- Operating under the correct firearms licensing conditions.
- Keeping work records and reports for clients.
- Meeting safety requirements such as risk assessments, safe work method statements and safe operating procedures.

For many hunters entering the industry, paperwork and compliance requirements are the biggest adjustment, while for experienced hunters, the field skills are often already there. The shift to professional work is less about learning to shoot and more about operating safely, legally and professionally in a highly-regulated environment. ●

• *Nigel Matthews is Director of Policy at Vertebrate Pest Managers Association of Australia*

AERIAL CONTROL FROM A HELICOPTER IS ONE ASPECT OF PROFESSIONAL WORK.



Alive . . . and kicking!

DEREK NUGENT TACKLES THE REALITY OF RECOIL

AS DIFFERENT AS YOU'LL
FIND RECOIL-WISE: THE
.22WRM (0.4FT-LB) AND
.45/70 (33FT-LB).

The law of conservation of energy was formulated in the mid-19th century and states energy can be neither created nor destroyed, only transformed from one form to another. This means the total amount of energy in a system remains constant over time. Recoil (or kick) is not only an unavoidable consequence of releasing a shot, it's an excellent everyday illustration of this scientific principle in action. When the trigger is pulled, the potential energy stored in the powder charge is released and transformed into kinetic energy, which in turn is used to accelerate and expel the projectile from the barrel of the firearm.

This energy/velocity outcome manifests Newton's third law of motion, which states that for every force there's an equal and opposite reaction. Therefore forces come in pairs and these action and reaction forces are opposite in direction. Thus recoil is the kinetic energy transferred to the shooter in response to the firing of a round. This rearward momentum experienced when a firearm is discharged, is caused by and matches the forward propulsion (momentum) of the projectile and gases.

PHYSICS IN ACTION

Also derived from Newton's third law, the law of conservation of momentum (1687) states the total momentum of a system remains constant if no external forces act upon it. Like energy, momentum is neither created nor destroyed, simply transferred between objects within a system during interactions like collisions or explosions. This means the total momentum prior to an interaction equals the total momentum after an interaction.

Take for example a game of pool. Every time one ball hits another, momentum is transferred. Exactly the same principle governs the phenomenon we shooters experience as recoil. In this instance the rifle, propellant and projectile are considered a combined yet 'closed' system. Prior to discharge the momentum of the system is zero. Once fired, the propellant exerts a massive force on the projectile, which in turn produces a significant amount of forward momentum.

Since the projectile gains momentum in a forwards direction, to conserve the total momentum of the system, the rifle must gain an equal amount of momentum in the opposite (rearwards) direction. This results in recoil as the net momentum of the system naturally reverts

to zero. Who knew we shooters were actually scientists at work?

Variables affecting recoil include the weight (and in some cases stock design) of the rifle, mass and terminal velocity of the projectile and mass and explosive potential of the powder charge. There are accepted formulas for calculating recoil if desired, which traditionally tends to be measured in foot-pounds (ft-lb). While all firearms recoil, some are so minimal as to go unnoticed. Others are so forceful that, in anticipation of a heavy hit, some shooters will develop an accuracy-destroying 'flinch'.

While each load is unique in terms of exact recoil energy generated, as a general rule the .223 and .243 at roughly 5 and 9ft-lb respectively would be rated as low recoiling rounds. The .270 at 17.6 and .308 at 18ft-lb would be deemed mild, while the .300 Win Mag, 9.3x62 and .45/70 all around the 31+ft-lb mark would be considered moderate rounds. Cartridges falling into the heavy recoil category are traditional 'safari' rounds like the .458 Win Mag and .416 Rigby and, as a point of interest, the .50BMG can recoil with a staggering, shoulder dislocating 83ft-lb of energy.

FEELING IT

Individual shooters will 'feel' recoil differently and thus have a different tolerance. Indeed 'free recoil' or the mathematically calculated energy transferred to the shooter can be very different to



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'felt recoil' which is highly subjective, being both a physical and psychological experience influenced by a number of external factors. Whether the recoil of a discharging firearm feels like a sharp punch, a 'kick from a mule' or a rolling push, is down to what's called recoil acceleration.

So in broad terms, a lighter weight bullet exiting a barrel like a bat out of hell will have a more resounding 'kick' or 'sharply felt recoil' than a heavier projectile travelling at a more sedate pace. In short, the quicker a projectile accelerates to its terminal velocity and develops maximum momentum, the 'sharper' the felt recoil.

A good analogy in this regard is to consider two vehicles sitting at a red light waiting to move off, say a Ford Mustang and Toyota Landcruiser. Both drivers intend to accelerate to a top speed of 100km/h. The Mustang driver elects to do this in 10 seconds and, as a result, the rapid acceleration jolts his passengers back into their seats. They experience or feel significant rearward momentum as the maximum legal speed is achieved.

By contrast the passengers in the Landcruiser, whose driver has taken 30 seconds to reach the same speed, are literally unmoved by the momentum acting upon them. Thus all recoil, particularly felt recoil, is the result of momentum. The forward momentum of the accelerating projectile is matched by the rearward momentum of the firearm and this is what's felt by the shooter.

RECOIL MANAGEMENT

This can be done in a variety of ways. Being confident and pulling the rifle firmly into the shoulder, so rifle and body become one recoil-absorbing mass (to 'roll' with the shot), is a handy hint. This also helps avoid 'Weatherby eyebrow', an injury caused when recoil forces a telescopic sight into the shooter's face.

An experienced-based appreciation of which shooting positions best promote an individual's confidence in, and control of a firearm, is also another adjunct to dealing with recoil. Using a good quality recoil pad, even if that means going aftermarket and replacing the factory standard one on your rifle, is another sensible proactive step. Many modern recoil pads use dampening materials and technologies borrowed from hi-tech sources like the aerospace industry.

A range of recoil reducers are also commercially available, all of which employ an inertia principle using a moving mass of weight within the stock to slow down and offset felt recoil. Some use mercury while others are mechanical. Muzzle brakes or porting a rifle's barrel will also reduce felt recoil, though the tradeoff is increased muzzle blast of up to 30 per cent, which may not be appreciated by



RECOIL IS MOMENTUM IN ACTION: BULLET MASS, ACCELERATION AND VELOCITY, A FUNCTION OF PROJECTILE AND POWDER CHARGE

your fellow hunters. These days, many manufacturers also provide a line of reduced load cartridges in order to address recoil concerns.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I'm reminded at this point of an old and very 'non-PC' one-liner which sometimes comes up in conversations with non-shooters. When inevitably asked: "What do you feel when you shoot a deer?", my deliberately flippant reply is: "Recoil!" The conversation at this point then goes in one of two highly predictable directions. Either the comment is recognized for what it is, a lighthearted witticism which is followed by a discussion on the virtues of game meat harvesting. Alternatively, I'll find myself on the wrong end of a stream of hysterical self-righteous rhetoric. Luckily I'm thick-skinned.

Speaking factually though, recoil is the physical manifestation of the interplay between energy, acceleration, momentum and the established scientific laws which govern them. In the end it is what it is: Unavoidable. If you're a regular user of firearms you just have to deal with it as best suits your preferences and abilities. As 'felt' recoil is a subjective phenomenon, significant degrees of tolerance naturally exist between individual shooters.

Yet there's clearly no merit in toting and shooting poorly with a shoulder-bruising calibre that's beyond your capacity to use effectively and humanely - our quarry deserves more respect. Take heart though as shooting off the bench is a far different experience to taking game in the field, as the psychological thrill of a hunt definitely negates the reality of felt recoil. ●



A MUZZLE BRAKE HELPS REDUCE FELT RECOIL; A QUALITY RECOIL PAD WILL HELP SPARE YOUR SHOULDER.

Top drop a lifetime in the making

Damon de Ruiten grew up in Tasmania and, because his mother had seven brothers and sisters, he had lots of cousins and plenty of uncles who all went shooting on weekends. And that's where, as a 10-year-old, he caught the bug.

Damon served his apprenticeship as a chef at Wrest Point Casino in Hobart, before travelling around Australia and eventually ending up in South Australia's Barossa Valley, where he's been involved in a few restaurant ventures. It was there he opened his first pizza cafe which he ran for 22 years, sourcing local ingredients and eventually launching his own wine label, Outlaw Wines, with its cellar door attached to the eatery.

In 2009 he beat 3600 competitors Australia-wide to be named the country's best pizzeria, collecting \$50,000 in prize money as well as a trip to Las Vegas to represent Australia in the world championships, where he finished a highly creditable seventh against chefs from 24 countries. He was invited back the following year to judge the competition.

During the Covid pandemic, Damon's café was one of the few Barossa Valley food outlets to remain open during lockdown, at the same time crushing five tons of grapes a year to supply wine for the cellar door. He eventually sold the café to concentrate full-time on production for Outlaw Wines, becoming the company's 'travelling salesman' to some of the most remote pubs and restaurants around the country. Four years on the road paid dividends for Outlaw Wines, which has gone from selling 200-300 cases a year to now around 1200 cases

For relaxation, Damon enjoys visiting his 600-acre block at Elliston on SA's Eyre Peninsula, where he shoots deer and goat for meat as well as culling foxes and feral cats. He also travels back to Tasmania every year, where he maintains the hunting connections with the cousins he grew up with. Now they're teaching their children the same skills to live off the land, including harvested meat from deer and kangaroo.

• More on Outlaw Wines on Page 88



DAMON DE RUITEN: LIVING OFF THE LAND AND SELLING IT BACK; OUTLAW WINES: GOING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH.

When one is enough

JOHN DUNN ON THE JOYS OF SINGLE-SHOT HUNTING

Of the myriad lessons my father taught me in those early hunting and shooting days, the one that's stuck most firmly in my mind is the first shot you get will always be the best one. He was right of course. The only rifle we owned at the time was a little single-shot Lithgow and he taught me to wait until a clear shot was available. That way you didn't waste ammo or wound any animals.

Like other young hunters of the era, I couldn't wait to grow up and own a good bolt-action repeater or self-loading rimfire which would allow me to shoot more rabbits faster. That had to be progress and eventually I owned and hunted with a wide variety of repeating firearms.

My hunting interests broadened and, more by proximity than design, I found myself in a job which involved pest animal control on both private and public land. Sometimes this included shooting pigs and goats from a helicopter, programs where numbers were important and repeating arms essential.

Through a contact I'd made at a national seminar of aerial shooting agencies, I was invited to have a short stint in the NT, culling buffaloes as part of the Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign. To this day I'm not sure if any of it made a difference, though it was pest control experience I couldn't have acquired anywhere else and I wasn't about to say no.

By the time I retired in the late 1990s I'd had enough of shooting animals in big numbers. I no longer enjoyed chasing pigs and goats and, some 30 years later, still have no real interest in hunting either species. Deer became my focus and, naturally enough, I went back to the basics the 'Old Feller' had taught all those years before.

For a long time I'd been steadily collecting and

occasionally shooting old single-shot rifles and to say they fascinated me would be something of an understatement. That evolved into single-shot hunting and before long I was back where it all started, albeit with better gear and not a repeating rifle in sight.

These days I only own single-shots, two No.1 Ruger rifles and a custom-built Model 1885 Low Wall Winchester in .22 LR. They're all I need for the hunting I still do and it's been a long time since I felt the need for anything more. If I can't take what I want with a single-shot rifle, having a magazine full of extra cartridges to call on isn't going to make any difference. And for that I have the Old Feller to thank.

HUNTING WITH A SINGLE-SHOT

This is no different to hunting with any other firearm type, except it can sometimes take a few precious seconds to arrange another shot. You still must find and stalk your game to within the certain range of whatever calibre your rifle's chambered for. Yet regardless of calibre, the rifle must be properly sighted-in, always on a paper target, working from a solid rest at a known distance.

First-shot accuracy is crucial to single-shot hunting, especially for those who load their own ammunition. And while it should be obvious, every new load must be range tested before it's used in the field. There are still hunters out there who believe hitting the big white rock on the other side of the gully a couple of times is all that's needed to sight in. If you're a responsible hunter, you must do better than that.

As a young rabbit hunter I was always taught to get as close as I could, an important consideration when you only had iron sights to work with. And even with the plethora of scopes available to the



ABOVE: SOUTH AUSTRALIAN RED STAG COLLECTED DURING THE RUT WITH A 50TH ANNIVERSARY RUGER NO.1 IN .308.

RIGHT: AN EDGE COUNTRY SAMBAR SPIKER SHOT FOR MEAT WITH A CUSTOM NO.3 RUGER IN .35 WHELAN; A SAMBAR HIND TAKEN FOR MEAT WITH A NO.1 RUGER IN 7X57 MAUSER; A CHITAL STAG AND .38-55 REMINGTON HEPBURN RIFLE (NOTICE THE TANG SIGHT).





A BUFFALO COW WITH WIDESPREAD HORNS, TAKEN WITH A PEDERSOLI HIGH WALL REPRODUCTION RIFLE IN .45/70; ARNHEM LAND AND A BANTENG BULL. THE RIFLE'S A THOMPSON CONTENDER IN .30-06; COLLECTING A FEED OF BUNNIES WITH A CUSTOM 1885 WINCHESTER LOW WALL IN .22 LR.

modern hunter, that still applies. Shooting game at long range might be great for stroking your ego, but the closer you get the more you can see and the better chance you have of making the shot a good one. Regardless of size, every animal must be taken as humanely as possible. Clearly identifying a target has long been a basic hunting maxim, made all the easier by having a good scope.

At his best, the Old Feller could be quite pedantic about waiting for a clear shot to present. He could see no sense in body-shooting a bunny in the shadows of the ferns, when there was a chance it might stick its head up or hop out into the clear if you waited.

Though it sometimes tries your patience, waiting also provides other opportunities. If hunting meat, you can choose the best animal to target. If you're after a trophy, you have time to check if that stag, buck, bull or boar is one you really want.

When working edge country there've been a few times over the years where I've been waiting for a sambar stag to show more of himself, only to have another, bigger animal appear. It doesn't happen often but when the hunting gods smile it can. That said, there've also been times when the animal I was watching simply faded back into the bush without presenting a shot. That's the chance you take.

Early on I was taught to use a rest wherever possible, be it the limb or trunk of a tree, a fencepost, shooting sticks, bipod or your day pack draped over a rock. While good offhand shooting on the range is an acquired skill, I try to avoid it in the paddock except as a last resort. Even today I'd rather pass on a shot than run the risk of wounding and losing an animal.

By now the reader can hopefully see hunting with a single-shot rifle really is no different to

hunting with any other type of firearm. Having just one shot readily available when you start proceedings is more of a mental issue than an actual problem. With practice, you learn to have confidence in your gear and yourself and these days I can't imagine hunting any other way.

Down the years I've collected all the common small game species with a single-shot rimfire. With medium bore centrefires I've shot goats and pigs, as well as three 'grand slams' of Australian deer. I've also taken my share of bigger animal such as buffaloes, banteng cattle and scrub bulls without any problems.

Looking back at more than 30 years of dedicated single-shot use, I can only recall losing three animals, two of which were later recovered. Sometimes a second shot has been required, yet that happens with repeating rifles too. Paradoxically, I know many hunters who are quick to brag about having needed only one shot to take some animal or another. When that happens, I like to ask that if they can do that with a bolt or lever-action, why can't they do the same with a single-shot rifle? Most don't have an answer, nor do they need one, as we all hunt the way we hunt because that's the way we like it.

I have friends who enjoy giving me stick about hunting with my single-shot rifles. A few are recidivists who tried it and went back to their old ways, others just like to stir. Either way, it's water off a duck's back to me. I've hunted as much or more than most of them and know what I can do. Experience has shown me there are more times than not when one is enough. ●

FROM THE
**SHOOTER
ARCHIVES**

This month our time machine takes us back to the *Australian Shooters' Journal* of December 1981 and a cover story dedicated to the one and only Marion Michael Morrison or, to give him his Hollywood moniker, John Wayne. Clearly a fan of 'The Duke', Heinz H. Raz penned a comprehensive tribute to Tinseltown's legendary shooter, who appeared in more than 80 'Westerns' and had several rifles and commemorative collectors' items made in his honour. The second part of the article will appear next month.



FOREWORD:
ALLAN BLANE

WORDS:
HEINZ H. RAZ



THE day was May 26th, 1907. The place Winterset, Iowa, U.S.A. He was only minutes old when Clyde Morrison cradled his son in his arms. Squirring and using his lungs to be heard, Marion made a fist as though to strike out at the world. The new father smiled proudly. "Mighty pair of lungs you got. And look at those fists...wouldn't surprise me a bit if you turn out to be a prizefighter some day." Almost by instinct the infant reached for his father's hand and clutched his thumb so tightly that Clyde Morrison was startled by the strength of those tiny, yet already strong fingers. Little Marion simply wouldn't let go. With tears of joy in his eyes, at his son's strength, Clyde whispered: "You've got the makings of a great man". Those were prophetic words. Iowa was a country fit for the likes of a boy with sturdy lungs and a grip of steel. How sadly ironic that one of those lungs, fifty-six years later, would be riddled with cancer and for the rest of his days Marion Michael would have to function with only one lung. Young Marion thrived on Iowa's rugged winters, the impassable snow and the bitter, below zero degrees temperatures. He developed an appetite like a horse and grew up to be a fearless kid. He had to, with a name like Marion. Marion is not exactly a "manly" name, but few of the neighbourhood kids dared even to imply that the Morrison kid had a girls name or that he was a sissy. Marion learned at an early age to look after himself and if some foolhardy soul made fun of this name, he would find himself flat on his back. When young Marion was five his parents sold their little pharmacy in Winterset and moved for health reasons to a warmer and dryer climate. The Morrisons settled for Lancaster, California, a town near the barren Mojave desert. Here Clyde leased a small farm and found that this new lifestyle and climate was like medicine and restored him back to radiant health. Within a year or so he was able to give up homesteading and moved to Glendale, California, where he opened another pharmacy.

AUSTRALIAN SHOOTER'S JOURNAL/DECEMBER 1981 45

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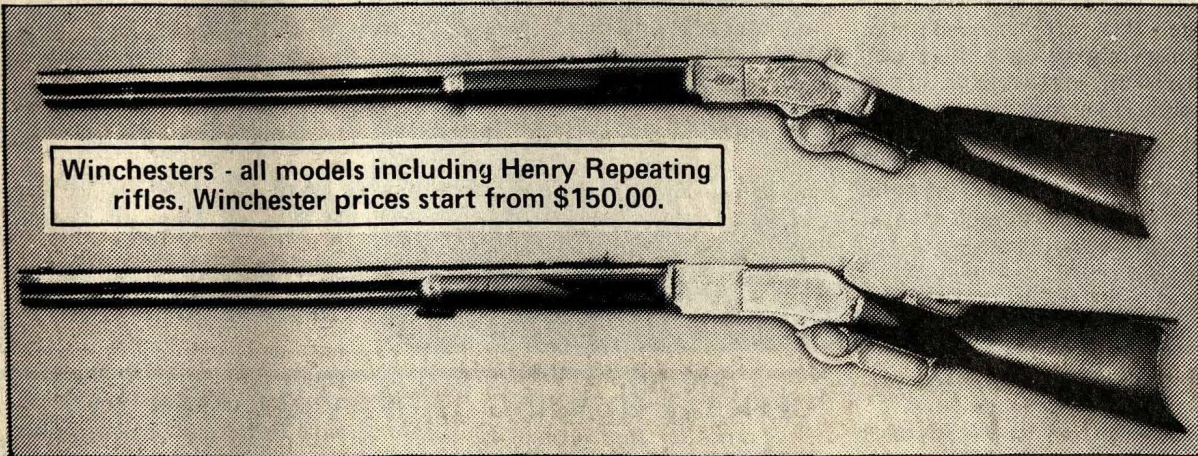
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Young Marion also enjoyed his new surroundings and liked to wander all over town with his dog Duke. One of his favourite stop-offs was the local firestation and the firemen soon looked forward to the boy and his dog's daily visit. They liked the big dog especially and soon nicknamed young Marion 'Little Duke', a name which stuck with the boy for the rest of his life, only the 'Little' became 'Big' and eventually just Duke.

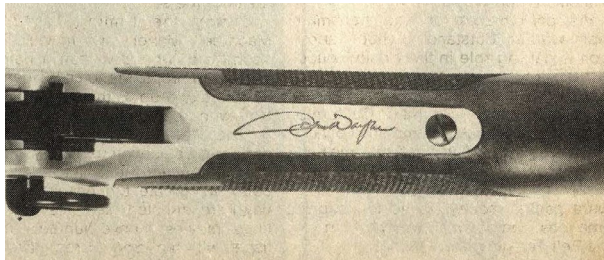
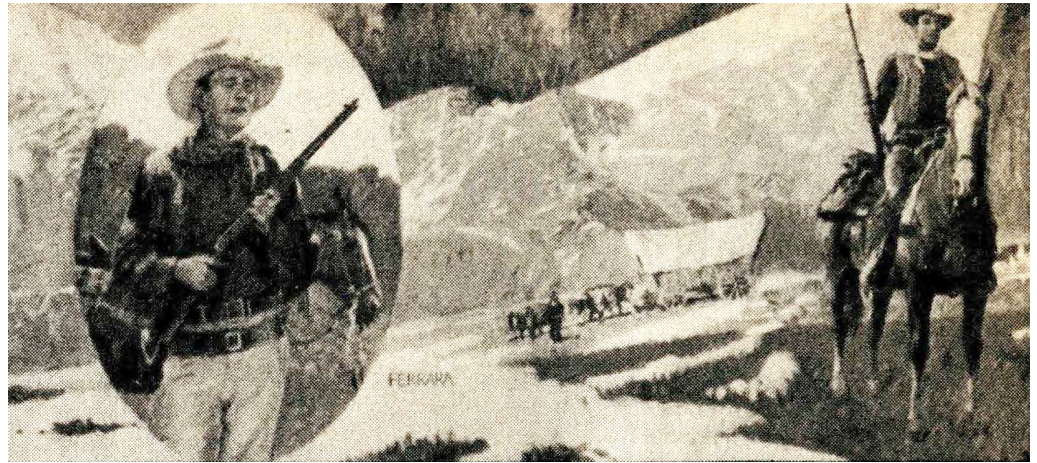
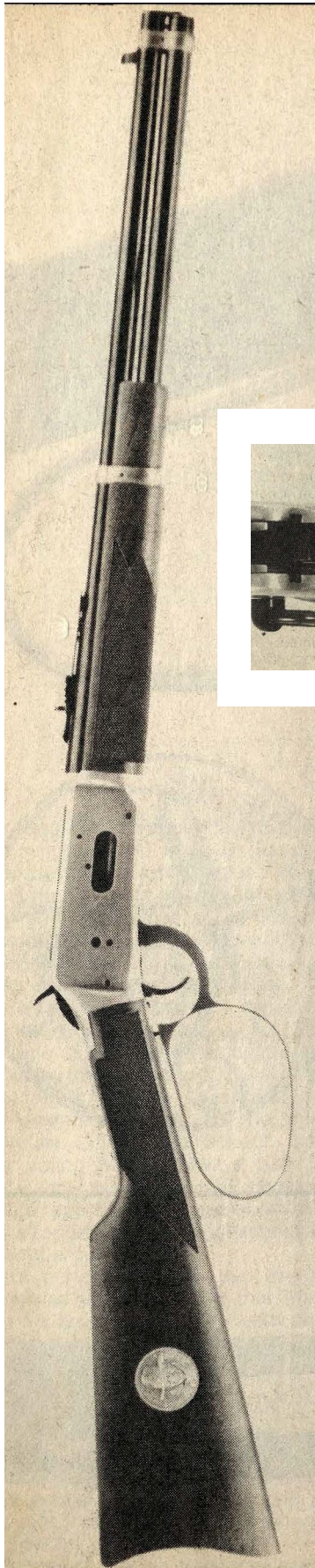
During the autumn of 1921 two significant things happened in the Duke's life. His parents separated and he entered Glendale Union High School. Seeing that young Marion always had been crazy about playing football, he was the first

to report and because of his height and strength made the school team without any problems. His performance on the freshman team was so outstanding, that Marion won a starring role in the varsity squad in his sophomore year. By the time he played his last game as a senior, his team had won the Southern California Scholastic Football Championship and the University of Southern California had offered him an athletic scholarship.

Whilst studying at the USC he needed extra pocket money so he found part-time jobs, one of which was working for the Bell Telephone Co. At the end of his freshman year at USC he received news from the Phone Co., informing him he no longer had a job.

Just about this time the Hollywood movie industry started to become a legendary talking point, and some of the early stars of the silver screen were also keen supporters of their local football team. Tickets for the finals were often sold at black market prices and some of the players made extra money by selling them to the stars, who in return were glad to see the game without having the hassle of big crowds at the gates.

Marion's coach remembered he'd looked after Cowboy star Tom Mix on behalf of the Duke, and connected the actor to help get a part-time job at the studio for the out-of-work football player. The job itself sounded important, but all it meant was Marion would carry furniture and props around and arrange them on the set. During the filming of *Mother Machree*, Marion met movie director



John Ford, who gave him a hard time setting up props. Marion's temper flared and he stood up to this already famous Hollywood personality.

"That was the beginning of the most profound relationship of my life," the Duke explained later, "and I have little doubt the greatest friendship. Since that day Ford directed me in several of my finest movies. I have hunted with him, fished with him and shared many a bottle with him. Were it not for my good friend John Ford's belief in me as an actor, I think I'd still be playing cowboy sheriffs in third-rate Westerns."

After playing a few bit roles, the Duke's first big chance came in 1930 when he was given the starring role in the film *The Big Trail*. After shooting of the movie was completed and the last rushes taken to the viewing room, the art department brought in its can of film bearing the film's titles. Among those watching the screen that afternoon was Winfield Sheehan, head of production at Fox. When he caught sight of the name Marion Michael Morrison in the leading trailer, he leaped out of his seat.

"What kind of a name is that for a dauntless he-man of the early West?" he roared. "We can't let that get out to the public. They'll laugh us right out of every theatre". Next morning Sheehan called Duke to his office. "That name of yours," he said, "it's gotta go. We can't work with it. It's the wrong

sound". "What's wrong with my name?" the Duke asked, "had it all my life and proud of it too."

"You don't look like a Marion Michael Morrison", Sheehan said. "What do I look like?" Duke wanted to know. "You look like a John Wayne", Sheehan replied, "and that's what you're going to be from now on - John Wayne."

There's a lot more to John Wayne's life story, but I feel it's not appropriate to recount it in the pages of a shooting publication. I've been a John Wayne fan ever since I was allowed to go to the movies. When I learned of his death I was deeply saddened. It was like losing a friend, yet I never met the man personally.



One could almost say John Wayne lived by the gun. The majority of his movies were Westerns and the Duke never had a Colt or Winchester far from his reach. Even in his personal life guns played a big role. He was a keen hunter and enjoyed taking time off from filming on location to shoot one of his favourite rifles or pistols. Wayne had a large

private collection of firearms, many of which were priceless antiques and rare collectors' items. Once, whilst on location, robbers broke into his Newport home and stole most of this collection. Luckily it was later recovered by the Mexican authorities and the Duke enjoyed owning his prized guns to the day of his death. ●



AGE IS NO BARRIER
I recently joined Goulburn Clay Target Club at SSAA Goulburn in New South Wales, where I overheard a conversation between one of the veteran shooters and another new member. The new member remarked: "Jeez, you don't miss do you?" The veteran, who I only know as 'Frosty', laughed and replied: "I've been shooting since I was 26 and I'm 86 now. I should have some idea of what I'm doing!" For me hearing that, it just shows how long you can remain active and competitive in this sport. Sixty years of shooting and he's still competing at 86. An absolutely outstanding effort.
Iain McKay, NSW

10,821 DAYS LATER . . .
Australia's firearm laws delivered 10,821 days without a mass shooting between the Port Arthur and Bondi Beach tragedies - almost three decades. Yet following Bondi, legal and responsible firearm owners are again under attack for failures which lie squarely with governments and criminal networks.
The evidence is clear: Registered firearms and licensed owners contribute minimally to gun violence. More than 90 per cent of firearms used in homicides are unregistered and their owners unlicensed. The almost nightly shootings plaguing Sydney and Melbourne stem from illicit firearms linked to organised crime, drug trafficking and a legacy 'grey market' of undeclared firearms from the 1996-97 buyback.

Australia's gun death rate has fallen from 2.9 per 100,000 people in 1996 to less than 1 per 100,000 by 2018. The post-1996 framework of licensing, registration, buybacks and storage rules has effectively prevented high-casualty events. Yet these laws have failed to eliminate the entrenched illicit market supplying persistent urban shootings.

Tasmania Police's recent seizure of 40-plus firearms and 250 kilograms of ammunition, demonstrates existing laws work. The problem isn't legal ownership, it's the illicit market fed by grey market weapons, theft, illegal imports and emerging threats like 3D-printed firearms.

Tasmania's open gun amnesty has highlighted a buyback scheme isn't required. Critics point to four million registered firearms with

manufactured hysteria, yet overlook 10 million additional vehicles registered since 1996 which cause daily deaths and injuries. There's no similar outrage on these despite millions spent on road safety.

Registered gun numbers have risen while overall household ownership has declined. This means fewer collectors own multiple firearms, hardly constituting a public safety crisis. In reality it says the opposite. Knife violence exceeds firearms in many robbery and assault statistics. Where guns appear in city crime, they're typically handguns and sawn-off firearms from the illicit market, not registered sporting rifles.

The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission identifies illicit market's sources: Historical grey market firearms, theft from licensed owners and dealers, domestic manufacture, illegal imports and poor record-keeping around interstate transfers. These are the issues government action should target.

Three decades after Port Arthur, governments still haven't delivered a national firearms register. Policy must focus on reducing theft from lawful owners, citizenship for registered gun owners, increased penalties for unregistered firearms, accelerating the national register, targeting organised crime armouries and adapting to ghost guns and 3D-printing threats.

Blaming legal firearm owners for gun crime is politically convenient on many fronts but factually bankrupt. The real challenge lies with illicit firearms and failure to address their sources over the intervening 10,821 days.

Philip Pyke OAM
Retired Army officer who also served at Port Arthur with Tasmania Police in 1996

THE PRICE AIN'T RIGHT
I've just been re-reading Daniel O'Dea's review of the Zastava M70 in the old February 2012 edition of *Australian Shooter*. A very good review and, at the time, a bargain for an all-steel and walnut rifle, just like the good old days. Exceptional value at \$650, especially considering the distributor then was Berretta, who are not renown for bargain prices.

Then in the May 2025 edition of the magazine, Con Kapralos did an updated review on the very same ri-

fle, though it seems the quality level has gone down and the price has sky rocketed, now with an RRP of around \$1990. I should've bought one on the strength of Daniel's review all those years ago. I did actually enquire with Owen Guns who wanted \$950, which I thought was still a bit steep. Anyway, enjoyed re-reading that old review.

Ross Allanson, via email

• Hi Ross, glad you enjoyed the review. The pricing is somewhat of a mystery, too many variables to point to any one thing but a lot has happened in 14 years. Beretta are a huge global player with significant buying power and I do recall it being a great price at the time. I also recall our dollar was running parity with the US, that's \$1 for \$1 instead of today's 60c, so there's a large part of it there.

Lastly, European arms manufacturing is pretty busy at the moment as the neighbours are a little restless, so I'd say the focus is on military rather than civilian manufacture over there. And unfortunately for other reasons, there may be some bargains coming up in the months to come related to law changes, if you're still in the market.
Daniel

GOTTA HAND IT TO HIM
I write to congratulate you on the latest edition of *Australian & New Zealand Handgun*. I read and enjoyed more articles in Issue 24 than in any previous issue. I particularly appreciated two of Rod Pascoe's offerings, namely 'Getting it right first time' and 'A sight for old eyes'.

Rod's generosity in sharing years of experience to encourage people to become involved (in the case of the first article), or to remain involved (in the case of the latter) are a great contribution to the sport we both love. Practical, well written, non-judgemental and helpful pieces. Well done Rod.

Kyle Pearson, via email

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National

Combined Services National Postal Shoot

January 1-August 24, 2026
 Program: Rifle: Event 1 3P core event Match 1: Standard Rifle (Graded); Event 1 3P core event Match 1: IOC Rifle (Open). Pistol: Event 1 3P core event Class 1 Handguns (Graded), Class 2 Handguns (Graded), Class 3 Handguns (Open) as specified in Combined Services Rule Book No. 4. Three classes may be entered. Scan and email cover sheets and score sheets to combined-services@ssaa.org.au Full details on National website. Contact: Steve Knight at above email address.

Muzzleloading and Black Powder Cartridge National Championships

June 6-8, 2026
 SSAA Monarto, SA
 Program: Friday, June 5: Practice. Saturday: Handgun, Musket and Vetterli matches. Sunday: Rifle matches Class 1 (Military), Class 2 (Traditional), Class 4 (Flintlock). Monday: Rifle matches Class 3 (Open), Cartridge Rifle and Shotgun (Percussion and Flint). Full event details on National website. National medals for first three, perpetual trophies for each class. Facilities: Limited camping and caravan on range, drinks on sale, kitchen in clubhouse, barbecue Sunday and Monday night. Contact: Michael Nicholas 0467 763 716 or nicmy002@gmail.com

BPCR Silhouette National Championships

June 18-21, 2026
 Monarto Silhouette Range, Para, SA
 Program: June 18: Set-up and practice. June 19: 40 shots Smallbore iron sights. June 20: 40 shots BPCR iron sights. June 21: 40 shots BPCR any sights. Facilities: Camping available at range, barbecue Saturday night, limited canteen. Contact: John Visnyai johnviz@hotmail.com or 0421 117 391.

SSAA 2026 National Junior Challenge

July 9-12, 2026
 SSAA Majura, ACT
 Program: Thursday, July 9: Practice; Friday: Silhouette Rimfire, Cowboy Lever Action Silhouette, BR30 (time permitting); Saturday: 3P Rimfire, Introduction to Western Action, catered roast dinner and games; Sunday: Field Rifle Rimfire, presentations. See National website. Contact: junior.development@ssaaact.org.au

Precision Target Pistol National Championships

September 18-20, 2026
 Springvale Range, Vic.
 Program: Friday: Practice, Any .45 Pistol - 900 match. Saturday: Any Rimfire Pistol - 900 match, Any Revolver match, Distinguished Revolver. Sunday: Rimfire Mayleigh match, Any Centrefire Pistol - 900 match, CMP Service Pistol. Full details on National website. Facilities: Canteen Saturday and Sunday, no camping. Contact: Susan Summers 0438 709 524.

Combined Service National Championships

September 18-20, 2026
 SSAA Narrogin, WA
 Program: See National website for full event details. Prizes: Medals for all pistol and rifle events, team events, top gun and top gun junior. Facilities: Contact Narrogin branch. Event contact: Ray Smith 0428 921 249 or narrogin@ssaa.wa.org.au

Air Rifle Field Target National Championships

September 26-28, 2026
 Majura, ACT
 Program: Saturday: Practice. Sunday: 100-shot Open Air Rifle FT (2x50). Monday: 50-shot Open Springer Air Rifle FT. Full details on National website. **As SSAA Qld has been suspended from National Association, you must be a member of nationally approved body in order to compete at National Championships.** Prizes: Medals in all grades including juniors and teams. Facilities: On-site camping \$10 per adult/day, no fires, basic canteen. Contact: Chris Dale 0418 255 874 or fieldtarget@disciplines.ssaa.org.au or Darius Krivanek 0418 103 360 or dariuskrivanek@gmail.com

Practical Shooting Handgun National Championships

October 3-4, 2026
 Hill Top Complex, Wattle Ridge Rd, NSW
 Program: Friday, October 2: Range Officer match. Saturday-Sunday: National Championships. Contact: Paul Fitzgerald practicalshooting@disciplines.ssaa.org.au

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

SA

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

Fly Shoot State Championships

July 9-12, 2026
 Monarto Shooting Complex, SA
 Program: Thursday, July 9th: Bench draw available; Friday: Flag set-up; Saturday, 9am: Centrefire 500m Fly five-target; Sunday, 9am: 200-yd Rimfire Fly five-target. Facilities: Barbecue, camping (limited sites with power), hot showers, toilets, cooking facilities. Contact: Pat 0455 280 024.

Black Powder Shotgun State Championships

September 20, 2026
 Long Gully Rd, McLaren Vale, SA
 Program: Breechloading Shotgun, Percussion Shotgun, Flintlock Shotgun. Nominations: \$10 per event, \$7 barbecue lunch. Contact: 0412 574 444 or secretary.srbpc@gmail.com

Black Powder Pistol State Championships

November 14, 2026
 59 Peel Rd, Currency Creek, SA
 Program: 10.30am 25m Class 1 Revolver Precision, 11.15am 25m Class 1 Revolver Timed, 1pm 25m Class 2 Precision Pistol, 1.45pm 25m Class 3 Revolver/Pistol (Open), 2.30pm 25m Firelock Pistol, 3.15pm 25m Class 3 Revolver/Pistol (Open). Nominations: \$5 per event (maximum \$20), barbecue lunch \$10 or \$5. Contact: secretary.gpasc@gmail.com

Vic

Lever-Action Silhouette State Championships

September 24-27, 2026
 Eagle Park, Vic.
 Program: Thursday 24: Practice and set-up; Friday: 80-shot rifle; Saturday: 80-shot pistol; Sunday: 80-shot rimfire. Contact: Mark Butler 0409 135 740.

WA

NRA & Scoped Air Rifle State Championships

August 1-2, 2026
 Bedfordale, WA
 Program: Saturday: 10m Scoped Air Rifle, 10m Scoped 3P Air Rifle. Sunday: 50m NRA Rimfire Rifle. WA State Junior and Open records are eligible to be broken in this event, as are Junior and Open national records. Facilities: Refreshments, food, tea, coffee on sale at clubhouse, dinner on Saturday night \$35 per person (RSVP to secretary@sdrc.com.au). Full event details on National website. Contact: secretary@sdrc.com.au

Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

August 6-9, 2026
 Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA
 Program: Thursday, August 6: Practice; Friday: Rifle match; Saturday Pistol Cartridge; Sunday: Small Bore (all 80 shots). WA state team selection will be on top 10 placings. Prizes: Medals in all grades,

trophies for two-gun, three-gun, juniors. Facilities: Camping with showers, toilets and barbecue, limited power, meal supplied Saturday night. Full details on National website. Contact: David Brougham 0432 748 703 or laswa2011@gmail.com

Big Bore Handgun Metallic Silhouette State Championships

August 21-23, 2026
 Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA
 Program: 8am gun check, 8.30 shooting starts. IHMSA Big Bore Production; Production Standing; Revolver; Unlimited; Unlimited Standing; Unlimited Any Sights; Unlimited Half Scale; Unlimited Any Sights Half Scale; Practical Hunter Long Course. Competitors wishing to shoot six or more categories must be available to shoot over the three days. Facilities: Canteen and barbecue each day, onsite camping, toilets and showers. Contact: Joe Brajkovich 0414 474 573 or mamothprojects@hotmail.com

Shotgun 5-Stand State Championships

September 20, 2026
 Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA
 Program: Total of 75 targets, three rounds of 25 over three grounds. Sash for overall High Gun, grade medals and two \$100 door prizes. Full details on National website. Facilities: Hot food, cool drinks and snacks on sale (cash only), free tea and coffee. Contact: Neil Cobb 0404 040 357 or neilcobb@bigpond.com

Rifle Metallic Silhouette State Championships

November 7-8, 2026
 Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA
 Program: Saturday: Centrefire Silhouette (40-shot), Centrefire Hunter (40-shot). Sunday: Air Rifle (40-shot), Rimfire Silhouette (40-shot), Rimfire Hunter (40-shot). Full details on National website. Medal presentation each day. Facilities: Some camping available, limited hot showers within 400m. Contact: Paul Dunn pauledd1939@gmail.com or 0407 428 175.

Shotgun Sporting State Championships

November 29, 2026
 Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA
 Program: Total of 75 targets, three rounds of 25. Sash for overall High Gun, grade medals and two \$100 door prizes. Full details on National website. Facilities: Hot food, cool drinks and snacks on sale (cash only), free tea and coffee. Contact: Neil Cobb 0404 040 357 or neilcobb@bigpond.com.

ACT

ACT Rifle Metallic Silhouette Territory Championships

June 6-8, 2026
 Majura Range, Hector McIntosh Grove, ACT
 Program: June 6: 80 shots rimfire, 40 shots air rifle. June 7: 80 shots centrefire. June 8: 40 shots rimfire hunting rifle,

40 shots centrefire hunting rifle. Facilities: Camping on range with water and showers, \$10 per person per night, fires allowed if no current ban, canteen facilities all weekend. Full details on national website. Contact: David True 0423 043 663 or dtrue222@gmail.com

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WAKE UP . . . IT'S ROAR O'CLOCK!

WORDS:
MARK VAN DEN
BOOGAART



I got the call: “Them deer are roaring,” so made myself ready. Now I’m not some sort of red deer emergency response unit, ever ready to answer the call at a moment’s notice. It was more a quiet confirmation of months of preparation, layered over a growing accumulation of years of hunting the blocks. Still, it was reassuring to know the predictions, signs and timing had all lined up the way they so often do when you pay enough attention.

The lead-up to that phone call really started back in October 2025 with laying out the trail cameras. During the following months, hind activity was consistent and healthy, though with a noticeable absence of stags. That was expected as the combined blocks I hunt don’t hold a large resident stag population. The bigger animals tend to live higher up, moving through the rougher, less pressured country where they don’t leave early. They know what’s coming. There’s no urgency when you already understand the rhythm.

Early this year the blocks began to dry out, grass went brittle, dams shrank and dust lingered longer. Still, I expected rain as it’s happened every year for the past five. This is, after all, a land of droughts and flooding rains, so I figured we’d one more good wet spell left before the dry properly returned.

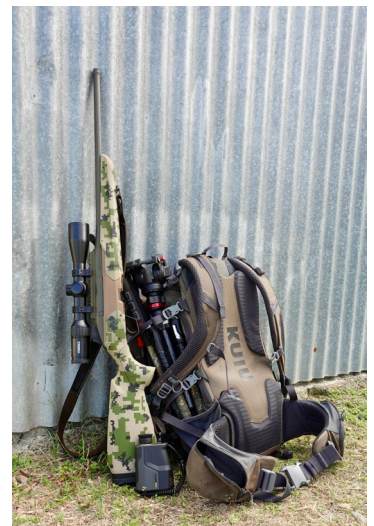
On my last visit before the hunt the rain arrived. Dams filled, runoff channels flowed again and, when I checked the cameras, so too did images of deer moving with purpose,

frequency increasing, patterns tightening. Before pulling the cameras I sat above one of the dams and watched a Double Five, unsettled, pacing with head up and ears searching. Then I heard it. Not a full roar but a clear, deliberate vocalisation drifting up the gully. The calm before the storm and things were about to kick off.

One week later I got the call. Boom! It’s a calendar all right, just not one Microsoft can help you with, rather the calendar of roaring or rutting deer which isn’t unique in the animal kingdom. Nature runs on schedules older and more reliable than ours. One of my favourite First Nations examples comes from my very own suburb, where a particular lizard shares its name with macadamia trees. The reason is simple: When macadamias drop their fruit, the lizards appear beneath the canopy to feed. Same place, same time every year with no alarms, no reminders, just rhythm.

I arrived at the blocks early on Monday morning, shouldered my pack and headed out. I had a small thermal monocular with me and was immediately glad I did. Three deer were in the front paddock and I had to cross that open ground to reach the hill country beyond. Without the thermal, without being able to see, plan and move around them in the dark, I’d almost certainly have bumped them and caused all sorts of unintended movement before the morning had even begun.

The reds were roaring, no doubt about it, though were still high on



PACKED UP AND READY TO ROAR.

the hills. As the morning wore on I started to wonder if I was a week early and 10 minutes late. But family commitments, school holidays and work calendars don’t bend easily, so I ran with what I had. The morning was full of deer, just the wrong kind, so I headed back to camp for a late breakfast, setting out again in the afternoon. The heat had come up and the wind began to swirl. I decided to take the long way round, staying right with the breeze and giving the deer every chance to bed around a body of water I had in mind.

When I arrived I spotted him, a Brisbane Valley roughie surrounded by hinds with a few spikers mixed in. I eased out of my pack, set up the camera and bum-scooted downhill and into position under cover of long grass. At around 150m I lined up and the shot felt right as he dropped and slid into a shallow runoff channel below. The rest of the mob barely moved, only fully breaking as I emerged from the grass. The animal was a clean, honest Valley stag. My boys would appreciate the antlers and the rest would become burgers, biltong and bolognaise.

Hours later I was back at camp, cleaning up and getting organised for a night sleeping in the back of the truck. Up on the hills I was certain time continued without the slightest regard for clocks or calendars. You see hunting runs on rhythm, just not *your* rhythm.

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