

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S SHOOTER

Arnya Olsen
has come a long way
in a short time



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Editorial

Gemma Dunn



Step into AWS columnist Laetisha Scanlan's shoes for a day to see what it takes to remain on top during competition time. With the long hours and busy routine, it's an exhausting lifestyle.

Meet a dedicated mum and hunter, Hayley Crichlow, who protects the family farm from marauding feral pigs with the help of her kids and pet dogs. No mean feat considering these pesky porkers outnumber people 10-to-one around her rural NSW town.

I take a look at what to expect on the range and provide my top tips for the first-timer, which is all about preparation and not over-complicating things. Once there, you'll discover there's always someone around to lend a helping hand and point you in the right direction.

Our cover story profiles NT shooter Arnya Olsen and how self-motivation has fuelled her remarkable rise through the shooting ranks in just four short years. Arnya has come from a non-shooting background to achieve national and international success.

We feature a Ridgeline camo clothing review, to keep you well-equipped when out hunting and back at camp. Our competition offers their universal waterproof Mallard jacket as this edition's exciting prize.

Your continued feedback and suggestions are welcome to aws@ssaa.org.au - see the request on page 12 from a fellow lady in need of shooting coaching at the Belmont Range in Brisbane.

Visit ssaa.org.au to view our wide array of material and extensive membership benefits as Australia's largest and leading impartial sports shooting body.

Gemma

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AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S SHOOTER

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Taking aim with Laetisha Scanlan

A day in the life of a travelling Australian Shooting team member



Anyone who has travelled internationally with a firearm will know the hours spent at customs and check-in. It's common for us to be at the airport five hours before our departure to hand in paperwork and monitor serial numbers on our firearms.

Once we have arrived in the host country, it doesn't become much easier because the identical process is undergone again but this time usually with multiple shooting teams arriving at the same time and with added language barriers.

A typical day overseas looks like this:

3am – Jet Lag: Usually, regardless of what country I travel to I am awoken in the middle of the night. I love Australia and where I live but we do land the bad end of the deal when flying abroad.

Europe and the US are often tricky time zones to adjust to. As I steer clear of sleeping pills, my piece of advice for jet lag is: grab lots of sleep on the plane ride over, keep well hydrated and try to arrive in the country late afternoon or night.

6.30am – Wake Up/Shower: Pack my bag for training. I have discovered the hard way to always pack spare clothes for unexpected weather.

As part of our athlete agreement, we are required to look like a team and therefore only allowed to wear the Shooting Australia uniform to and from the range. No casual clothes allowed at the range.

7-7.30am – Breakfast: Head down to breakfast. Whatever I eat on the first day of arrival I tend to eat for the rest of my time there (call me superstitious).

This will include protein, some type of carbohydrate and fruit to fuel me for the day.

8am – Official Transport to Range: This is generally on a large bus that takes all the athletes. The official hotels we stay at normally are no longer than 30-45 minutes away from the range.

9am – Shooting Range: Each country will have a team area that they set up for the day. This is usually in a large tent with many tables and chairs. All competitors' guns and ammunition are locked in the armoury, which we must collect and return on a daily basis.

Before competition each athlete will need to pass equipment control. This is to ensure you are abiding by the rules set by the ISSF. Members of the jury will check your gun, shooting jacket, glasses, earmuffs, hat and length of your shorts (if applicable).

9.30-10am – Warm-Up: This is done before my first round and includes stretching, gun-mounting practice and a quick massage from the team physio to loosen any tense muscles.

10am-1pm – Training: The team size and everyone's individual training regime will determine how long our day is at the range. Training times are organised by the coach. I personally try to shoot at least three rounds on different layouts to acclimatise to the environment, figure out my hold points and become used to the surroundings.

1-1.45pm – Lunch: Typically the shooting ranges have decent restaurants, so after training we will eat before heading back to the hotel. If there is no food at the range, I pack snacks beforehand or fruit from breakfast. I also make a point of drinking plenty of water throughout the day. Dehydration has a huge impact on eyesight and your decision making time, both which are important to hitting a target.

2-2.30pm: Back on the bus and back to the hotel.

2.30-3.30pm – Downtime: I usually just relax in the hotel room or go for a walk and explore the city. If all else fails, Netflix and YouTube are great time occupiers.

3.30-4.30pm – Gym: Some hotels we stay at have great gym facilities; others don't have any. However when I do have access, I purely focus on cardio, whether it be running on the treadmill or riding the exercise bike.

I shy away from weights due to risk of soreness before competition. I never go to the gym in the morning or before a training session as I feel like I burn too much energy and this becomes detrimental to my shooting.

5-5.45pm – Physio: Clay Target shooting involves a lot of muscles in your neck, arms and back. Also due to 20-plus hour plane rides, it's natural to be stiff and sore. When our team physio travels with us, I see him once a night to loosen up and feel refreshed for the next day. On the trips he doesn't come away with us, I make sure to pack a foam roller or find a local massage therapist.

6.30pm – Dinner: I try to have dinner early so I can be in bed at a reasonable hour. We usually have one designated team dinner on our trip away, the other nights are very casual – whether it be going out for local cuisine or staying in for room service. I sometimes find it difficult not to over-eat due to the wide array of food on offer.

8-9pm – Rest and Relax: It's important to have a healthy balance of shooting and downtime. The team is usually overseas for eight days in total. This includes two days of travel there and back and three days of competition. We have minimal time to prepare and perform at our best on the world stage.

And finally: Eat, sleep and repeat.



Arnya Olsen

has come a long way in a short time

Dave Rose

The powers of self-motivation are what have fuelled Darwin shooter Arnya Olsen's rise from firearm novice to accomplished performer.

That plus a helping hand from SSAA Darwin committee member Casey Bland, who 29-year-old Arnya met in her early forays into the shooting sports and is now her partner. Arnya is currently a full member of the SSAA Darwin branch as well as the Darwin Pistol Club.

Arnya said her mum and dad have never really been interested in shooting or hunting, so it was not the traditional family influences that took her to the range.

Instead, she had to virtually find her own feet as she first sampled handgun action in 2015. Dad Henning and mum Julie are quite proud of what Arnya has managed to do as a self-achiever in the shooting sphere. She has three brothers – Daniel, 36, Clayton, 34, and Haydn, 26. Again shooting is not ingrained in the family loop although Clayton does dabble in occasional outings.

All the hard work has paid off for Arnya since she took those early steps. In 2016 Arnya moved on to trying out shotguns. The next stage was to take a crack at hunting.

"I do also shoot handgun in a couple of different disciplines but with all the shooting and hunting commitments already, it is hard to allocate the time and practice needed with them," said Arnya.

She can't really pinpoint when she initially became interested in shooting but her instant affinity has earned her success on the international stage as well as at national level in Australia.

"I suppose it all started when I came back to live in Darwin after finishing my time in Queensland where I was working in hospitality," she said.



Arnya's instant affinity has earned her success on the international stage as well as at national level in Australia.

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In Chateauroux, France using a Remington 870 pump-action shotgun at the IPSC 2018 SWS. A special exemption allowed practice in Australia, where it's a Category C firearm.



Top: Arnya with other Australian competitors from the 2018 IPSC Shotgun World Shoot in France.

Middle: Arnya, left, on the podium after coming second in the Ladies Standard Manual Shotgun in France's IPSC 2018 SWS. Alessandro Moro came first and Candida Tatian Balestiere Vargas third.

Bottom: The quartet of Gemma Dunn, left, Arnya, Dave Gosper and John Dakers volunteering at the recent Ladies day event held at SSAA Darwin.

"I always wanted to try shotgun but I never previously had the chance. I had a go with a rifle when I was a kid but that's as far as it went."

Last year Arnya took out second place in the ladies section in the IPSC Shotgun World Shoot in Chateauroux, France. The competition attracted a total of around 700 shooters and was spread over six days. This was added to by her accolade as the first-ever Top Lady in the Practical Rifle event in the Northern Territory in August 2018. She was also third overall in Production.

The French trek was the debut taste for Arnya of life at a global happening. At one point a journey to Rifle World Shoot in Sweden in August 2019 was mooted as a possible venture but had to be ruled out due to the financial outlay. "It would have been just too costly," she said.

Her latest brush with the buzz of competition came with the IPSC Rifle and Shotgun Nationals at the Little River range in Victoria. At the three-day shoot, Arnya landed second spot in the Standard Manual Rifle and came seventh in the Shotgun.

When Arnya opts to shoot handgun, she goes for the Trojan 1911. This is backed up on occasions with the STI 2011. When Practical Rifle comes into play, the favoured option is the Tikka CTR in 6.5 Creedmoor. Variety certainly seems to be the spice of life for Arnya.

"We have actually just recently got our Vic game licences and have been for a stalk looking for sambar too," said Arnya. "It's a different ball game compared to the activities we do for CPM (Conservation and Pest Management) back in the NT but the scenery and weather was amazing."

And so far all the plaudits and progress have been savoured on the back of saving up from her jobs working as a part-time farmhand and as a casual employee in the retail business.

"I kindly receive a little sponsorship cash from SSAA Darwin and SSAA NT," she said.

"SSAA Darwin and SSAA NT help me out on some trips away. I cannot speak highly enough of the generosity and support of SSAA.

"And IPSC NT has also contributed at the last IPSC event, by way of supplying shirts and paying for entry fees."

Arnya tries to spend as many hours as she can at the range practising and perfecting her technique.

"It's tough to find the time, but we try to go down to the range at least once a week," she said.

It was Casey who played a big role in Arnya's development.

"He booked me into the SSAA in Darwin and showed me the ropes with rifles," she said.

Arnya crossed paths with *Australian Women's Shooter* editor Gemma Dunn at a Ladies Day event in the Northern Territory earlier this year and the pair found plenty of common ground to chat about.

"Gemma was really interesting to talk to and it was good to pick up a few tips," said Arnya. "She seemed very modest but she was so busy at the same time, talking to everyone and organising things."

Arnya was already into shooting when she met Casey at the range and he is full of admiration about her rate of advancement.

"She has come a long way pretty fast," said Casey. "She didn't have the family

connections to shooting that a lot of people have so she has done really well."

It was Casey who introduced Arnya to the hunting aspect which followed on from her early days on the range.

"I began by shooting magpie geese on the mango farms around Darwin," she said. "From there it moved on to rabbit and fox shooting interstate when possible, as well as pigs. We just try to get around as much as we can."

The hunting offshoot took Arnya and Casey on a fortnight's trip to Western Australia where they joined a party culling feral pigs. The end result was a tally of more than 350 porkers, which was an outstanding effort. After the recent Victoria event, Arnya and Casey decided to travel back via a long-haul road trip.

"We went stalking sambar in Victoria which was certainly a different experience due to the weather conditions and everything else," said Casey

"We spotted plenty of deer but none of them were really worth taking," added Arnya. Maybe next time...

Casey remains on hand but feels that the laudable diversity of Arnya's shooting pursuits could actually be a hindrance.

"Because Arnya is into rifle and handgun shooting as well as all the hunting it is all really spread out," said Casey "It is pretty hard to concentrate on one discipline and fit work and the general lifestyle in as well.

"Plus we are pretty remote up here in the Northern Territory, which again can work against you."

Arnya is aware that she may have to sacrifice one of her outlets to push herself to the limit.

"Maybe I should concentrate on Practical Rifle next year and see how things turn out," she said.

Whatever happens, Arnya has already done the hard part. She has proved herself adept in a mixture of shooting spheres, after showing the self-discipline to set off on her own agenda. She is a shining example to other women shooters about what can be achieved. She also has the expert back-up of Casey by her side.

...the favoured option is the Tikka CTR in 6.5 Creedmoor. Variety certainly seems to be the spice of life for Arnya.



Dogs, feral pigs and *a dedicated hunter*

Henri Lach

Hayley Crichlow epitomises the Australian rural country woman. She's a wife, a mother of two and a part-time certified personal care assistant, looking after aged individuals.

What distinguishes her among her contemporaries is her pastime pursuit. With her two dogs, she hunts feral pigs. This definitely is more than just a hobby. Haley loves her dogs and she has a passionate hatred for those wild porkers.

"When I see the amount of work Todd (her husband) puts into planting chickpeas and then have the pigs root them up and destroy them overnight, I get very angry," said Hayley.

So she's mounted a personal campaign to hit the ferals where they hurt, with encouragement from her husband.

Now, let's establish where we are, geographically: Hayley, her property manager husband Todd and their children Thomas, 8, and Emile, 6, live on a 7000-hectare property in the Yetman district of far northern NSW. Yetman is a hamlet in the New England region. The area is located on the Macintyre River only about 30 kilometres south of the Queensland border and 700 kilometres north of Sydney. It's a sparsely populated region. Feral pigs outnumber people 10 to one, according to some estimates.

This is a part of NSW with widely mixed farming interests. Sheep and cattle abound, while cash crops like cotton, wheat, sorghum and chickpeas dot the landscape during their growing season.

Grain is what attracts feral pigs. They'll also snack on immature cotton balls, would you believe. Then there's the occasional treat of a weak newly-born lamb. Feral pigs are savage omnivores. So overall, wild porky's character doesn't endear him to local landholders.

"There's a lot of negativity around hunting dogs and their relation to kids, but my kids and dogs respect each other."

– Hayley Crichlow

The war on feral pigs in this area has been going on for uncountable decades, as it has in most other rural areas of Australia where porky's forbearers escaped from the domestic pens of the early settlers. But with many thousands of hectares of pasture and hidden waterways in which to roam and breed, porky continues to thumb his trotter at his human adversary. There are continued calls for an ongoing feral pig bounty in Queensland and NSW. It's a case of watch this space.

Meanwhile, Hayley Crichlow has no illusions about winning the battle against this menace, but she's determined to make as considerable a contribution as she can towards its control, bounty or no bounty. She's a licensed firearms owner in NSW. Her favourite rifle is a Marlin .17. It doesn't play an active role in Hayley's hunts, but it can be a handy back-up for the occasional despatch of a particularly aggressive porker.

Her current tools against her quarry are cross stag hounds Johnny Cash and Mac along with a 20cm-bladed hot pink coloured handled sheath knife.

Between them they've accounted for more than 40 ferals during the past 12 months. She hopes to increase this tally in 2019, bearing in mind that this is the Year of the Pig in the Chinese calendar. Hayley is quick to point out that the pink colour on her despatching tool's hilt is not a fashion statement or a gender message.

"The colour makes it easier to spot if I accidentally drop it in the stubble," she explained.

As to her dogs, her affection for them manifests itself when she recalls a former hunting companion.

"My old dog Django was a Dane wolf-hound cross and when he died [of old age] he took a piece of my heart," said Hayley.

In recent years she has taken her respect for hunting dogs to an almost evangelical level. In fact, she's become their public image advocate.

“There’s a lot of negativity around hunting dogs and their relation to kids, but my kids and dogs respect each other. When the dogs are at home they are just like normal pets. They play with the kids. The kids love them and they love the kids. They are part of the family,” she said.

That obviously extends to the field, where Thomas and Emile join Johnny Cash and Mac in celebrating a successful hunt.

Hayley believes there are no set rules, or a formula, for training hunting pig dogs. Nor do any particular breeds stand out.

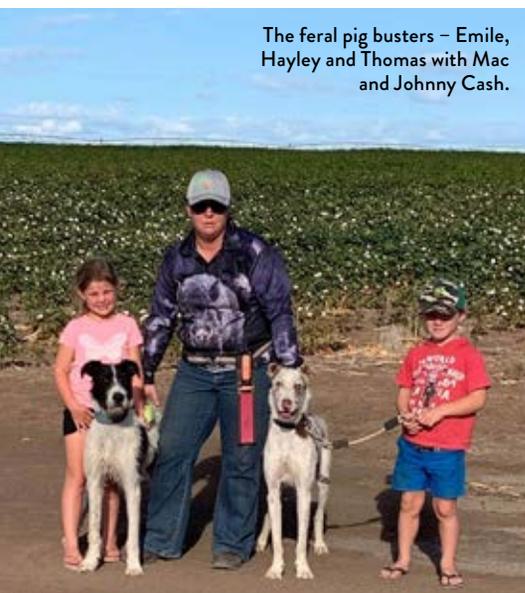
“I consider a good dog a solid one which is loyal, smart and full of heart. Johnny Cash has a calm and a bit of a serious nature whereas Mac is just all heart – they both give their all and they are dedicated,” she said.

Does Hayley have her own training regime? Her attitude is simple. “Teach them the ‘normal’ expectations early. Take them everywhere and have them around the action when older dogs are working. Expose them to all sorts of stock. That’ll sort them out. They either love it or they don’t. You pick the ones who do. Respect is a two-way street between my dogs and myself. We learn from each other.”

There’s no doubt that Hayley’s standing in her small rural community is that of a feral pig buster.



Hayley and her dogs after a successful morning’s hunt.



The feral pig busters – Emile, Hayley and Thomas with Mac and Johnny Cash.



Johnny Cash, left, and Mac are eager and poised for the hunt.

"I often get calls from neighbours who are having a pig problem and Johnny Cash, Mac and I are all too happy to help out," she said.

A call to arms against the forces of porky also can become a social outing. "Yes, I've invited some of my girlfriends out hunting a few times. I think they've enjoyed it as much as I do," said Hayley.

This sort of enterprise is not without its perils. A well-nurtured 60 kilo-plus feral pig used to roaming free on a benevolent range undoubtedly objects to having a dog hanging on each ear as a hunter descends on the scene with a massive despatching blade. The bigger porkers have large and sharp tusks. Some injuries are inevitable.

"My dogs have had a few skin tears, nothing major though. Other than the odd sprained ankle I've been lucky so far," she said.

Brucellosis has been identified as an ever-present danger in this area, so none of the despatched pork is fed to the victorious dogs, as it was once.

Today, the pigs become carrion that's soon cleaned up by the numerous and ever-present hawks, crows, foxes and other ferals.

Landholders in this part of NSW, like those in many other regions, subscribe to the adage that the only good feral pig is a dead one and Hayley often collects the accolades she deserves from her neighbours for her contribution to that view.



There's no doubt that Hayley's standing in her small rural community is that of a feral pig buster.

However, at the end of the day there are two especially big winners here. Whether they fully appreciate it or not at this stage in their lives, I believe Thomas and Emile are privileged to be enjoying a childhood filled with real-life country experiences.

Thanks to their mother, they've been exposed to the realities of life, like many of us once were. The necessary death of feral pigs is just one aspect of their realistic practical education. When a sheep is butchered for the family's personal use Hayley makes sure Thomas and Emile are there to witness the event.

"The kids learn anatomy, what the lungs, heart and other organs are for," she explained.

They can then all go to the dinner table with full knowledge of the source of what they're about to consume.

At my local supermarket in south-east Queensland, lamb chops come in polystyrene packages. The packaging used to be white a few decades ago but the packaging is now black.

The perception is that this doesn't show up the blood so much and upset the sensitivities of some. Recent surveys have shown that more than 60 per cent of supermarket shoppers have kids up to 12 years of age who have no idea where the meat in the package just whisked through the checkout comes from. And adults can be reluctant to come forth with an explanation.

To me, Hayley Crichlow, with her attitude towards her children, and towards her environment, is a very special person indeed in this day and age.

Women's-only competition

Only female SSAA members are eligible to enter. One entry per member. To enter, simply write your name, address and membership number on the back of an envelope and send it to:

Ridgeline Ladies Mallard jacket,
Australian Women's Shooter,
PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061

or online at ssaa.org.au/win



WIN a Ridgeline Ladies Mallard olive jacket

*Please provide your desired size (8-20) upon entry

Valued at \$139.95

Kindly donated by Ridgeline Clothing
ridgelineclothing.com.au

Competition closes September 30, 2019

Casadora jacket in pink camo.



Ridgeline's ladies clothing



Spring Buck v-neck tee in pink camo.

Lynn Bain

I've mentioned in *Australian Shooter* that I tend to wear a few items of pink camouflaged clothing these days, particularly around camp and/or when spotlighting. The practical side of wearing pink is I'm visible to everyone as well as being clearly identified as female.

It's very handy that my kit is plainly recognisable when husband Steve and I pack our jackets and the like into the one duffle bag or backpack. It certainly makes it easier and quicker to grab something out of the shared bag when you're in a hurry.

I've worn Ridgeline clothing since it first became available in the early to mid-1990s and am a big fan of the blaze orange camo shirts and jackets I wear when hunting. These days, Ridgeline also offers the full range of upper-body outerwear garments in colour schemes that are either a bold pink camo or a pink and natural camo blend. The bold pink certainly isn't subtle and that's what I like about it – it's ideal when concealment isn't on my agenda.

For the youngsters

To suit the young girls, Ridgeline offers the popular Little Critters Pack in pink camo. At a RRP of \$99.95 it comes in sizes 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12 and 14. The Little Critters

Pack includes a fleece top, short sleeve top, fleece trousers and beanie, all in pink camo as well as a pink-trimmed black baseball cap.

For lady hunters

My personal 'go to' pink camo option is normally Ridgeline's Casadora jacket over a t-shirt, the t-shirt being something like one of Ridgeline's two Spring Buck Tee pink camo options. I find the Casadora jacket ideal for Queensland winters – mid-year it turns pretty cold in the fallow deer state border country around Stanthorpe and among the pockets of chital deer from Texas to Goondiwindi.

Ladies Casadora jacket

This is a specifically-designed 'hoodie' for the huntress, a fully-lined ladies-cut jacket made from waterproof and windproof Quiet-Tex 3KTM material. The 165gsm Quiet-Tex is a two-layer fabric that's waterproof and breathable yet, importantly, is very quiet when it brushes against itself or other items when going bush. The hooded fleece jacket features include two side-entry pockets, a zippered internal pocket, two chest pockets and a hard-wearing two-way full-length central zip which allows you to 'tune' the jacket to the climatic conditions. There are enough pockets for those necessary extra items such as earplugs, camera and spare ammunition. RRP: \$249.95 but \$139.95 on sale while stocks last.

Ladies Spring Buck Tee and V-neck

Available in two neckline options, the ladies cut Spring Buck Tee and Spring Buck V-neck t-shirts are ideal either as a layer under Ridgeline's Casadora jacket or as a t-shirt around camp during hot summer days in the bush. Both are available in the pink camo print option. Tee RRP \$34.95, V-neck RRP \$34.95 but \$15.95 on sale while stocks last.



Little Critters Pack in pink camo.



Mallard jacket
in pink camo.

Outer shell

When it turns really cold and an extra layer becomes necessary, Ridgeline's ladies Mallard jacket outer layer shell maintains the pink theme. I find it a useful hint that, to allow for the bulk of a few clothing layers, my Mallard jacket outer layer/shell is a size larger than my Casadora top.

Ladies Mallard jacket

This hooded jacket has all the features of the men's popular packaway Mallard jacket. Just like the other camo versions of this jacket, the pink camo ladies tailored edition features soft touch silent shell Quiet-Tex Pro material – a two-layer fabric that's warm, light and waterproof. The hood is two-way adjustable and the jacket's seams are tape sealed. The features include two large flap pockets with flaps and internal zip, two-way heavy duty central zip with a storm flap over the zip and lightweight mesh lining. The Mallard jacket is an outer garment that affords the wearer the full range of arm and torso movement yet it is easily folded for storage and ideal for stuffing into your backpack. RRP: \$139.95. See page 10 for your chance to win a ladies Mallard jacket!

Visit ridgelineclothing.com.au for their full range of women's, men's and children's clothing, with the 2020 line sure to be a hit!

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Saadia seeks coaching tips

Dear Gemma,

I have been reading the *Australian Women's Shooter* magazines and I just love all the articles. I look forward to receiving it in the mail, it makes my week.

In the current issue (Issue 3), there are two articles which I have really enjoyed reading while taking notes and highlighting words of wisdom. 'Your Top 10 psychological tips for shooting' and 'Taking aim with Laetisha Scanlan' are just amazing.

I have just taken an interest in shooting but am struggling to find a coach in Brisbane, to teach me this sport; unfortunately I am trying to teach myself which is not going so well.

I really wish that there was more support for females to learn and coaches (especially female coaches) who understand the psychological tips you mentioned in your article.

Can you please advise me of any courses that I can attend to enable me to learn the skill of shooting.

Thank you again for publishing the AWS magazine and these amazing articles.

Kind regards,
Saadia, Queensland

From Gemma:

I have replied to Saadia personally but we thought it would be a good idea to put out a call to our members in Brisbane to see if there is anybody willing to help Saadia find her feet in our sport. Much like Saadia, I am sure there are many women out there looking for the same type of guidance on the range, so feel free to contact me via aws@ssaa.org.au and we will do our best to find someone to help you. Another fantastic way to get in touch with the AWS community is through our AWS Facebook group ([facebook.com/groups/AWSmagazine](https://www.facebook.com/groups/AWSmagazine)) and Instagram ([instagram.com/australianwomensshooter_mag/](https://www.instagram.com/australianwomensshooter_mag/)).

In the meantime, on the next page my practical piece talks about what to expect when you go to the range as a beginner. Many of us have experienced our first visit to the range already but it is a great article to help you with introducing a non-shooter to the sport (male or female) or just going back to the basics.

Shooting range tips for newcomers



Gemma Dunn

As with many new experiences, going to the shooting range for the first time can be intimidating or scary. But if you are prepared and know what to expect, it is a great place to enjoy the shooting sports and meet new people.

I know that many of you have already experienced the range for the first time and are wondering about the point of this article. Well, it's important to know these things for when you invite a friend or family member to try shooting for the first time so that they feel as comfortable as possible and have the best chance of enjoying their time there as much as you do.

The shooting sports were not a part of my family growing up. I had never seen a firearm as a kid, let alone held one or used one, even up until my mid-teens. My first interaction with the shooting sports was at a 'come and try' day in Newcastle, NSW. It is safe to say that if my experience of going to a shooting range for the first time wasn't as welcoming as it was, I would most likely not have pursued shooting as a sport. First impressions really count and every range has their responsibilities for this, but so does every visitor.

I have compiled a list of top tips to help anybody with their first visit to the shooting range to help you gain the most out

of your experience. These tips are in no particular order and are all equally as important.

1. Know the rules

Every range (whether they be shotgun, rifle or pistol ranges) is slightly different with their rules and commands, so it is a good idea to check out their website or contact them directly to ask for a copy of these prior to going. If you don't have the opportunity to do this, all ranges will have their rules on display, so make sure you read them and understand them before you head onto the range to shoot.



Once the firearm is loaded, you should always point it downrange, never directly at the ground or up above you.

2. Know the fundamentals of safe gun handling

Every gun is slightly different, but there are always key fundamentals of safe handling of firearms. It would be wise to know these fundamentals before even going to the range.

- o Treat all firearms as loaded, unless you see a chamber flag or have checked yourself.
- o Always keep the gun pointed in a safe direction. Downrange is always the safest, but when you are carrying your gun around the range it is best to check the rules on whether or not to point the

muzzle down or up. Never point the muzzle forward until you are on the firing line. Once the firearm is loaded, you should always point it downrange, never directly at the ground or up above you.

- o Keep your finger right away from the trigger, until you have acquired the target through your gun's sights, the area around your targets is clear and you are ready to shoot.
- o Always be aware of the target you are shooting at and what lies beyond it. Generally when you go to a range, each shooter/bay has a target to themselves. Make sure when you are shooting, that you have identified the correct target before you begin to shoot.

3. Know who is in charge and who you can go to for help

All SSAA ranges have Range Officers (ROs) managing the range. Sometimes these ROs are paid staff, but most are volunteers who just love shooting and being a helping hand. Regardless, all Range Officers are the commanding personnel and are not only responsible for the safety of all shooters on the range, they are responsible for the range adhering to the laws and regulations according to their state rules and regulations.

If you are unsure about anything while on the range, they are the absolute best person to ask and are more than happy



Range Officers are multifaceted and can provide excellent advice.

to assist you if you are having difficulties. If it is your first time at a range, or your first time taking someone to the range, it is always a good idea to introduce yourself to the Range Officer and explain the situation.

4. What to bring

- o A firearm: If you have your own firearm, make sure that you have the correct travel case for it. Always ensure your firearm case meets your state firearm laws and always have it unloaded before you enter the range.
- o Ammunition: Make sure you have enough ammunition for the session. Some ranges have a store within where you can purchase more, but it is best to bring your own if you are unsure. Ensure your ammunition type is allowed to be shot at that range. This should be covered in the range rules.
- o Safety glasses and hearing protection (personal protective equipment): Again, this should be highlighted in the range rules about what is required here. Also, you can generally purchase these items at the range too but I would recommend

relying on your own glasses and hearing protection even though the general disposable earplugs will do the trick. It's always best to find good-quality PPE for your own well-being. Generally, Range Officers will not allow you to shoot without your PPE.

- o Comfortable clothing: Most ranges will stipulate clothing requirements in their rules and all rules are for your own safety. Make sure that you wear clothing items that are not restrictive or 'bulky'. It is ideal to have the best extent of movement possible as you might be shooting standing up, sitting, lying down, moving between stations etc.

It is also important to note that while camouflage clothing is helpful with some forms of hunting, it provides no extra benefit while at the range and most venues do not allow camouflage clothing for safety reasons.

Also make sure that you wear enclosed shoes – no high heels, sandals, ballet flats or such.

It is of particular note for us lady shooters to tie back your hair if it is long enough to

be in the way/in your face. You don't want to be worrying about your hair blocking your line of sight to the target – this will not help you hit your target and is also a safety concern.

Lastly, make sure you wear a shirt that doesn't expose too much skin, as you might sometimes have spent hot brass cases coming from your firearm. It's best not to have exposed skin when this happens.

5. Clean up after you're finished

Much like most aspects of our lives, it is important to leave the range in the state you found it. This means after you are done cleaning your rifle, you should also clear the shooting bench of all targets, spent brass, used ammo boxes and return the bench rests or other range equipment. This is basic range etiquette and the Range Officers and person who uses the bench or station next, will appreciate it.

Lastly, make sure you wash your hands and face after shooting as the cool water and soap will help remove any traces of lead and gunpowder residue.



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