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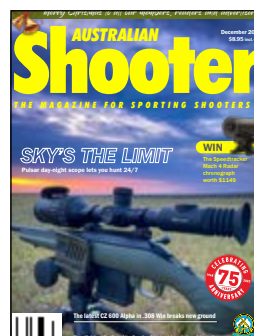
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Most things we do in life carry an element of risk and while we know the chances of a mishap in the bush may be small, they're still real and that's where a PLB (Personal Locator Beacon) might just save your life. So as Brad Allen points out, for an investment of around \$500 you can put the odds back in your favour and that has to be cheap insurance by anyone's standards.



The Hikmicro Cheetah LRF rifle optic looks to be a great entry point for those keen to dip their toes into the

night vision market and as Daniel O'Dea discovered, as a night vision monocular and rangefinder it will provide excellent service. For use as a scope or clip-on he reckons its best applications will be when fitted to a rimfire or air rifle or for close-in work on a centrefire at night.



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Some firearms with all their wear and tear speak volumes of their past and are best left as-is except for obligatory servicing. But for vintages and handy-me-downs that've seen better days, a refurbishment can make a real difference and, as Sam Garro outlines, a bit of application, patience and persistence is all that's required.

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Signing off a milestone year stronger than ever

The 75th year of the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia has been one of celebration and reflection as the Association continues to strengthen and grow. Around 100 forward-thinking shooters set the wheels in motion back in 1948 and we're now spread far and wide, with state and territory member numbers reaching new heights of more than 215,000.

We started the year singing the praises of SSAA stalwart Scottie Brydon as he was about to embark on a jam-packed calendar of events in preparation for his goal of selection to the 2024 Paris Paralympics team. Scottie is continuing in his role as SSAA ambassador where he actively promotes shooting as an all-inclusive sport suitable for everyone. And there have been great examples in all states this year of representing our sport and pastime to the wider public in come-and-try events and hosting our country's elected leaders on the range. These activities go a long way to encourage understanding and acceptance of what we do and why.

In the political arena, SSAA Inc has been in regular contact with government entities and representatives on a number of issues including native bird-hunting, the concept of a National Firearms Register and cancel-

lation of the 2026 Victorian Commonwealth Games. Earlier this year, SSAA Inc joined other like-minded bodies including Shooting Australia and the Sporting Industry Foundation Australia (SIFA) to relaunch the Parliamentary Friends of Shooting group after a Covid-enforced hiatus. SSAA Inc has also provided assistance throughout the year to our Western Australia branch as the government there prepared to rewrite that state's firearm laws. A number of these issues are ongoing and we'll continue to update members as appropriate.

Under our own roof the digital *Australian Shooter* was recently launched alongside the print edition of our flagship magazine, offering members a new way to read their favourite publication. We released the fourth edition of the Association's public-facing magazine, *Great Australian Outdoors*, where we continue to celebrate and promote all that's environment, conservation, travel and hunting in a forum for the masses.

As the Association looks forward to 2024 and beyond, we can reflect with pride the fact the SSAA is continuing to grow. We wish all our state and territory members, readers and advertisers a safe and enjoyable holiday period and look forward to seeing you at the range or in the field in 2024. Happy Christmas one and all!



SSAA - Protecting shooters since 1948



A de-pressing outcome

HERE'S A WARNING about the dangers of destroying a press by mixing up cases within a calibre. I was neck-sizing and de-priming my fired 303/25 cases when I inadvertently tried to de-prime a case I hadn't full-length resized. This case was one of a batch which had been fired in a Lee Endfield 302/25 (the rifle's on an FN Mauser action).

The lubricated case became stuck and I reversed the press arm with the top of the press coming away from the base. The lesson learned here is don't assume all fired cases are the same as there are variations within case brands as well as the same calibre in different rifles.

The other lesson is you can't ask a light alloy press to do the same as a cast iron or steel one. I'd had this press for 30 years or so and it was used to neck size/de-prime/bullet seating while at Silverdale trying various loads and in that role I can recommend it.

Stephen Kennedy, via email

Austral scope puzzler

I BOUGHT A Norica 56 air rifle with this Austral Special 4x32 scope on it but have had no luck in trying to track down information on either the scope or its maker. I know it's only a basic scope but I'd be interested to know more about the company, so was hoping someone out there could shed some light on this.

Alan Howarth, Vic.



Scotty on song

WHAT A PLEASURE to read Scott Heiman's Bushcraft and Survival article (*Shooter*, April 2023) entitled 'See and be seen (or not)', a wonderful piece full of thought-provoking advice. I look forward to further exploration of the subject in future editions. Many thanks Scotty.

Malcolm Jenkinson, WA



Seeing double

WHEN I WAS a teenager my gran gave me my great uncle Clive's pocket knife when he passed away. I treasured my Rodgers pocket knife for many reasons but on revisiting an old copy of *Australian Shooter* (February 2018), it was a real bonus to see a photo of another Rodgers knife pop up in an article on collectables by Mark van den Boogaart, so thank you Mark.

Julie Cavell, Qld

Insurance SSAA GENERAL INSURANCE BROKERS

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THE latest offering from SSAA General Insurance Brokers (SSAIB) is especially for firearms professionals who require personal accident and firearms cover. These insurance options offered through Precision Underwriting recognise that people who work with firearms have specific needs beyond those of someone using firearms for personal use.

SSAIB General Manager Megan Spinello said it was a pleasure to give those with extra or specific needs for their work the option to source insurance from a brokerage specialised in the field. "This is something we haven't offered before but after seeking feedback from members, we've been able to research and develop how to make professional personal accident and firearms cover work for you," she said.

"Our members are all shooters with different needs, some shoot at the local range for fun, others are recreational

hunters and some operate as professional pest animal controllers. Professional shooters operate like any other business and we're making sure there's the right type of insurance for their needs."

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The advice offered in this column is of a general nature and does not allow for individual situations. SSAIB recommends that you obtain professional advice before proceeding with any insurance investment. SSAIB accepts no liability for any actions by an individual to change their insurance plans without seeking professional advice.

Just let hunters get on with hunting!

Victoria's Game Management Authority (GMA) recently released their 2023 game licence statistics report which provides details on current game licence numbers and licence holder demographics. The report shows there was a total of 59,682 game licence holders in Victoria (as of June 30) who participate in recreational hunting. It was clear some are licensed to hunt more than one species with 48,038 licensed to hunt deer, 22,193 (duck) and 26,940 (quail).

Key demographic data suggested 95 per cent of hunters were male with 20 per cent aged 28-37 and five per cent female with 29 per cent aged 28-37 years. While most hunters were male, female participation in recreational hunting has increased 54 per cent over the past five years.

When looking at the historical information presented in the report, specifically the trends displayed in Figure 1, it does tell a story. And there are some notes below Figure 1 which are important. There has been continual growth overall in the number of game licences issued on the back of the increase in the popularity of deer hunting. It's great that more and more people are venturing into the outdoors and harvesting deer, as this helps with their management while ensuring population growth is contained in the areas people have ready access to.

It's pretty clear from the notes that recent messing around with duck season length, bag limits and huntable species has had an impact on the growth of duck hunting. In the years 2011-2014 when no extra condi-

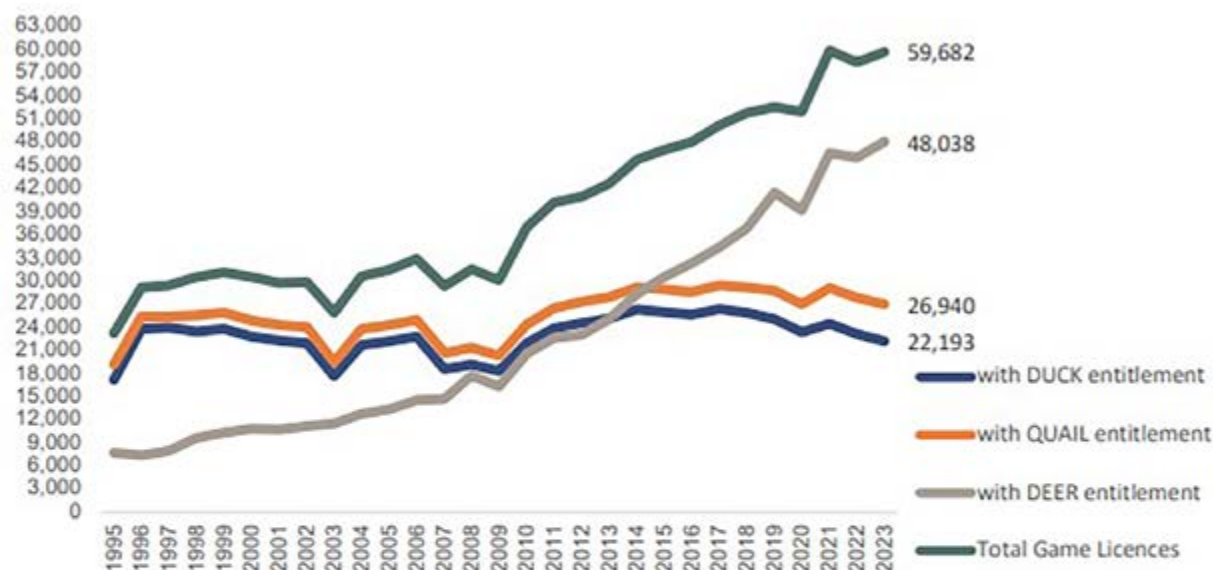
tions were placed upon hunters, we saw a rise in the number of licences purchased. The political interference with Victoria's duck seasons during the past few years has certainly caused hunters to feel fed up and some have even thrown in the towel. This is exactly what the antis want and we need to stay resilient and not give them one inch.

The graph is certainly an example of two tales - one of growth and one of stagnation. The reasons behind the different paths of the lines are directly due to the outside forces sabotaging the proper game management of these species. Hopefully with latest modelling showing duck hunting is sustainable, this no longer will be an issue.

Send questions to:
wildlife@ssaa.org.au



Figure 1 – Game Licence statistics – historic (figures as at 30 June each year)



See Table 1 Appendix II for detailed information

¹ The licence differential has been calculated from 1996, rather than 1995 which was a cancelled duck season, to illustrate the licence differential to date as more reflective of a normal season.

Note:

The duck season was cancelled in 1995, 2003, 2007 and 2008.

There were restricted (either reduced season length, bag limit or species) duck seasons in 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023.

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Dying from a full stomach

Recently I've been reflecting on a comment by my aunt a few years ago. Over a glass of wine round a fire pit, I mentioned I'd been hunting and bagged a couple of rabbits and a hare and was surprised when she responded: "Eww! I'll never eat rabbit or duck ever again." The trouble was that as a youngster, those meats were the staples of our family meals along with vegetables from the garden.

By way of context, my aunt's childhood was punctuated by extended shortages for many Australians. After WWII the European economy collapsed with the flow-on effect being inflated prices here, much as has happened recently in response to the war in Ukraine. During that same period Australia's unemployment rate topped 25 per cent while the population was rapidly increasing, in fact between 1945 and 1976 it had doubled. So while grandad was lucky enough to have a job running the local post office and telephone exchange, he supplemented his income with a shotgun, bagging rabbits and ducks for the table.

The reality was that during the early to mid-1900s the phrase 'underground mutton' came into being to describe rabbit served as an alternative to costly butcher's meat, yet there's a vast difference in nutritional value between the two. While duck and mutton comprise around 30-40 per cent fat, rabbit is one of the leanest meats around with no more than 5 per cent fat (kangaroo is lower at just 2 per cent and venison even less). All of which goes to show that, while these lean cuts are fine if you're trying to shed

unwanted kilos, they can be a real problem in a survival situation.

While uncommon nowadays, back in the time of explorers and pioneers, so-called 'rabbit starvation', 'protein poisoning' and 'fat starvation' was right up there as a cause of death. Also known as 'mal de caribou' (literally 'caribou sickness') these terms refer to an acute form of malnutrition caused by a diet deficient in fat and carbohydrates, which happens when almost all calories consumed come from the protein in lean meat.

Once you run out of stored fat the body begins to catabolise your muscles and organs for energy, which decreases testosterone and raises the cortisol hormone. While you need cortisol to fuel a 'fight or flight' response, too much of it (and for a prolonged period) slows the healing process and causes muscle weakness, generates severe fatigue, high blood pressure and headaches. Furthermore, a diet consisting solely of, or high in, lean meat will produce diarrhoea in about a week and result in dehydration. Leave these conditions unchecked and you'll die - it's that simple.

Therefore in a survival situation you need to round-out your wild harvest with other sources of vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates and fats. For vitamins and minerals look for vegetation like warrigal greens, native mint, pepper berry leaves, dandelions or lemon myrtle and for carbohydrates,



This rabbit and hare made an excellent stew.

seek fruits and flowers like the bush cherry, banksia, grevillea, yams and seeds and, most importantly, look for fats.

A good source of fats are nuts, fish and especially eels, indeed Australian freshwater eels can contain up to 41 per cent fat. And remember as a hunter another source of fat might be staring you in the face so consider, for example, the brains and bone marrow of your wild harvested game, both excellent sources of fat. And let's not forget the nutrients available in organs like the liver, kidneys and tongue as after all, offal isn't awful. Any reluctance you may have to eating it is likely based on social conditioning rather than a problem with the flavour.

So before you turn your nose up at nature's numbles remember that in some societies those parts of an animal are prized more than any other. Truth be told I was recently served roast bone marrow at a Viking-inspired restaurant and it was absolutely delicious. So keep an open mind and until next time, stay safe.





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Q I've never quite understood where I should be looking when I call for the target to be released. I shoot a variety of clay target events which include Sporting, Trap and even Skeet and seeing the target leave as it starts its flight path seems to be my weakness. Any advice much appreciated.

Beau Hammil, Vic.

A I have to assume you have good vision and healthy eyes with no major issues. I'll also assume you've had your eye dominance tested and are using your shotgun from the correct shoulder or have made the appropriate modifications if your dominant eye doesn't match your left or right-handedness. A correct set of shooting frames is also highly recommended. If you're forced to shoot with an optician's prescription, I strongly recommend a set of appropriate shooting glasses and, to be honest, even if you don't need corrective lenses, simply buy some frames for safety reasons. On these assumptions we can proceed.

I rate target acquisition as one of the most important fundamentals to master in the shooting sports. You can have the greatest shotgun in the world, the best technique and most popular ammunition but if you're not seeing the target correctly, everything else is useless. It's irrelevant what discipline of shotgun shooting you're participating in as the sooner you can lock your eyes on the target, the better. In events like Trap or Skeet this is critical but even with many of the fast Sporting Clay shots which require quicker reflexes and instinctual shots, where you position your eyes before you call will often determine the outcome.

Generally there are two schools of thought on how you should set your eyes just prior to calling for the target in any form of shotgun shooting which requires a fast response. The traditional point of view is you should 'softly focus' your eyes into the target acquisition area, just over or even under the end of your barrel, so your fore-vision can still reference a sight picture between your barrel and the target when it appears. Once the target is in the air, your peripheral vision will firstly identify the flash of the target leaving, then your vision will very quickly go from a soft to a hard focus, thus locking your eyes on the target until it reaches the desired point in the sky where you want to pull the trigger to break it.

Lots of shooters use this method and don't even know they're doing it and in many circumstances the fact they don't know they're doing it can be quite advantageous. The fewer things floating around your head the better is my take on this, though there are many competitors out there who just need to know how everything works to perform at their best, so the following method may be better for them if it can be perfected.

The second and more recent tactic is training to keep your eye perfectly still for a period of at least two seconds before calling for the target to be released. It goes against the traditional technique, as it brings your vision somewhat closer to the end of the barrel and holds your eye perfectly still 'looking' at a blade of grass, a rock, a cloud or particular part of a tree branch. It can be any material object which holds your concentration and eye perfectly still and stops

it moving back and forth constantly in the hundredths of seconds before calling for the target. Once you have control of your eye and have been able to keep it totally still, there's quite a bit of evidence to suggest it will identify a moving object (the target) much faster and with far more accuracy.

This modern-day approach is often referred to as the 'Quiet Eye' technique which has been used with great success in many other sports and is quickly working its way through the shotgun disciplines. Once again, there are quite a few athletes I know who use this technique successfully but in reality don't really know they're doing it. The internet has many articles on this technique and I highly recommend some further research.

Identifying your target is an area of coaching that's often overlooked. When people ask for a shooting lesson, coaches often concentrate on gun fit and technique as these two material things are fairly easy to fix. To improve someone's ability to see the target then have them move the barrel quickly and, above all, smoothly from acquisition to breaking point, is quite another skill which requires a level of knowledge and experience to explain. My own experience as a coach tells me most people perform this task adequately but many, if not most, could improve on it.



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Got a question - ask our **TOP SHOTS?**

John Dunn • Paul Miller • Geoff Smith • Barry Wilmot • Rod Pascoe

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Q I found this projectile while prospecting in the Etheridge goldfields which I understand were discovered and worked from the 1870s. It weighs 27 grams and while the outside ridge of the 'hollow base' is no longer perfectly round, it looks like it would've been around a 15mm projectile. I find plenty of old projectiles and cases but the way this has expanded into a 'donut' intrigued me.

After some research I'm guessing it's a .58 cal Minie ball projectile but would appreciate some expert opinion. And yes, I did also find some gold!

Jason Burzacott, via email

A Thanks for your question and photos Jason and I reckon you're 'on the money' with your guess as 27 grams equates to 416 grains and 15mm to 0.59". It's probably a hollow-based .577 calibre bullet of Minie style, originally around 500 grains in weight, fired from something like a Pattern 1853 Enfield rifle. I've seen several soft-lead, hollow-base type bullets which, when hitting the right surface, turn themselves inside out like this one has. It's a very interesting find. It might be possible with very careful cleaning to determine the number of lands and grooves and their dimensions to further identify the rifle from which it was fired, although that could be a fairly tall order.

Geoff Smith



Q I really enjoy the Top Shots section and wonder if someone could explain the benefits of an adjustable comb on a shotgun and how it works. I'm receiving all sorts of conflicting advice from people at my gun club.

Mike, Canberra

A Glad you enjoy the column and hope you continue to do so. Adjustable combs are a valuable option nowadays on shotguns and allow you to fine tune the pattern placement of your gun in relation to its point of impact, when comfortably mounted with eyes parallel and your master eye looking straight down the rib to the bead or beads on your barrel.

For Trap shooting we like to see a bit of rib with the beads in alignment in what's called a figure-of-eight sight picture, which usually delivers about 80/20 above and below the point of aim when patterning. For Skeet or Sporting Clays many people prefer to just see the bead or beads superimposed, as they want the gun to shoot flatter patterns in the 60/40 or 50/50 above and below range.

If you have a standard stock that's shooting high, you need a stock-maker to take a bit off the comb and if the gun's shooting too low, you need to add some wood and refinish which can be pretty unsightly. Alternatively you can have an adjustable comb installed for a similar cost which gives you the ability to fine tune. If your gun's shooting high you adjust the comb down and adjust up if you want the pattern higher. If your gun shoots left then move the comb to the right and vice-versa if it's shooting right (these movements are looking down on the comb with the gun pointing forward).

As for how much to adjust? Shoot with the pattern board exactly 16 yards from the muzzle and the adjustment is 1/16th of an inch for every inch you want to move the centre of the pattern. Pattern at longer distances where you're more likely to shoot each barrel to confirm pattern placement at those ranges. Once you have the gun shooting spot on, leave it there and don't fiddle!

Having your gun shooting exactly where you want it is an enormous confidence booster as those clays are smashed and your scores and overall enjoyment improve.

Paul Miller

Q I'm looking to buy a Ruger in .350 Legend. Would I be able to use 125gr pistol projectiles to reload for it? If so, do you know any loads using ADI powder?

Jim Inwood, via email

A The .350 Legend is becoming a popular and useful cartridge. For the 125gr jacketed projectile, ADI recommends using 24gr of their AR2205 powder as a starting load to give a velocity of about 2050fps, with a maximum load of 27.5gr of the AR2205 powder to reach a velocity of about 2300fps.

Barry Wilmot

Q As a newcomer to sambar hunting I've been thinking about getting a dog to help me out. Most of the country I hunt is pretty thick and though there's always plenty of deer sign, actually seeing the animals before they see me is a bit of a problem. I realise I still have a lot to learn and was wondering if a dog might help me become a more successful hunter. If so, what breeds would you recommend?

Andrew Morgan, NSW

A Hunting with a companion dog adds a whole new dimension to your deer hunting. Most dogs have better eyes, ears and noses than we mere humans and consequently their ability to find deer is substantially better than ours. That said, the dog must be trained to work with you. Obedience is essential as a dog which hunts for itself and leaves you behind when it finds a deer has no value at all as a hunting mate.

When it comes to selecting a breed of dog for deer hunting I'm not sure there's a simple answer. I have friends who use nothing more than mongrels with the right instincts, others have spent a lot of money on pedigree breeds such as Labradors or

Pointers and all of them are capable of producing results on the day. My own dog Dixie is a Springer Spaniel/Kelpie cross sired by a working dog which jumped the fence. She works well for me as I'm sure other breeds do for other people, though at the end of the day I think it's more about the hunt in the dog rather than the dog in the hunt.

Will a companion dog make you a better hunter? It all depends on how much time and effort you put into it. Working with a dog will improve your perception of what's going on around you and that can only make the time you spend in the bush more enjoyable.

John Dunn



John's dog Dixie, a Springer Spaniel/Kelpie cross, has been a faithful hunting companion for many years.

Q As we approach the end of the third year of reloading component shortages, we're now at the point where most primer and powder stocks are either totally

depleted or outrageously expensive. Even though it's across the board, pistol shooters in particular are reaching the point of not being able to shoot at all, as we tend to reload our own ammo as factory loads are not a viable alternative. Does anyone have any inside information on what's happening with component supply and when it will return to normal?

Steve, Vic.

A Not inside information Steve but the firearms trade in the US has been reporting similar situations and cite the Covid-19 pandemic as creating the problem in the first instance. That then led to production and supply chain issues which affected both internal and external customers and I think our readers are aware of the demise of our local pistol and shotgun powder industry.

The pandemic along with everything that came with it - lockdowns, illness, labour and material shortages - has been blamed for a serious reduction in ammunition production in the US and so the priority now is to address this backlog and divert all components, powders, primers and projectiles into making ammunition, leaving little or nothing for the reloader.

As early as 2020 the NRA *American Rifleman* publication ran an article entitled The Great Ammo Shortage: When Will It End? In part, it reads: 'Ammunition purchasers

across America, or make that would-be purchasers, are finding shelves bare and unfortunately that's hardly breaking news. If this was simply a Christmas-season run we could insert a Grinch joke here and assume things would return to normal after the holidays.

'But in fact this shortage, as many readers can attest, traces back at least to spring when Covid-mania shocked the country and has since intensified under an unprecedented chain of cultural phenomena. Many gun owners feel the only way to ensure they have ammo when they need it is to buy in bigger-than-normal quantities and the result is hoarding.'

To answer the 'when will it return to normal' part of your question, there does appear to be a slight improvement in the situation in the US and the ammo shortage is being slowly addressed, though any surplus components are going to the much bigger US market first.

Unfortunately, Australia is at the tail-end of the supply-and-demand loop and my prediction is that in the future, near or otherwise, we'll see more and more reloading components originating from Europe. Already small amounts of pistol and shotgun powders and primers have appeared - be that for about five minutes - before being snapped up but we live in hope.

Rod Pascoe

We spotted this unusual listing on the SSAA Gun Sales website last month, a 12-gauge SKB over-and-under shotgun whose stock has been hand-painted and signed by celebrated Australian artist Pro Hart. The shallow-framed Trap gun was presented to the SSAA by Arthur Langsford of Myra Sports in Broken Hill during a fundraising venture and auctioned at the 1998 Shooting, Hunting and Outdoor Trades Expo on the Gold Coast. Bought by a private collector who never shot the gun, it's now offered for sale in Victoria in the same condition it was bought 25 years ago.





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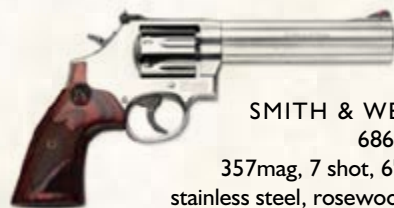
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One of a kind

John Maxwell visits a unique firing range in NSW

When Ray Dennis wanted to shoot his new Barrett rifle in .50 BMG he was told he wouldn't be issued a Commissioner's Permit unless he had access to an approved firing range. "So I built my own," he told *Australian Shooter*. The end result is the Klondyke Range Complex on Klondyke Station, a vast sheep property in far western NSW with a series of five shooting ranges available to those with a need to wring out large calibre and long-range options. Alas, that's not sporting shooters. Klondyke is for Australian defence companies conducting research and development, testing and evaluation of new systems.

When *Australian Shooter* visited Klondyke, Canberra-based defence company EOS (Electro Optic Systems) was conducting three weeks of trials on its counter-drone systems. Those feature a MAG 58 light machinegun in 7.62 NATO and 30mm Bushmaster cannon, both in a vehicle-mounted remote weapon station and, much more exotic, a 34-kilowatt high energy laser.

"The range itself is the only privately-owned one in Australia available for this type of firearms development and research," said Ray. "The only other places to go are Defence ranges. The bureaucracy associated with those ranges is unbelievable. What a pain, it's hard enough even here for what I'm doing. We've managed to get licences and approvals up to the 120mm Abrams cannon." Yet the largest ammunition so far fired at Klondyke is the 30x173mm from the Bushmaster MK44S gun on the Hanwha Redback, during trials ahead of its selection as the Australian Army's new infantry fighting vehicle.


Ray grew up in South Australia and hunted from an early age, potting rabbits and foxes while pursuing a career as a dentist. That was the era when foxes were abundant and shooters were paid a bounty per skin. For taking them he used rifles in both .17 Remington and .222 Remington, necked down to .17 and fireformed into the Ackley Improved cartridge. The rifles were fine but not the ancillaries and even the best US and European scopes weren't

well suited to night shooting and spotlights, while available, had limited range.

So he developed his own spotlights, founding the Lightforce line and in 1986 travelled to the SHOT Show in New Orleans to market his lights to the vast US shooting community. He also found a manufacturer willing to make a scope to his specifications: 30mm tube and illuminated second focal plane reticule so the crosshairs wouldn't grow with higher magnification, obscuring the head of a fox at 300m.

Those early scopes were made in Japan and sold well in Australia, prompting him to establish an office in the US primarily to market spotlights. That was on the reasonable belief that the US market was already amply serviced by an array of well-established scope manufacturers, however as American hunting is done more in daylight, hunters there were less interested in his lights and more attracted to scopes.

He planned to call the new business Lightforce but a US firm making flashing lights for emergency vehicles already owned that name and wasn't willing to part



*We're out with
the flies, trying
to look after
Australia*

Mounds at 500m intervals
and stop butt at 4kms.

with it for less than US\$25,000. No way and so was born Nightforce. Those early scopes were good and sold well enough but weren't mechanically perfect, especially in larger calibre rifles. That led to greater efforts to engineer the scopes to live up to the Nightforce motto: Rugged, Reliable, Repeatable - a requirement with its genesis in the need for a scope which could survive being bumped around in the back of a ute on Aussie hunting trips.

Indeed that's what led him to acquire a Barrett rifle in .50 BMG to do his own test and evaluation, as US SEALs had complained the Leupold Mark 4 scopes on their Barretts couldn't handle the recoil. "For every scope on a rifle there was one in the store for repair," Ray said, "and they just accepted that as being normal. We came along with our NXS series and they trialled them and now they're down to five in the store for every 100 in the field. That's the difference."

In 1998 Nightforce relocated from Seattle in Washington state to Orofino, Idaho where the firm manufactures its own tubes and

other components and sources optical glass from Japan with assembly done in the US. Cementing their position as makers of some of the world's best optics, Nightforce won a succession of US military contracts to equip special forces operatives.

These military contracts really kicked off with the war on terror in the early 2000s when the company went to work on a SEALs requirement for a scope that would function properly after being underwater or high in the sky. That required some specialised test equipment to ensure every scope delivered to the SEALs worked as advertised.

And it's not just in the US. Under Australian Defence project LAND 159 Tranche 1, Nightforce's ATACR 7-35x56F1 riflescope was chosen to replace German Schmidt & Bender scopes, long regarded as among the best optics money could buy. Nightforce scopes are also the choice of competition shooters and hunters with deep pockets, as one from the top-of-the-range ATACR series could set you back more than \$5000, though there are cheaper options.

As well as Nightforce, Lightforce and the Klondyke Range Complex, the Ray Dennis shooting empire also includes Horus (reticles, accessories and ballistic software), Force Ordnance (the Defence arm of the group), Theon Sensors (night vision) and Adelaide-based rifle maker Ace Precision Rifle Systems.

Klondyke, located on the scrubby red dirt plains of the far west, started out as a single range. "Just for myself, I don't need to be flash and can put up with a few flies. From there it built up to where it is today," said Ray. That's five ranges, each with different characteristics and to give an idea of the sizes, range two is a single narrow lane with a danger template out to 36kms. Range four features shooting lanes with stop butts from 600 to 3000m, while range five is configured to allow firing of weapons up to .338 Lapua Magnum in a full 360 degrees out to 4kms. The same range allows firing of weapons up to .50 BMG in an arc of 284 degrees out to 7km.

Facilities of this order necessarily mean Klondyke is a long way from anywhere,



Drone graveyard at Klondyke. Target drones are made by Canberra firm Boresight.



This drone shot down by MG fire has taken a single hit from a 762 bullet.

300km west of Bourke. However, the range does have its own airstrip and since testing is unlikely to be completed in a day, there's visitor accommodation at nearby Tongo Station. With civilian ranges generally too small and military ranges mostly unavailable or far distant, the only other option for Australian Defence companies would be to head overseas. "You need customers to warrant putting in this type of facility," said Ray. "Here we have a system set up, we have the licensing and are out of everyone else's way. There's no risk to the civilian public and no road next to us. We're out with the flies, trying to look after Australia, that's the theory."

So far, customers have included EOS, Hanwha Defense Systems and W&E Platt,

a Sydney firm which manufactures weapon mounts for vehicles and ships. "This is really an opportunity for us to test the system in field conditions against free-flying drones in an environment where we can manage the risk," said Matt Jones, EOS executive vice-president for Defence systems. "We're well away from anywhere but there are still risks to be managed - we have flights overhead. The employment of high-energy lasers as a weapon system is something that brings with it a completely new framework of risk. Coming to Klondyke allows us to test and develop that new capability in an environment where we can manage the risk."

That risk is to passing aircraft even at high altitudes and to put that in perspective, hand-held lasers with power exceeding one milliwatt (one-thousandth of a watt) are banned. More powerful lasers could potentially dazzle or damage the eyesight of a pilot and anyone wielding such lasers faces serious penalties including hefty fines and jail. So at Klondyke, all laser operations ceased when aircraft were in the vicinity, known through monitoring of aircraft onboard Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) identification beacons.

A drone downed by gunfire isn't that exciting as it simply tumbles to the ground, though if the onboard lithium battery is hit, the effect can be more pyrotechnic. On our visit the EOS 30mm cannon was firing

practice ammo, essentially large solids. Best effect would be achieved with the new Northrop Grumman XM1211 proximity fused round which explodes when close to the drone, allowing engagement out to a couple of kilometres.

Alas, Klondyke isn't yet certified for use of explosive ammo and in any case the US Army, which funded development of this round, is taking all production (it's also expensive at around \$500 a bang). The laser system is housed in a shipping container and when operational, all on-site personnel are indoors wearing laser-safe eyewear and watching proceedings on a TV screen which shows a bright light on the target.

As well as being the boss of Klondyke, Ray wears another hat on his vast range complex. "I'm feral pest controller for the million acres. I have a full-time job that everybody else wants to help me with," he said. "Someone has to do pest control and I'm the poor unfortunate."

His preferred firearm is a custom-built rifle in 25.06 Remington with one-in-eight barrel twist for the 133-grain Berger VLD projectile. "By default, out here because the ammunition is cheap - and it's not my favourite but I use it - is the .308 out to 500 yards," he said. "If you had the choice and money wasn't an object, you'd probably go up to a .300 Win Mag or .300 Norma of 7mm Remington Magnum to go a bit flatter with better trajectory." ●



Ray Dennis with EOS and vehicle-mounted counter-drone guns (MG and 30mm cannon in background).

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IN A RUT!

Brad Allen finally took his trophy in the 2023 mating season

There's no substitute for spending as much time as possible in the bush over the fallow deer rut. The dynamics can change on a daily basis and, where there are no deer today, could be where you find the buck of a lifetime tomorrow as only the deer know why they come and go as they do.

Our first few days were spent checking out bucks which had started croaking earlier than usual. A couple of them would have already made reasonable trophies but everyone hunting on our block could see their potential and left them to grow for at least another year. The Quality Deer Management scheme we've been operating on the property for several years was starting to produce the goods with part of that process being to cull excessive

numbers of does and inferior bucks. With this in mind we encourage our hunters to take meat animals in areas which border neighbouring farmland, where they regularly shoot deer as a control measure.

As we'd already checked out most of the vocal bucks, my nephew Frank, son Morgan and I headed to our eastern boundary, an area which normally sees little hunting pressure and as we were taking our gear from the truck at the boundary gate, a buck could be heard grunting no more than 400 yards away. This brought grins to the boys' faces as we set off in his direction with a light breeze in our faces.

Of course the nemesis of all hunters are the wind, kangaroos and ever-alert noses, ears and eyes of any buck's harem, though today was an exception with the wind in our

favour and no roos about. The only thing we still had to contend with were satellite spikers and does. A spiker was happily grunting in some thick stuff on the far side of several does and as we cautiously moved in his direction, he came wandering past at 10 yards. With the sheer number of deer around it was decided only one of us should continue alone.

Frank put in a textbook stalk but returned just on last light, having seen only one of the buck's reasonable antlers before he moved further into the bush. At this point a consolation prize presented as another satellite spiker came walking towards us on the track. Morgan was given the nod and quietly came to full draw on his 70lb Hoyt Compound before releasing an arrow. It hit the spiker in the centre of



Any deer taken with a bow is a worthy trophy.



The possum head dropped by a crow which almost hit Brad.

the chest and he was dead on his feet as he managed only 10 wobbly yards before piling up. As we carried the little meat animal back to the car in the dark the buck continued grunting, never knowing we'd been there, one of the silent advantages of hunting with a bow.

Frank headed home for work the following morning and left the hunting to myself and Morgan. From camp we could hear several bucks grunting in different locations and using the breeze to our advantage, we snuck along the river before heading back up the valley into some of the property's best deer country. We'd just stalked around a young buck we looked at previously when I heard some frenzied flapping coming towards us. Two crows appeared 10m overhead and, on seeing us,


the first swooped upwards and dropped whatever it had been carrying. The mystery object missed me by a few metres and on inspection we found a relatively fresh possum head. You can only wonder at that possum's demise.

About 100 yards further on we entered a heavily timbered area on a narrow path. I whispered to Morgan: "You should nock an arrow, there's always deer in here," when a thundering of hooves came heading our way. Within seconds we were almost bowled over by a doe who veered off no more than five yards from us, being pursued by an amorous buck. He too swung off to our right, slipped in the mud, jumped up and kicked out as he continued after his prize. He was young but his antlers were even and already showing good potential

and we were happy to leave him to his amorous pursuit. Fifty yards further on I whispered to Morgan: "There could be deer ahead in an old rutting stand," when we spotted four or five does stand up and move away from us into the scrub.

Heading back to camp we had eyes on a buck moving between his rutting stands, one we all agreed had enormous potential as a trophy animal, so we were happy to see him wander off on his mating mission. Shortly after, a length of tape in a tea-tree bush caught my attention - only to materialise as a green tree snake! This had been an interesting morning.

That afternoon we hunted towards a noisy buck near the river and after a quite intense stalk through the crunchy leaf litter, we were able to see his mob of does



*A length of tape
in a tea-tree bush
caught my attention
- only to materialise
as a green tree
snake!*



bedded down in the shade with the buck running around the scrub, chasing them and croaking. With narrow split palms he was definitely a cull-buck and exactly what we'd been looking for, though any mature buck, regardless of antler size, taken with a bow is a trophy to be proud of.

As is common, we were busted by a keen-eyed old doe who let out a bark before all the girls moved off into the bush. Our old mate didn't bat an eye but kept grunting and followed his ladies as the lights were once again turned off by mother nature. The next morning saw us back in that general area and it wasn't long before we could hear him grunting in one of his rutting stands, no more than 200 yards from where we'd seen him the previous evening.

Morgan stalked down through the

boulder-strewn creek as Molly (the Labrador) and I stayed on the hill opposite. After 20 minutes or so the buck moved back to where he'd been the night before, giving Morgan the chance to cross the relatively open creek area to the buck's rutting stand. It gave Molly and I the same opening so we too headed over, 80 yards behind Morgan. There were several kangaroos and wallabies in that patch but our luck held and they quietly moved away from the deer.

Morgan eventually stalked into a position between two of the rutting stands the buck had been moving between, when the buck chased a doe past at about 30 yards. There had been no time for a shot before both were swallowed up in the scrub and thinking the buck may return, Morgan waited. Soon he was strutting back past

him at 30 yards when Morgan came to full draw and gave a doe call. The buck stopped in his tracks and was immediately met with an arrow through his right shoulder, spinning on the spot before crashing downhill through the bush.

After hearing the commotion, Molly and I quietly headed over to Morgan who relayed what had just happened and, after leaving the buck for 15 minutes or so, Molly picked up his trail which we followed 30 yards downhill to where he was lying dead in the gully.

The following morning in the half light, mobs of kangaroos and deer were feeding all around the open paddocks and a lone buck was busily grunting in his rutting stand. With a fair idea of where he was working, our main problem was sneaking



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In a rut!

past those many sets of eyes and ears without being busted.

We finally were close enough to study the buck through binoculars. He was definitely a target so Morgan and Molly stayed as I used what little available cover there was to shorten the distance between us. Several does remained feeding as the buck croaked off out of sight to my right after another doe. As the deer had remained feeding, I determined he'd likely return at some point so crept forward as close as I dare to the bottom edge of a dam behind a straggly tree.

I could no longer hear the big bloke grunting and wondered if I'd missed the opportunity when 30 yards to my right out of the corner of my eye, I saw a doe and her fawn behind me, heading towards where I'd last seen the buck. At the same time a spiker was approaching in front of me - I was in a precarious position behind that small tree and wondered if they could hear my heart pounding. I was unable to turn my head for fear of being spotted when another movement behind the doe caught my eye. The buck had been following her and started grunting at the spiker who promptly took flight.



Brad's buck and his Zastava 9.3x62 wearing a Leupold 2.5-8 VX3.

Finally as they all skirted round the far side of the dam, the buck presented a clear side-on shot at 80 yards and I didn't hesitate. I took a lean off that tree and sent a

285gr soft-point 9.3x62 bullet into his left shoulder whereupon he went down as if struck by lightning. The rut of 2023 had been one to remember. ●



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Happy anniversary!

David Crofts hails Beretta's 694 Limited Edition Sporter

The Beretta Arms Company and the many types of firearms they produce under their own name (they also own other brands of rifle and shotgun manufacturers), are well known in this country, having been imported for many years. During that time Australian sporting shooters have used them successfully for target shooting and hunting and even to win Olympic medals. The company was founded in 1526, so in three years' time will celebrate their 500th birthday.

Under review here is the 694 Limited Edition Sporter, made to commemorate Beretta Australia's 20th anniversary, and is engraved as such on the underside of the monoblock. Only 50 of these were produced and imported and this particular anniversary model is only available with 31" barrels, unlike the standard 694 Sporter which comes with 30 or 32" barrels. The gun comes in an attractive silver Beretta

ABS case with three combination locks making it airline friendly.

Also inside the case are a stock bolt tool, an additional 23mm recoil pad, Beretta gun oil, choke spanner, three additional Optima HP chokes, a small screwdriver for trigger adjustment, spare pair of ejector retaining studs, a pair of 20-gram B-Fast stock weights, basic safety instructions, warranty and ABS case paperwork. During the course of the review I also noticed two 40-gram B-Fast stock weights were already secured inside the stock.

Barrels

The 31" barrels are 3" chambered, Steelium Plus bored with Beretta's 'Triple Cone' technology and have five Optima HP extended colour-coded multi-chokes as standard. The chokes supplied are Cylinder, Skeet, Improved Cylinder, Modified and Improved Modified. The barrels are fitted with an 8-10mm tapered rib which,

unusually for Beretta, has a tramline. The rib is fitted with a Bradley-type white bead at the muzzle and as the 694 has no mid-bead, I found the tramline helped as it was noticeable in peripheral vision if your eye wasn't centred over the rib (Beretta Australia will fit a mid-bead for a small fee).

The barrels are regulated at the factory for point of impact and when I tested the gun on a pattern board at my local club, results showed both shared the same point of impact. They're monoblock in construction and superbly finished with a dark gloss blue/black and no sign of rivelling or unevenness. The interior of the tubes are highly polished to a mirror-like finish with the barrels weighing 1520g, which is at the lighter end of the scale for longer barrels on Sporters.

This lighter weight compared to those usually fitted to a Trap gun can be a significant benefit in a model intended as a Field/Sporter shotgun. Unusually, this version of



The balance felt close to ideal for a Sporting Clays gun

The 694 being given a run on the skeet field.

the 694 doesn't have the option to fit B-Fast magnetic weights to the barrels. With the 694 being made in Europe, the gun has been proof tested in Italy for CIP Superior Steel Shot Proof, handy for the sporting shooter who wants to go duck hunting as it's safe to use with high performance steel shot.

Action

This is of the bifurcated type and due to positioning of the trunnions and conical locking bolts, means the receiver has a lower profile when viewed from the side than a Browning or Miroku-type action. The action finish is fairly plain but has a more contemporary 'racy' look with chunkier, angular bolsters unlike the 694's predecessors the 682 and 692. This extra meat in the action adds more weight for improved handling.

There are also similarities between the decoration of the 694 and DT11, both having a nickel-type finish and blue fill

to the lettering and line along the action bordering. The metal-to-metal fit and finish of this gun is exceptional. The top lever has been given a makeover and the thumb area is now angled like the DT range of shotguns, which makes that top lever far more comfortable to use. The action fences have been slimmed down by fluting on either side (these flutes also run into the top of the walnut stock on either side of the top tang) to aid with target acquisition and the trigger is adjustable.

Barrel selection is obtained the usual Beretta way via a rocker-type switch on the safety catch. Having owned a few Berettas, this type of barrel selector would annoy me at times as I'd catch it with my thumb as I went to move the top lever to open the gun and change, sometimes unknowingly, which barrel shot first.

Yet with this 694, Beretta technicians have engineered a solution to that issue, as you can only change the barrel setting with

the safety in the 'safe' position. As soon as you push it forward into the firing position, the selector is locked in place so you can't change it by accident and, for me, that's top marks to Beretta. Trigger pulls were good straight out the box and averaged 1.65kg for the bottom barrel and 1.7kg for the top.

Woodwork

Timber furniture on the 694 Sporter is European walnut and I believe Beretta use walnut they grade as 2.5 as standard on this model, the wood fitted to this gun being of the paler, blonde type with some figuring. Wood-to-metal fit is excellent as are the stock shapes with a fairly tight radius pistol grip and palm swell. There's a slight right-hand cast and 375mm length of pull including an 18mm Beretta recoil pad, though different pad length and spacers are available to adjust stock length, with a longer 23mm pad included.

Stock shapes are reminiscent of those

Happy anniversary!



The 694 Limited Edition cased with spare chokes.

on Beretta's DT range and are a marked improvement on designs previously fitted to their mid-range Sporters. The stock comb is of a fuller design to help prevent head roll, dimensions being 35mm drop at start of the comb and 50mm at heel which suited me. The fore-end is of a rounded type which is fitted as standard to 694 Sporters and some variants of 694 Trap guns, the wood itself having an oil-type finish. Stock ergonomics made for good mount repeatability and handled the punchier (1350fps+) competition shot shells comfortably.

At the range

The 694 felt good in the hands, weighing 3.79kg and balancing on the hinge pin out of the box and to me the balance felt close to ideal for a Sporting Clays gun. Using it on Skeet, Trap and 5-Stand layouts I was most impressed by its handling characteristics and pointability. Overall ergonomics and feel of the 694 are a noticeable improvement on



The monoblock is jewelled.

previous models and felt recoil, even when using 1350fps+ 28-gram high-performance target loads, seemed low.

I managed some good scores during testing with the first box of shells I put through the gun giving me a clean round of Skeet, very pleasing from a gun I'd never shot before. Consistent patterns produced by the extended Optima HP Chokes broke the clays I connected with in a most satisfying way using target loads by different manufacturers.

In summary

The 694 Limited Edition Sporter is an excellent product which, even though priced around the \$7000-8000 mark offers good value, especially considering the longevity you can expect and Beretta Australia's excellent product support. Not only is this a great Sporting Clays gun, it'll handle up to 3" (76mm) heavy, high-performance steel loads which makes it ideal to double-up for duck hunting.

It's a shotgun which handles superbly, has the maker's reputation for reliability and durability, coupled with Beretta Australia's 'Forever Servicing' and up to a three-year warranty. Finally, a shooting mate of mine whom I call 'Beretta Bill' due to his love of their shotguns, likes to say: "Better buy a Beretta" and in the case of the 694 Sporter I'd agree wholeheartedly. ●

Specifications

Maker: P. Beretta, Italy
Distributor: Beretta Australia
Model: 694 Ltd Edition Sporter
Overall length: 125.5cm
Overall weight: 3.79kg (with 2 x 40-gram stock weights fitted)
Barrel length: 31 inches/79cm
Barrel weight: 1.520kg
Bore: Steelium Pus, 18.6 Tapered, 76mm Chamber
Chokes: Optima HP, 5 Extended Chokes with coloured bands included
Trigger pulls: Bottom - 1.65kg / Top - 1.7kg
Drop at comb: 35mm
Drop at heel: 50mm
Length of pull: 375mm
Warranty: Three years
Other info: RRP includes a free gunfit at Beretta Australia, Melbourne
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The Beretta Australia 20th Anniversary Engraving under the monoblock.

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A bloody good Sport

Affordable Meopta scope a winner, says Frank Varapodio



The O-rings fit perfectly on the offset Picatinny rails and provide ample space between scope and barrel.

Meopta, a company with a rich history dating back to 1933, has been delivering a wide range of products from precision medical and scientific instrumentation to military systems and even digital cinematic projectors. Yet it's their optics for shooting and hunting including riflescopes, binoculars and spotting scopes which truly pique my interest.

Their commitment to quality and innovation is evident in a diverse line-up and the Meopta MeoSport R 3-15x50 RD SFP rifle scope is no exception. I was delighted when Winchester Australia supplied *Australian Shooter* the scope for review as, having owned a Meopta MeoPro 4-12x50, I've come to know and appreciate the excellence of their products.

A closer look

This scope has been marketed as an entry-level model, feature packed and is the first in a new series released by Meopta last year. Out of the box it's visually striking with sleek design, clean lines and eye-catching finish and I found it to be remarkably light at around 655 grams, making it ideal for hunting. The zero-reset exposed locking windage and elevation turrets are ergonomically finished with rounded edges which is a nice touch. Ring mounts (1½") are included and while the ring height was perfect for me and my set-up it may not suit all shooters. The rings are also laser engraved with a mark which helps you align the scope to speed up the mounting process.

The RD in its name designates its illuminated red dot on 4C reticle while SFP indicates second focal plane with the optic housed in a 30mm aluminium tube. The scope measures roughly 13¾" in length and offers maximum eye relief of around 4", 90 MOA of adjustment and parallax adjustment from 10 yards to infinity.

The scope has a simple crosshair recital with that illuminated red dot at the centre. This is exceptional and a point of difference certainly at this price range. I've been using Steiner and Swarovski scopes with illuminated recitals and, subject to the terrain and time of day, the red dot is crucial for me as it provides for a visual focal regardless of whether stalking or simply on the move.

The MeoSport is nitrogen purged, shockproof, waterproof and also features MeoBright hydrophobic lens coating, suggesting guaranteed exceptional clarity in virtually all weather conditions. Overall attention to detail in construction and design further underlines Meopta's commitment to delivering high-quality products.

Performance

I tested the MeoSport R on targets from 100, 200 and out to 300m from the bench and in the field in early morning and late evening. The scope allows for hunting around dawn and dusk when there's minimal light, as the 50mm objective allows it to gather more light which results in a brighter and significantly sharper image aided by the 5x zoom and parallax, both sleek and easily adjustable.

Precision and accuracy

The turrets equipped with zero-set functionality can be locked to prevent unintended adjustments while moving between locations. MeoSport dials provide windage and elevation adjustments with a .1 Mil increment precision and you can make those changes easily by pulling the turret, rotating it the desired amount and locking it back into place. The battery (included) for the illuminated 4C reticle is conveniently located beneath the parallax and illumination adjustment turret.

Range testing

I paired the scope with a .243 rifle which produced outstanding accuracy, highlighting the firearm's trustworthiness and showcasing the scope's ability to consistently reproduce shots. Tests were conducted from 100-300m and the results reinforce the MeoSport's dependability and unwavering performance, qualities essential for both hunters and marksmen.

Specifications

The scope comes with a 30mm tube size, field of view of 37.5-7.5ft at 100 yards and eye relief of 3.94". It operates on the second focal plane, has an overall length of 13.29", weighs 655 grams and features a 4C illuminated reticle with red dot illumination. RRP is \$795.

Key takeaways

Optical quality: Meopta is known for producing high-quality optics and the

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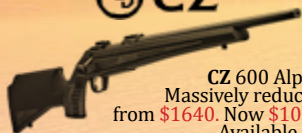
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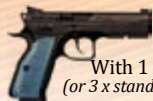


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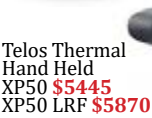
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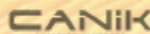


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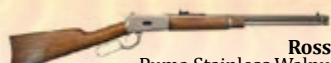
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MeoSport R 3-15×50 RD features excellent glass and lens coatings which provide clear and bright images. The scope offers a high level of light transmission, ensuring good visibility even in lowlight conditions.

Magnification range: The 3-15x magnification range provides versatility, allowing shooters to engage targets at various distances. This range is suitable for both close-quarters shooting and mid-range engagements, making it a versatile option for different shooting scenarios.

Large objective lens: With a 50mm objective lens the MeoSport R 3-15×50 RD allows ample light to enter, resulting in enhanced image brightness and clarity. This can be particularly useful at dawn, dusk or in other lowlight situations.

Red dot reticle: These are popular for their ease of use and quick target acquisition. They provide a simple aiming point and can be particularly effective for close-range or fast-paced shooting.

Robust: Meopta scopes are generally built with durability in mind. They often feature a rugged construction with high-quality materials, making them resistant to recoil, shock and environmental conditions. This robustness ensures the scope can withstand harsh shooting settings while maintaining accuracy and performance.



A close look at the eyepiece and power ring.

Summary

This riflescope is an excellent choice for hunting. Its sharpness at all magnifications and in less-than-ideal conditions during testing meant performance was outstanding. I really appreciated its light weight for lugging up and down challenging terrain through the rough country I often encounter, while its price-to-performance ratio is close to unbeatable. This is a reliable, high-performing and affordable option for hunters and shooters at all levels. Its robust construction, excellent optical performance and user-friendly features make it a worthy addition to any shooter's kit, so whether you're a seasoned hunter or beginner, this scope is sure to enhance your experience and improve accuracy in the field. ●



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Go wild with Ackley

Consider a makeover for that
.30-06 rifle, says Thomas Tabor

Five-shot groups at 100 yards like this, or better, are common in many .30-06 Ackley Improved rechambered rifles.

When the .30-06 Springfield first appeared on the scene in 1906 (hence the '06') it quickly became recognised for its abilities as a good choice for hunting, military use and even some competitive shooting events. But in all honesty, when compared to some of the choices of today, this cartridge has lost a great deal of its original lustre.

One of the first major challengers to the .30-06's favourability arrived in 1960 when Norma introduced its revolutionary new .30 calibre magnum - the .308 Norma Mag. Three years later Winchester ramped up that competition even further by introducing its own slightly more powerful magnum in the .300 Winchester Mag and, almost immediately, shooters worldwide began to recognise how they could benefit from the far better ballistics of those two cartridges.

But almost equally important as those improved ballistics was the fact the overall cartridge length of both new arrivals were close to the .30-06, which made them acceptable for use in a standard-length bolt-action rifle. Standard-length bolt-actions are generally much cheaper to buy than

the longer magnum actions, and the end of World War Two brought a glut of surplus .30 rifles which could be customised and rechambered for these new magnum cartridges.

Ackley's improvement

But even before those Norma and Winchester Magnums appeared on the scene, there was a lesser-known competitor out there. P.O. Ackley was possibly the most prolific cartridge experimenter of his time and had been diligently working on his own more powerful .30 calibre version. Like Norma and Winchester, Ackley thought if he could find a way to send a bullet out the muzzle a little faster than the '06 could, it would result in flatter trajectories and higher retained energies on impact. His wildcat .30-06 Ackley Improved did just that by only expanding the .30's factory-made cartridge case.

Ackley's approach took the form of first recutting the rifle chamber to slightly larger dimensions, which included a straighter case wall and considerably sharper 40-degree shoulder angle to increase its powder capacity. Once this was done he fired the original .30-06 Springfield ammo

in that new chamber, which resulted in blowing the case out to match those new specifications, a procedure commonly known as 'fire-forming' the brass. Once the cases have been reformed in this manner they can be resized and reloaded using handloading dies which match the new improved dimensions.

The .30-06 Ackley Improved

Ackley developed his .30-06 Improved in the 1940s and it remains one of the more popular non-commercialised wildcat cartridges today. And you can take full advantage of its more desirable ballistics by simply having a .30-06 rifle rechambered to those dimensions. While various gun writers have said the conversion from a standard .30-06 to the Ackley Improved results in an increase in powder capacity by about five per cent, my research shows a somewhat greater expansion in volume. I believe at least some of those writers were using water as a medium for comparison purposes and I don't believe water is the most appropriate and reliable measuring method.

I've found in many cases water tends to underestimate capacities which might be due to the tiny air bubbles that persistently

cling to the inside walls of the cases. My personal preference is to use either fine grain cartridge powder or granulated table salt. When filling cases I continuously tap the side of them with a small metal spoon to ensure a complete settling of the contents. In this case the result showed the standard .30-06 held 99.3 grains of table salt and the Ackley case 107.7 grains, an impressive total percentage increase of 8.4 per cent.

This rise in powder capacity of the case brings about a potential substantial increase in its velocity, though clearly extra powder alone doesn't always equate to better overall performance. Every barrel is unique and a balance must always be struck between velocity and an acceptable degree of accuracy. Nevertheless, I've enjoyed great results in my own shooting of the .30-06 Ackley Improved over those of the .30-06 Springfield.

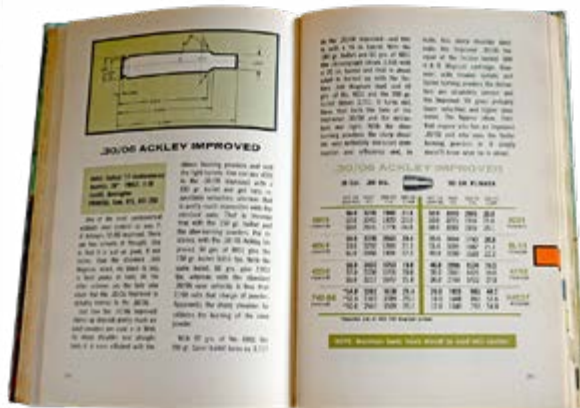
Handloading the Ackley

My personal experience handloading most mid to large-sized magnum cartridges have shown a real preference for slower burning-rate powders and the .30-06 Ackley Improved is no exception. My best recommendation when working up an acceptable load would be to avoid all the slower burn-rate rifle powders entirely and concentrate only on the two or three slowest rate. When working up an acceptable charge for any cartridge you should always start low then gradually increase the charge, staying alert to signs of developing excessive pressures.

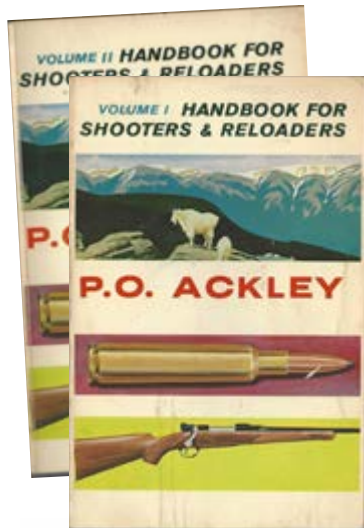
Sourcing loading data will be a bit more challenging with any wildcat cartridge, though I found data for my own .30-06 Ackley Improved in some older reloading manuals as well as in book *Cartridges of the World* book. There's also reloading data available on the internet but ensure anything you choose comes from a trustworthy source and, if possible, confirm it with at least one other.

Benefits of improvements

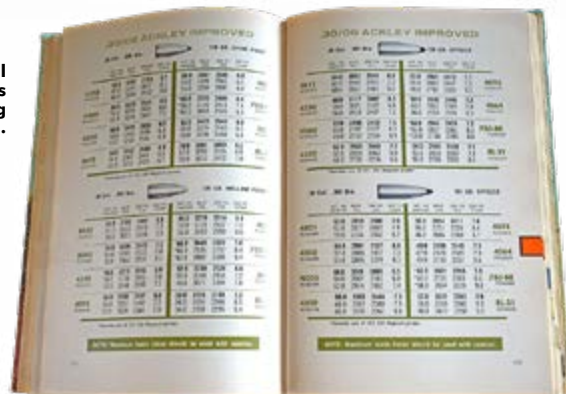
One of the nice things about improved wildcat cartridges is not only can you fire them, you can also safely substitute pre-modified commercial rounds too. Even after the chamber has been recut to the new dimensions, there seems to be little problem continuing to fire the parent .30-06 Springfield rounds in that newly rechambered rifle. In this case, if you run out of handloaded Ackley ammo, the flexibility of being able to substitute Springfield .30-06 shells can be a great asset - just head to your local gunshop and buy a box.



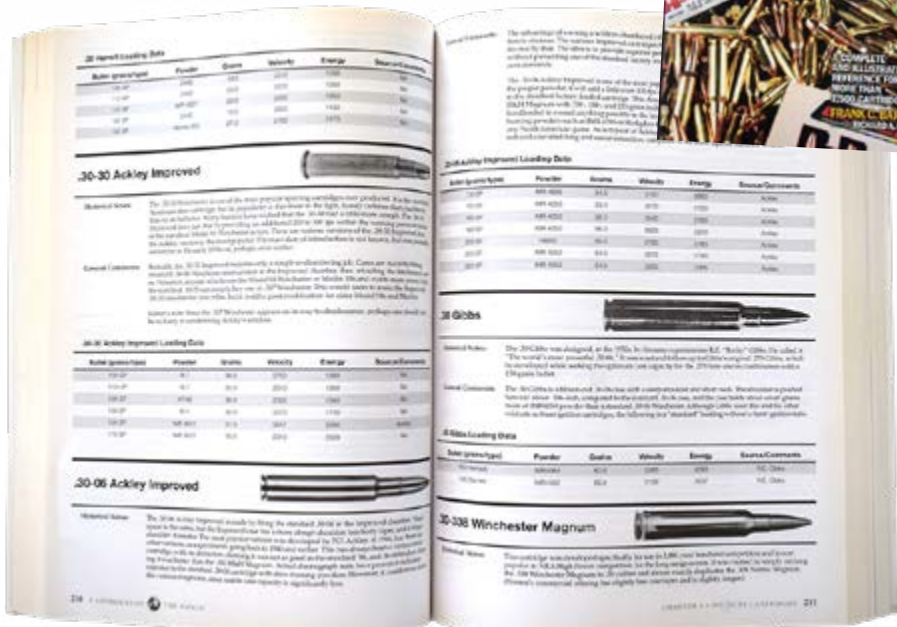
Tom found useful reloading data in his old Speer Reloading Manual #8.



P.O. Ackley was a prolific cartridge experimenter with much of that experience in his Vol. 1 & 2 Handbooks for Shooters and Reloaders books.



Cartridges of the World is a great source of reference.



Go wild with Ackley

This 10-shot group at 100 yards provides an even better picture of the Ackley's capabilities.



The .30-06 Ackley Improved (right) comes with a much straighter case wall compared to the .30-06 Springfield.

The flexibility of being able to substitute Springfield .30-06 shells is a great asset

Ackley vs belted mags

While most .30-06 bolt-action rifles have the capability to be rechambered to .300 Win Mag or .308 Norma Mag, those conversions can be more costly and in some cases a bit more problematic. In addition to having the chamber recut, a bolt face alteration is necessary to accommodate their belted designs. In some instances there may be feeding issues but these problems don't exist when converting an 06 to the Ackley Improved design - and of course there's no option to shoot original 06 ammo in those rifles.

Even though some handloading data indicates velocities produced by the .30-06 Ackley Improved are on par with those of the .308 Norma Mag and .300 Win Mag, I believe the Ackley falls just a bit short in those comparisons. While there are many variables which can affect such a comparison, I feel the following would be a general assumption of what a shooter can expect. By carefully selecting your powder and charge weights, it wouldn't be unrealistic to expect an increase of up to about 150fps in muzzle velocity when shooting either 180gr or 200gr bullets with the Ackley design over the .30-06 Springfield. And when a comparison is made between either

the .308 Norma Mag or .300 Win Mag firing 180gr bullets, I'd expect the .30-06 Ackley velocity to be about 100-150fps less.

The way I see it

While I'm not a huge fan of the .30-06 Springfield, I love the various .30 calibre magnums and that includes the .30-06 Ackley Improved. During many years of shooting I've converted several 06s to .300 Win Mag and owned at least one .308 Norma Mag. I've also played around with various wildcats and very much like the option of rechambering a standard .30-06 to the more desirable Ackley specs and ability to fire both type of shells in the same rifle.

Reamers for the Ackley conversion seem readily available from many suppliers, as are reloading dies (my own came from RCBS). So if you're looking to increase performance of that old .30-06 which has seemingly taken up permanent residency in your gun-safe and not had a bullet down its barrel in a while, an Ackley makeover might be on the cards. ●

The Ackley (right) shares a similar shoulder angle with that of Weatherby's magnums.

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A result of tireless efforts to manufacture a true coin finished Silver Action shotgun based on a proven 900K. Developed with the Australian shooter in mind, it has perfect balance, superb finish and will perform in the most demanding conditions.

Kilworth Side x side 20g-28" Barrel / 12g-30" Barrel

The Kilworth side by side offers an understated finish to those seeking an alternative to the more intricate Imperial model. With all the technological improvements of a modern shotgun this steel proofed side by side offers incredible value and longevity.

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Sleep tight

Kyle Andrews spent a cosy night in the new One Planet sleeping bag

The locking YKK zipper with its brilliant anti-snap cover and glow-in-the-dark pull tab. The 'draught tube' behind provides insulation along the zipper line.

When *Australian Shooter* was offered the chance to review a sleeping bag from Australian outdoor equipment supplier One Planet, I was more than a little excited to test such a high-quality piece of gear which more than lived up to my expectations. All their products are designed and developed in Melbourne under their philosophy to 'Make it good. Make it work. Make it last.'

Make it good

The first thing that struck me on picking up the box the Sonder sleeping bag came in was to wonder if there was actually anything inside, such as the light weight of the bag at 743g. Including the compression sack, my kitchen scales clocked it at 901g with tags attached, which certainly won't overload my pack or the ute for that matter. The compression sack, so named for the straps which allow you to compress the bag very tightly, has plenty of scope to squeeze it even further if you really need to save space.

The specifications are stitched into a piece of fabric on one end, which doubles as a sturdy carry handle I also found suitable for attaching to a backpack. In the spotlight here is the Sonder sleeping bag with a -8C lower comfort limit, 800+ Loft hydrophobic down, regular size and lefthand zip. While that's quite a mouthful, there are many options to choose from and it reflects

the selection of a made-to-order product from such a wide range. One Planet's catalogue contains considerably more detail and guidance on making your choice and is a great read for those interested in the 'nitty-gritty'.

As I pulled each handful of the bag from its tiny compression sack, the down filling expanded to normal size almost immediately. It's akin to emptying a clown car and I was impressed that it's able to be repacked with very little effort indeed. As I'm poring over every detail, it's the little things which grab my attention, all of which are pet hates of mine from spending countless nights in a sleeping bag. Ever found yourself twisted up in the bag at night and can't find the zipper? The Sonder has a glow-in-the-dark

tab on the end of the pull string! Find yourself with the bag half unzipped in the morning? Not any more as the locking main zip will stay put unless you deliberately pull it down (in practice I found it can slide a minimal amount but reliably locks after about 50mm of travel).

Keep finding your sleeping bag has slid down to your waist? The elasticised drawstring in the hood and shoulder section is effective at preventing this. Sure, all sleeping bags have a drawstring in the hood but they're often not elasticised and are combined with very little padding in the hood so can be uncomfortable to put any tension on.

The down filling is held in place very effectively through a 'Vertical V Baffle



Rolling up my double swag in time to watch this Coober Pedy sunrise was a breeze without bulky blankets. No extra bedding required!

T1x T3x UPR

Ultimate accuracy
in all situations.

The core of the UPR is the lightweight stock construction: the bedding features an extra layer of carbon fibre mixed with fiberglass for increased rigidity and accuracy. The stock is coated with a rough surface for the best grip in any condition and has attachments for QD slings. In addition, the design of the stock takes into account the ergonomic shooting position, even at long distances.

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T1x UPR

Blued \$2,249 RRP



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One Planet Sonder Sleeping Bag

Construction' which also serves to allow full expansion of the filling. The more basic alternative would require stitching through the inner and outer fabric layers, holding things in place but preventing the down from expanding, thereby creating cold spots in the sleeping bag where stitching causes 'thin' areas. It's not an effect I'd considered before but the results of the baffles are impressive and can be easily observed in the expanded volume of the bag.

It's an unfortunate fact that the flexible and silky 10-Denier material of the bag would ordinarily be quite prone to snagging in zippers. It's frustrating and has the potential to cause rips and tears, though One Planet have dealt with this in a few ways and I was very satisfied with the results. The main zipper includes an 'anti-snap' attachment which separates fabric from the metal zipper teeth and is incredibly effective. There's also a thicker Cordura internal lining either side of the main zip to prevent snags and tolerate them better without damage should they occur. Further, there's a flap (draught tube) to cover the zipper track internally as it would otherwise not be sealed and lack the insulation afforded to you by the rest of the bag. The added benefit of this draught tube is it'll keep that ice cold zipper off your skin through the night.

Make it work

It was forecast to drop to around 8C on a 'relatively' cold night for my first chance to test the Sonder at Coober Pedy in central South Australia. I was returning home to Adelaide from Alice Springs and had just unrolled my swag after a long day's drive to the Big4 caravan park in Coober Pedy. I left

the swag cover open for added exposure to the cold wind, unpacked my new One Planet sleeping bag and climbed in wearing minimal clothing.

By tightening the elastic drawstring the hood was pulled around my head and the air inside the bag was now trapped, cutting off the strong cold breeze. Considering I'd just stripped down before getting in, I was considerably warmer after a few minutes and more than happy with my accommodation for the night. There was a great view of the stars and my old sleeping bag wouldn't have stood a chance of keeping me warm without the swag closed.

Given the Sonder's -8C comfort rating it wasn't unexpected that before long I removed the hood section in search of ventilation to avoid overheating. A great feature of this sleeping bag worth detailing is the toe pocket zipper. Due to the zipper position and designed shape of the foot section, you can open the end for some air without having your toes poke out. Effectively the zipper is positioned at your heels and manages to let air through without giving you cold feet. My research into competitors' products in a similar category showed this foot vent isn't a typical feature on a sleeping bag meant for more extreme weather, though in my opinion it makes it much more versatile for all-round conditions.

I'd taken a digital thermometer from my car fridge to bed and left the unit itself outside my swag for some temperature comparisons. It was 12.3C when I went to bed with an ambient minimum overnight of 8.2C. When I arose at 6.40am it was 9.2C ambient and 34.2C inside the bag where the sensor had been swimming around all night. Toasty!



One Planet's Sonder provides vastly better performance in cold weather at half the weight of my old sleeping bag.

Make it last

Owing to their sustainability focus and making gear that lasts, One Planet offers both minor and major repairs in addition to professional cleaning services for their products with a variety of prices listed on the website. In my opinion this is a deciding factor if you're in two minds about the price.

Frankly, the fact repairs are even considered just highlights the pride they take in their original product and they expect this gear to perform well enough for long enough that you'll want it repaired should years of wear and tear eventually take their toll. I look forward to spending many more nights in this one. ●

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See everything!

As **Matthew Godson** discovered,
the Pulsar C50 lets you hunt round the clock

There's no doubt undertaking pest control in the dark using either thermal or night vision optics can help boost your efficiency. Thermal scopes are great technology but can be quite expensive, while night vision provides an alternative that's more affordable yet still delivers results. One product I've had my eye on for some time is an offering from Pulsar which offers good flexibility at a reasonable price tag in the Pulsar Digex C50, a digital day and night-vision riflescope with round-the-clock capability

And it really does provide 24/7 use as the Digex C50 employs different lens and

sensor operating modes to generate great results at any time. The image produced by the super-sensitive 1928 x 1088 pixel sensor is clear and detailed with full high-definition resolution which, unlike typical thermal, lets you see the target in far greater detail. From sunset to dusk the C50 will display a bright image with correct colour rendering at a time when the naked eye starts to struggle for detail in observed objects.

During daylight the full-colour digital functionality eliminates the need to switch to a traditional optic. If you like to set up a scope and rifle and not mess around

with it then this is for you - and you can add a quality return-to-zero mounting system to use the Digex C50 on several firearms. With the ability to save five separate shooting profiles, this means you can configure the scope on five different rifles and have up to 10 separate reticles (distances and/or ammunition settings) zeroed into the device per firearm.

After dark is where the C50 is claimed to have the best sensitivity in its class for infrared spectrum (night sensitivity). It's highly effective when paired with IR illuminators and can detect larger game up to 550m away in darkness. You have the

The Digex X850S (long-range) IR illuminator has the power button and brightness adjustment within easy reach.





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Find out more about the Steyr Monobloc combination and customisation process online!

See everything!

option to choose Digex X940S (invisible) or X850S (long-range) illuminators and when using these, special firmware algorithms equalise the image brightness shown on the display.

This feature eliminates flood exposure from foreground objects and increases the brightness of more distant targets. What this means out in the field is trees, bushes and tall grass will not be an obstacle for observing far-away targets as all images, even at different distances, will be equally and clearly visible.

Battery life is roughly 10 hours from a single charge and the scope comes with rechargeable batteries and a charger in the carry bag, one a built-in lithium-ion with capacity of 4.9Ah and the other a replaceable APS2 2Ah lithium-ion. Those who like an extra battery in their backpack can buy more to extend operating time. When charging, you can either boost the replaceable battery separately using the APS or charge both in the scope body via the USB Type-C port/plug/cable connection.

The Digex C50 for review had wi-fi which allowed connection to a smartphone and internet via the Stream Vision 2 mobile app, which provides a range of options including remote wireless device software updates and bug fixes, real-time image transmission to mobile devices, remote control digital functions and more. With internal storage of 16GB there's plenty of room to save pictures and videos of your adventures to share with others.

Other noteworthy features include an instant start-up mode which has you ready for action in just three seconds, while the PIP (Picture-in-Picture) function enables you to see both a detailed box image of the aiming area and main image representing the entire field of view. The base magnification of 3.5x increases fourfold to 14x and zoom changes can be either gradual in 2x step or continuous to set the ideal ratio of magnification to suit. A high-resolution sensor enables accurate aiming over the entire magnification range.

The high-contrast 1024 x 768 pixel HD amoled display offers enhanced colour rendering, high-contrast images and quick-response to provide clear and smooth images. The SumLight enhanced sensitivity software increases the sensor's ability to passively observe in low-light conditions and at night without IR illumination to maintain image quality. This means on nights with a bright moon you may not need IR depending on your activity. The C50 has a wide-angle eyepiece of 29.5 degrees for comfortable viewing of the HD display with 50mm eye relief, so having comfortable



Just before last light, the C50 still produces colour images and, inset, current sky.

At roughly 300m, this piece of farming equipment can still be clearly seen in daytime mode.

image perception without a 'keyhole' effect will ensure you won't have eye strain and can concentrate on your hunting activities.

The C50 is extremely shock-resistant to cope with high calibre recoil and has a waterproof rating of IPX7 which lets you work in high humidity and heavy rain. Not that you'd do the next one on purpose but it can withstand 30 minutes immersion in water to a depth of one metre. Essentially it's designed to operate in a wide range of temperatures (-25 to +50°C) to cover all Australian conditions.

The aluminium-alloy body with IR illuminator weighs 1.345kg, which did feel a little front-heavy in the hand but once attached to my Ruger American 204 the weight seemed to even out. I visited the SSAA (SA) Para range to sight-in the scope and found the process straightforward - set your target at a known distance, choose a primary zeroing profile, aim and shoot.

Use the freeze function to hold point of aim at the centre then align your reticle with the impact point. Save the zeroing coordinates and fire a second shot to



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SCAN ME

See everything!



All set up and ready for some pest control.

confirm your point of impact and aiming point are matched. Compared to sighting thermal scopes, I could see the actual point of impact much clearer thanks to the powerful sensor and full HD resolution display and was certainly far more precise with sighting-in than any thermal I'd tested previously.

I used the Digex C50 on a couple of pest control sessions covering both day and night use and during the day could see clear colour images through the HD display at various distances. If you're used to a glass scope it may seem a tad foreign looking through what is a small HD television screen, though putting that feeling aside you'll be impressed by the clarity this device can produce through the eyepiece. Unfortunately, that clarity isn't reflected in saved images but the quality is still good enough to share.

When the sun started to sink the C50 really impressed as I was still able to see colour images right up until last light. With the sun slipping below the horizon and stars appearing in the sky, it still produced reasonably clear images of horses 350m away in a paddock and landscapes much further out. You can switch to black and white and see more for longer before it

becomes too dark, then it's time to switch to night mode.

Once in that mode it's time to attach the IR illuminator to look into the darkness. I found it worked well, providing plenty of light and reflecting eyeshine back to the C50 for a good sight image. I was more than happy with the reach of the illuminator and was able to clearly spot large wildlife such as kangaroos more than 300m away and small game like rabbits beyond 100m. That's well within my effective range when operating in the dark, as I normally engage most targets inside 150m so I can move much closer undetected.

The Digex C50 lived up to my expectations as a very capable scope that's as effective in darkness as it is in daylight. It looks good and offers user flexibility and versatility on multiple firearms. If thermal scopes are outside your budget, this is certainly an option to have you operating in the dark and boosting your pest control efficiency. Pulsar guarantee their products are defect-free in materials and workmanship for three years from date of purchase, with the warranty for rechargeable batteries (supplied or bought separately) being one year. The Pulsar Digex C50 digital day and night riflescope with 850 IR has an RRP of around \$2395. ●



The illuminator attaches to the scope body using the supplied mount ring with eccentric lever.

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Action stations!

Marlin lever and Leupold Freedom combo impressed **Chris Redlich**



Most modern firearms are based on designs enjoying decades of history and, for some, more than a century. Take for instance the model 1911 Pistol, which commenced manufacture in the year which gave it its name. Basic yet hailed as a breakthrough design of its time and, despite its age, still a platform which set the standard for so many pistols of today.

On top of that my son recently remarked on our RAAF's Hornet fighter jets and was surprised when I told him their original airframe was a design which started in the same era we were driving HZ model Holdens! My point is that some designs

are timeless and lever-action rifles fit that criteria. As levers have been with us as far back as the 1800s, they certainly don't need any further introduction and adhering to heritage, Marlin's 1895 lever model designation is a direct lineage of their original 1895 patent.

From the basic blueprint of a sliding bolt connected by linkages to a falling lever, some makers have done it better than others and through the generations, US brand Marlin is by reputation up there with the best. Marlin hasn't gone completely unscathed though and a few years back when it was a subsidiary to another company, its name was blemished

somewhat, thanks to poor tooling and manufacture.

Thankfully this setback was short-lived and it did restore its reputation with the old manufacturer before changing hands once more. Now owned by Ruger it's forging ahead again and with precision manufacture and quality control, doing its best to re-establish itself as a highly regarded brand.

My first experience with Marlin's new lever rifles was at last year's Nioa conference where, at their indoor range, I was able to test an SBL in .45-70 Government for the first time. Having never fired the rifle before and feeling the pressure of a very observant and learned audience, I was



Long Picatinny rail provides ample positioning for optics.

surprised to discover its accuracy off the shoulder and, with that in mind, was more than keen to accept an invitation to review.

The Marlin SBL rifle

Months passed before it was my turn to get up close with the rifle and I didn't waste any time familiarising myself. What's noticeable at first glance is how Marlin has taken a historic design and thrust it into the modern arena. Although not a new design to Marlin, gone is the sleek, non-existent pistol grip of yesteryear's lever, replaced with a modern and more vertical grip which reflects shotgun design, promoting responsive and accurate offhand

targeting without affecting the function of a smooth lever action.

SBL is an acronym for Stainless Big Loop and although there's an attraction to the deep bluing of the traditional 'lever', Marlin's SBL is designed as an all-weather field rifle that's more about practicality than looks. The stock is ambidextrous and designed to suit left and right-handed shooters. Both the fore wood and butt stock are laminated timber, enhancing durability further and, honestly, I don't mind the combination of stainless-steel components matched to grey laminate wood. Fine cut chequering with the inclusion of a diamond inlay on the pistol grip

adds to the appeal but more importantly overall, adds grip to the wood surfaces.

The 19" (482mm) hammer-forged barrel is one hell of a big tube, though not unexpected considering the large chambering of .45-70 Govt cartridge. The barrel's twist of one turn in 20" is the perfect rate for stabilising 'game-stopping' 300-grain projectiles accurately off the shoulder and on target. At 3.5kg (fully loaded and unscoped) the Marlin's not light. Its weight, however, is offset by a well-balanced compact 950mm overall length and the heft of the SBL proved perfect for taming recoil, as I later discovered during field testing. A subtle but handy inclusion is a barrel thread cap which

Action stations!



Thread for muzzle brake attachment and tritium insert to fore sight aids open sight shooting in low light.



Rounds fed easily within the tubular magazine.



All rounds ejected well during fast follow-up shooting. Note compact sight alignment of the Pig-Plex scope. Inset: Deadly accuracy of the Marlin and 45.70 cartridge.

can be removed for fitment of a muzzle brake should recoil be a hindrance, though the large rubber recoil pad absorbed any kick and felt snug in the shoulder.

The tubular magazine running parallel to the barrel holds six of the big .45-70 Govt cartridges and each round finger-fed easily through the load gate thanks to the improved spring tension of the retainer. The centrepiece of any lever-action is the lever 'handle' and the SBL's big loop, while designed for the wearing of gloves (specifically US hunters), didn't affect functionality with bare hands.

The action is slick and smooth to cycle and rounds fed flawlessly. The bolt is spiral fluted and slides fore and aft, cocking the hammer with ease. For those with 'stumpy' thumbs Marlin supplies a hammer extension but I found it easy to cock manually without one. The cross-bolt safety ensures the firing pin stays clear of the hammer when a cartridge is chambered, while the

ability to half cock the rifle ensures the shooter is safe and 'at the ready' should wild game present.

If I had one complaint of the new 1895 SBL it's trigger pressure. I'm used to much lighter triggers on hunting rifles and was surprised when my trigger pull gauge 'maxed out' at 8.5lb pressure without release. The Marlin doesn't have an operator adjustable trigger but I'm reliably informed by a Nioa representative it can be modified for a lighter pull by a qualified gunsmith.

Despite that heavy trigger pressure it did break crisply during testing once I became used to it, empty shell cases extracted without fault and thrown well clear via the right-hand ejection port. One of my biggest gripes of other lever rifles I'd used was the awful razor-sharp edges of machined steel. Marlin has done a brilliant job of polishing off all machined surfaces likely to come into contact with the operator's hands and I applaud them for this attention to detail.

The SBL comes standard with a Ruger-designed rear-folding peep sight which enables rapid target acquisition for fast-running game, while the illuminated tritium insert of the front sight adds an ingenious touch to open-sight shooting in low light. Additionally, the Picatinny rail runs the full length of the receiver and at least one-third the length of the barrel, providing ample positions for a multitude of optics including red-dot sights. That inclusion is a real bonus which caters to shooters of varying scenarios, reinforcing the SBL's hunting credentials.

Leupold VX-Freedom scope

Along with the Marlin, Nioa provided a 1.5-4x20 VX-Freedom scope with Pig-Plex reticle. With a weekend hunting trip planned soon after receiving the rifle, I promptly mounted it for sighting to the Picatinny rail using the supplied Leupold cross-slot rings. The popular 1.5-4x20



Large boar removed thanks to Chris' brother's sharp shooting and Leupold Pig-Plex scope.



Second wild dog taken cleanly at 80m.

Superb results on paper and out bush where it really mattered

Pig-Plex reticle needs no formal presentation and is a sensible mate for the SBL. It's perfect for fast follow-up shooting, designed purely for rapid acquisition of feral pigs with the inclusion of various holdover sub-tensions relevant to game of their size.

Additionally, Leupold supply a reticle sub-tension value chart in MOA for ease of reference. The 20mm objective doesn't have a large field of view compared to popular 40mm objectives, though the lever rifle is purposed for close-quarters shooting and the compact VX-Freedom provides ample field of view at shorter distances.

Range and field

Further reinforcing my positive experience at Nioa HQ previously, the Marlin was on target and sighted within a few shots

at both 50m and 100m using Federal Premium 300-grain Hammer Down hollow points. The Pig-Plex reticle provided a clear sight picture and as you'll see in the accompanying target photo, results speak for themselves.

That three-shot group was achieved in less than 10 rounds after 'zeroing' shots and proved Nioa know what works as they'd supplied a winning combination of rifle, cartridge and scope. Needless to say I had all the confidence required for hunting at my brother's property a few weeks later.

Before stepping out for an early morning hunt, I fitted one of my favourite slings to the front and rear studs on the stock. The compact Marlin sat snug across my back when slung and was also a pleasure to carry in the hand. The freezing cold morning

began to heat up though not because of sunrise. Wild dogs acknowledged my brother's howls and before long we had choirs of response calls all around us.

The first wild dog that presented after a tense stalk fell instantly but not surprisingly to a single round off the shoulder from the .45-70. I was rapt with the 'pointability' of the SBL and although a second shot wasn't required, a quick 'action' of the lever had a single round fed and ready as smooth as muscle memory. If only the ferals had presented as readily during trips for other reviews as this one, because as far as field testing goes it was a dream run. Within the next 24 hours we'd taken another large wild dog and a monster wild boar thanks to my brother's sharp shooting.

Conclusion

For a design with age on its side, the new Ruger-made Marlin 1895 SBL has reinforced once again its place in today's hunting market. And on a lighter note, Hollywood considered the SBL in .45-70 Govt to be Owen Grady's (actor Chris Pratt) preferred rifle of choice for tackling man-eating dinosaurs in the movie *Jurassic World*.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time with the rifle and if anyone has any doubts over the historic .45-70 Govt cartridge, think again. Make no mistake though, the Marlin lever in .45-70 Govt is no pussy-cat rifle but despite its mild aggression on the bench, all sins were forgiven when it produced superb results on paper and out bush where it really mattered.

I was most impressed by the accuracy of the Federal 300-grain loads in combination with the SBL rifle, both of which I highly recommend for feral pig and wild dog destruction based on my experience. Furthermore, for traditionalists who love the look of blued steel and dark timber, you'll have to wait for the Marlin Guide Gun, available here at some point.

The Ruger-made Marlin 1895 SBL lever rifle comes with a lifetime defect warranty and, at time of writing, a recommended retail price around \$2570. Following the field test my brother, although a left-hander, enjoyed using the flexible SBL so much he inquired about buying the review rifle for pest control on his farm. Additionally, Leupold has been around long enough to enjoy a good rap and the VX-Freedom 1.5-4x20 Pig-Plex priced at around \$600 is a fair price for a no-nonsense scope with lifetime guarantee. Check with your local retailer on both items for store price and availability. More at nioa.com.au ●

Class axe

Think what you really need from a hunting blade, says **Derek Nugent**

Browsing the tables at my local biannual gun show in search of a bargain or enticingly different bit of kit is a relaxing way to spend a few hours. Among the crowd are people of all ages, gender and ethnicity, a great sign for the long-term future of our sport. Some are after firearms and hunting-related items, others camping and outdoors accessories or boots and apparel, so with that in mind it's interesting to note what people buy, particularly in respect to bladeware.

What often catches my eye, and not in a good way, is the number of people who walk away beaming, having just bought a monstrously large hunting knife, usually in a Bowie-style reflective of a 'Rambo' heritage. Rightly or wrongly I find myself pondering how, when and to what effect such an implement is to be used.

Any hunter, particularly a game meat harvester, will affirm that bigger is not better when it comes to skinning and field butchering, far better with a more modestly sized, ergonomically suitable blade to safely and efficiently strip a carcass. Similarly, the image of some of these machete-like sheath knives being used like a cleaver to smash through bone and cartilage makes me fear not only for the fingers and eyes of the wielder but also the safety of those in the immediate vicinity.

So perhaps thought needs to be given to a more appropriate blade, something more fit for purpose like a small axe or hatchet. Whether your preference is to carry field equipment on a hunting belt or in a small

backpack, when it comes to safely and efficiently claiming a trophy or breaking down a carcass, for ease of transport or butchering, a small hatchet is an often-overlooked option worthy of consideration.

Historically speaking

The axe has for millennia been a feature of the human experience as either an agricultural implement or personal weapon. The stone axe, with or without handle, was an important part of our long-distant ancestors' tool kit. The terror unleashed on the people of western Europe by Norsemen (or Vikings) from the late eighth century, involved extensive use of both bearded throwing axes (hatchet-sized) and the long-handled 'Dane axe' which was also variously known as the English long axe or hafted axe. Indeed Frank, Anglo and Saxon warriors of the period themselves used the Francisca (or throwing axe) to deadly effect.

Saxon Huscarls, the warrior elite of the time, had a fearsome reputation for their skills with the hafted axe. Many references can be found detailing fearsome blows which 'split men asunder, cleaving helm and mail' and even decapitating horses with a single blow. Indeed, historical sources describe how these men and their mighty axes almost carried the day for King Harold at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, only to have their bloody handiwork undone by a single arrow as dusk was falling.

Interestingly this is all evidenced in the panels of the Bayeux Tapestry, which chronicles the year 1066 and its history-shaping

outcomes. Throughout the Middle Ages the axe remained a staple both agriculturally and militarily, until the advent of firearms eventually relegated it to a more domestic as opposed to military role. Today the axe remains an agricultural and domestic mainstay of most tool sheds and is certainly essential equipment for all hardcore four-wheel drivers, campers and adventurers. Perhaps then it's appropriate for hunters to 'rediscover' the versatility of the hatchet or belt axe and give serious consideration to including one in their kit when afield.

So what's available?

It's not hard to source a belt axe as there are literally dozens to pick from, it all comes down to preference in terms of weight, dimensions, design, functionality



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and of course price. A simple online search will throw up a myriad of options from a host of suppliers, all of whom will deliver to your door. If your preference is to be more hands-on and actually have a feel for the heft of an axe in person prior to purchase, again you're spoilt for choice. Every hardware store, auto shop, camping and outdoors supplier and gunshop will carry a line of hatchets or camping axes suitable for use by hunters.

Should you choose to visit your local Bunnings, Anaconda or BCF you'll find products by Saxon, Cyclone, Spear & Jackson, Fiskars, Gerber, Rough Country and Renegade to name but a few, with prices ranging from as little as \$10 to as much as \$130. Some will be traditional hickory-handled steel-headed axes, some all drop-forged steel while others will feature composite materials in an array of styles.

Size of handle length and bit (cutting edge) will vary considerably as will weight, typically in the 1 to 2kg range, so faced with such a diversity of choice it's important to decide beforehand exactly what you want. How much are you prepared to pay? What length handle and size of cutting edge are you comfortable with? What style in terms of materials and design suits your purposes? What about weight: Is the axe to be carried on your belt or in a day pack? Most importantly though, what usage do you intend for it?

Compact and effective

As a meat hunter I've always opted to carry a small axe in my kit. Initially I used a cheap off-the-shelf model from an auto shop, hollow synthetic handle with a small fitted steel head and while it was adequate, experience suggested I could do better. Firstly I wanted to carry the axe on my belt and not in a day pack. Secondly I wanted a solid,

compact model with a shorter handle and heavier head with a larger bit and, after a little research, I settled on a Marble's sheath axe from Global Gear at \$110 delivered. The axe is 32cm long with a 16cm bit, weighs 1.25kg and has a brown timber handle. Naturally it also came with a belt sheath.

It's the smallest in the Marble's range which includes other suitably-sized options in the No.9 Camp axe, No.9 Hunter's (double bit), No.9 Belt and No.10 Belt axe. This company was established in Michigan in 1898 by Webster L. Marble, originally making safety axes with the product range gradually increasing to include knives, firearms and sundry hunting and outdoors products. The firm markets itself as manufacturers of "quality, durable and practical outdoor equipment for serious sportsmen the world over" and based on my usage of the sheath axe to date, I can attest to the accuracy of their claim.

The ergonomics of the handle allows for a comfortable grip, the slight pseudo 'pistol grip' format making it easier to deliver a well-aimed and weighted blow to the target area. While the bit had clearly been factory sharpened it did require a touch up to enhance the keenness of its edge. Interestingly, the size and curvature of the blade means it can safely chop, slice and cut as the task demands and the finish of the handle, while smooth, is not in my experience prone to becoming slippery.

That said, as with all bladed implements care must be taken if your hands turn unduly sweaty or bloodied and consideration should be given to some DIY chequering or a leather grip if deemed necessary. I'll be honest and say the sheath provided was a disappointment, obviously made to a budget and largely unsuitable for extended and demanding life on a hunting belt. To that end I had a more suitable alternative made by a

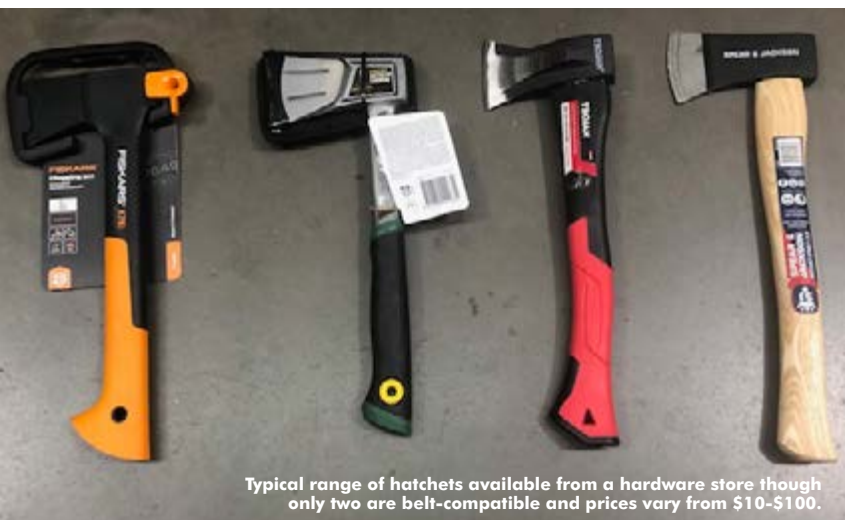
local leathersmith for a modest sum, though if your intent was to carry the axe in a day pack, the sheath provided would be more than adequate. In all other respects I'm happy with the overall quality and performance of the axe.

Fit for purpose

As previously stated I've always carried a hatchet as part of the hunting kit and my decision to upgrade to the Marble's sheath axe reflects a desire for a more effective tool to carry on my belt as opposed to in a backpack. I've habitually used a hatchet to recover trophies from both deer and boar and break down carcasses in the field to allow for ease of transport or speed of butchering. I'm also mindful of safety, particularly when hunting alone so tend to equip myself with gear which is fit for purpose rather than a compromise.

I've seen fellow hunters come to grief when pushing a knife, especially a king-sized Bowie, beyond its practical usage. In my experience a small, well-designed and weighted belt axe is the safest and most efficient way to deal with bone, cartilage and vertebrae when field processing game animals for both trophy and meat recovery purposes. The axe has for eons been a faithful servant to the needs of mankind and there's no reason why it shouldn't continue to be so as it adds an enhanced level of versatility, performance and safety to a hunter's field kit. ●

*Rediscover
the versatility
of the hatchet
or belt axe*



Typical range of hatchets available from a hardware store though only two are belt-compatible and prices vary from \$10-\$100.



Selection of hatchets from a specialist outdoors retailer from \$90-\$130.



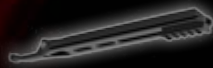
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Extension Rail



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- Match Trigger
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- Adjustable hammer tension
- Cocking changeable from left to right
- Safety changeable from left to right
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- 1/2" UNF barrel thread
- Adjustable cheek rest
- Adjustable butt pad (Fixed for NSW)
- AR grip platform



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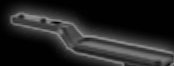
COMPATIBLE ACCESSORIES



Keymod to Picatinny
Rail Adaptor



Keymod to ARCA
Rail Adaptor



ARCA / Picatinny
Extension Rail

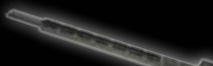
- C2 barrel
- 20MOA Picatinny Rail
- Match Trigger
- Adjustable regulator
- Adjustable hammer tension
- Cocking changeable from left to right
- Safety changeable from left to right
- M18x1 barrel thread
- Dual magazine holder at rear of stock
- Metal cased magazine
- Adjustable cheek rest
- Adjustable butt pad (Fixed for NSW)
- Folding stock (Fixed for NSW)
- AR grip platform



24 Month
Warranty



COMPATIBLE ACCESSORIES



ARCA / Picatinny
Extension Rail



Plenum
Extension

- RTI Proprietary Barrel
- Adjustable regulator
- Micro adjustable hammer tension
- Pressure-assisted valve system (ensures rapid closure times)
- Adjustable Picatinny rail 20 to 150 MOA
- Adjustable ambidextrous cheek piece
- Interchangeable calibre
- Ambidextrous magazine
- 1/2" UNF barrel thread
- AR grip platform



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Alpha . . . bravo!

Con Kapralos was well
impressed by the new CZ 600



Ceska Zbrojovka (CZ) has taken a huge step with the release of its CZ 600 series of centrefire rifles. Such classics as the CZ 550, 555 and 557, held in high regard for their superb fit and finish, are no longer in production with the CZ 600 moving the company into new territory.

CZ has released five models in its 600 line - the Ergo, Range, Trail, Lux and Alpha - and all have a niche user group in mind and specific task at hand. Local importer of CZ, Winchester Australia, sent *Australian Shooter* one of the new Alpha models in .308 Winchester for assessment, coupled with a Meopta Optika 6 3-18x50 riflescope and a generous selection of ammunition. Being a review rifle, it arrived assembled with the optic cradled in Recknagel rings all ready for testing.

At a glance

The CZ 600 Alpha in .308 Winchester is a full-size, turn-bolt rifle with modular design and the capacity to interchange barrels. The barrel is 510mm (20") with a medium/heavy profile, the receiver aluminium with Picatinny rails machined into its top surface for scope attachment. The stock is

fibreglass-reinforced polymer with detachable five-shot magazine also made from polymer and the entire rifle is finished in matte black, has an overall length of 102cm and weighs 3.2kg bare.

Barrelled action

CZ 600 receivers are machined from either high-grade aluminium or steel, the Alpha test rifle having the former measuring 24cm long by 4cm wide and while aluminium receivers aren't new on sporting rifles, CZ provides reassurance with a guaranteed 20,000-round service life. The Alpha's receiver has a generous ejection port on the right for unhindered clearance of fired cases while permitting a round to be top-loaded into the magazine.

Atop the receiver body two short Picatinny rails are milled into the front ring and bridge, allowing the use of matching scope-mounting rings. Other models of the 600 have the receiver drilled and tapped to accept Remington 700-style scope-mounting bases. The receiver and barrel attachment is a complete deviation from previous CZ centrefire models, the left of the front receiver ring base being split and made to accept the chamber portion of the barrel.

This is clamped into place using three large screws which are semi-permanently fixed into place with red thread-locking compound. Rearward of the three set-screws is a notch in the receiver which engages with a recoil lug in the stock floor, just forward of the magazine well. This lug arrangement provides excellent support of the barrelled action into the stock.

The 600 is designed as an interchangeable barrel rifle but CZ does stipulate only qualified gunsmiths are permitted to carry out such work. Any attempt to remove a barrel yourself will void the factory warranty and to further reiterate its position, it only makes barrels and spare parts available to CZ-approved gunsmiths through Winchester Australia.

The barrel is cold hammer forged, 510mm long (20") and of a medium/heavy profile. It measures 27mm at the front receiver ring and tapers down to 18mm at the muzzle, which is also threaded. The external metal surfaces of the CZ 600 barrelled actions are finished in a new surface treatment called Bobox, applied as a chemical heat process which results in a super-tough finish that's also corrosion resistant.



Bolt

This is redesigned to match the new receiver. It measures 190mm x 20mm and is released from the receiver by pressing the bolt catch, in the form of a spring-loaded tab in the right side of the bridge just forward of the bolt handle. Up front the bolt has three pairs of symmetrically spaced locking lugs which engage into corresponding recesses in the chamber end of the barrel proper, a longitudinal slot cut into the underside of the bolt body serving as a guide for the bolt stop to run along.

The design can be touted as a combination of a controlled round feed and push feed systems, demonstrated when chambering a round from the magazine. The cartridge rim is guided under the extractor, which it holds firmly throughout the bolt cycle until the case is ejected from the action. The bolt handle is steel and accompanies a 60-degree bolt lift, something that's standard on many factory bolt-actions. A large bolt handle knob ensures the user will have a decent grip in all conditions.

Safety, trigger, magazine

The trigger unit is of a single stage design under the rear tang. It has a unique feature

where the user can choose four predetermined pull weights by simply using a 1.5mm hex Allen key in the dial in front of the trigger (the stock need not be removed to do this). The surface of the dial has a small dot which, when rotated, indexes to four pull weights from 0.8-1.8kg. The test rifle had the trigger pull set at 1.4kg, not sure if this is the factory setting but it was left as-is for testing.

The safety's a deviation from the norm on most bolt-action rifles, being located at the rear of the trigger group. It consists of a tubular rod sliding within a housing and is operated by simply pressing up from underneath or pushing down from the top. Pushing the button down makes the rifle safe, up enables the firing mode. It seems to work as intended and is positive in operation.

The magazine is polymer and of a detachable box design with twin stack configuration holding five rounds in .308 Winchester. It clicks in securely and has a neat feature where the magazine can be 'locked' into place by simply sliding the release button forward. The magazine can also be top loaded through the ejection port quite easily, a feature many hunters prefer.

Stock

This is a quantum-leap from its predecessors and all models in the new range have something different. The Alpha's is fibreglass-reinforced polymer and has a rather characteristic design and aesthetic. The comb is fairly high while being slim and straight without a cheekpiece, the pistol grip quite scalloped and allowing a secure hold. To the rear of the buttstock a soft rubber recoil pad is fitted with a Monte-Carlo scallop at the top of the pad and absorbed recoil well in testing.

Sling swivel studs are provided as standard on the toe of the buttstock and underside of the fore-end. The stock has a series of grip panels inletted into its surface around the pistol grip and fore-end but also the main segment of the stock either side of the receiver and two small triangles above the rear stud. These inletted grip panels are raised rib-like striations with a rubber texture and offer satisfactory grip in all conditions though the aesthetics left me a tad undecided.

At the range

Winchester Australia supplied a wide selection of hunting and match ammunition for

Alpha . . . bravo!



The action with its aluminium receiver and integral Picatinny rails.

Accuracy testing at 100m

Ammunition	Average Group size (mm)*
Winchester Copper Impact 150gr	24
Winchester Super X 150gr PP	28
Winchester Super X 180gr PP	30
Winchester Deer Season XP 150gr	34
Winchester Ballistic Silvertip 168gr	32
Winchester Match Sierra 168gr	20
Winchester USA 147gr FMJ	36

* Average group size calculated from three 3-shot groups at 100m from a benchrest.



The three barrel retaining screws which clamp the split front receiver ring to the barrel shank.



Polymer detachable five-shot magazine holds rounds in a staggered manner.



Adjustable trigger pull mechanism with four pre-determined settings.



Buttstock with its high, slim and straight stock.

testing, the rifle thoroughly cleaned beforehand with three 3-shot groups fired from each brand at 100m.

The CZ 600 Alpha in .308 Winchester, coupled with the excellent Meopta Optika 6, made it possible to shoot some accurate groups and any of the five hunting loads would make a suitable choice for the astute hunter. The rifle shot flawlessly, feeding rounds from the magazine to the chamber and ejecting fired cases without issue. The standout was naturally the Match load with the 168gr Sierra with a group average of 20mm, pretty respectable from a non-benchrest shooter like me.

In the field

The 600 Alpha and Optika 6 topped out at 4.1kg and for a stalking outfit that's just on the limit. If this was my rifle I'd fit a lighter optic and rings to drop overall weight to around 3.8/3.9kg. I chose to set up in a ground blind overlooking a proven deer patch and using Winchester Copper Impact loads, harvested a couple of fallow deer for meat. I did a few short walks with the rifle/scope combination which carried well and many will appreciate the additional weight and love the compact nature of the Alpha.

Conclusion

Having owned and reviewed a few of the predecessor CZ models, the new 600 range is in a league of its own. Purists won't be rushing to upgrade their 527 and 500

models with the 600 targeted more at a new market and oriented towards the US at that. For what it is, the CZ 600 Alpha is a neat rifle suited to both hunting and target applications with the barrel interchangeability one of its best attributes. The CZ 600 Alpha retails at \$1695 and is available from all Winchester Australia dealers nationwide. ●

Specifications

Manufacturer: Ceska Zbrojovka, Czech Republic

Model: CZ 600 Alpha

Action: Bolt-action repeater, interchangeable barrel capacity

Calibres: .223 Rem to .300 Win Mag, tested: .308 Win

Magazine: Detachable box, polymer, five-rounds

Barrel: 510mm (20") cold hammer forged, medium/heavy profile, 1:10" twist

Sights: Picatinny rail integral to receiver, no open sights

Trigger: Single-stage, adjustable to four pre-set positions from 0.8-1.8kg

Safety: Two-position

Stock: Glass-reinforced polymer

Finish: Matte black barrelled action and stock.

Overall length: 102cm

Weight: 3.2kg (bare)

RRP: \$1695

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It's a family affair



Families who shoot together create generational bonds, writes **Dr Todd Hutchison**

Nicolene, Tobie, Riki and Talita - the family shares a love of the shooting sports.

The shooting sports can bring families together, transcending age, gender and personality types as they present an opportunity to develop strong bonds by spending quality time away from technology and other life distractions. Like other sports such as golf, shooting brings a state of immersion with a sense of energised focus, enjoyment and complete involvement, often referred to as 'in the zone'.

Shooting enables parents to teach children important skills during their developmental years such as improving focus, mental strength, following rules and regulations and having a strong sense of self-discipline and responsibility, values which often later influence other aspects of their lives and careers.

While tourist-friendly indoor firing ranges can be a fast way to expose someone to the shooting experience, clubs provide for adequate time to be fully inducted into the sport and develop skills within a social group environment over time. Australian Defence Force Cadets is another common way for young people aged 13 to 18 to gain shooting experience in a safe, supervised and secure setting.

Shooting clubs provide an ongoing community environment for all ages and a chance for experienced and inexperienced families to come together in a controlled location to learn about the importance of proper firearm handling practices, marksmanship and camaraderie, all under the watchful eyes of trained Range Officers. They also offer opportunities to learn about,

prepare and participate in competitions from club, to state, national and international events including the Olympic Games. It's also a rare sport where grandparents can compete with grandchildren on an equal footing, making it a truly unique and inclusive family affair.

Attracting new participants and particularly youngsters into shooting is also a vital factor in building a sustainable sport for the future. Most success in appealing to and retaining young members is linked to an early exposure to firearms and the support given by their family. The neuro development of children plays a crucial role in shaping their core values and beliefs about firearms, and many shooters today grew up in a society where guns were more commonplace. Introduction at a young age



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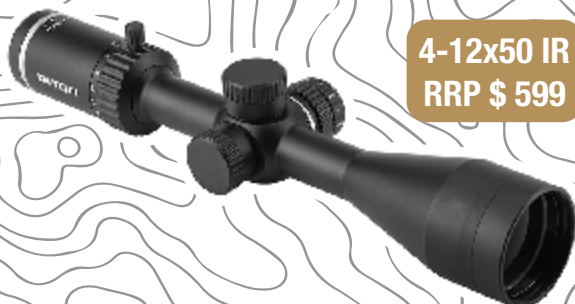
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It's a family affair

can instil interests which lead to a lifelong passion for the sport.

The most effective pathway to firearm contact at an early age is through the trust relationship built with family members. It's also a chance for a parent to act as a mentor and role model in a situation outside of the home as children learn by example, so having trusted adults to follow helps implant positive behaviours and values.

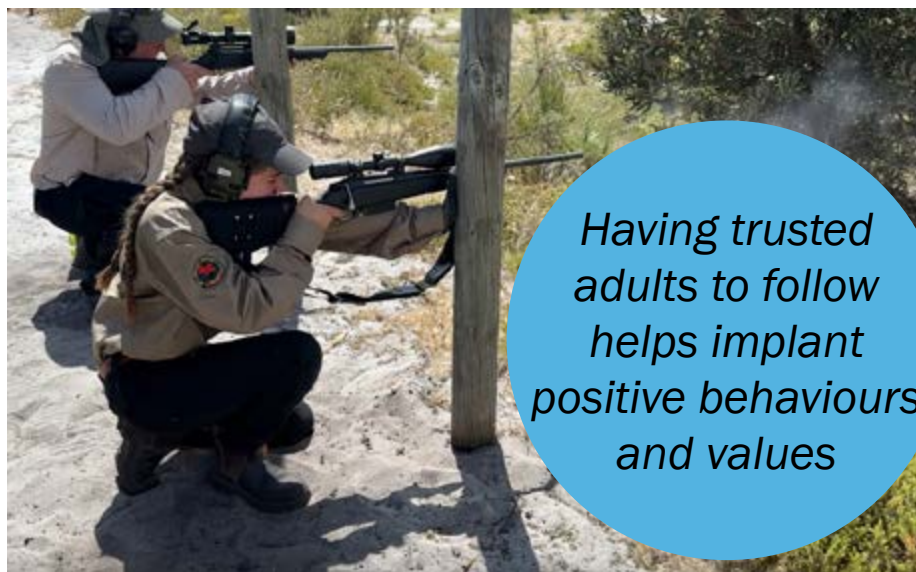
Take the Western Australian family of four who are active members of the Perth Rifle Metallic Silhouette Club. They comprise state champion father Tobie, who mentors his two daughters, state champion Nicolene (15) and silver medallist Talita (13). Mum Riki is also an avid shooter and found that club activities have become a great father-daughter bonding experience. She's taken a step back from competing and plays more of a background role as the team's primary support base during competitions.

Said Tobie: "I find that doing this activity with my daughters gives us precious time as a family to do something unique together and it'll definitely create memories in years to come for us to look back on." Tobie and Riki are originally from South Africa, where firearms are more readily accepted and where it's common to introduce children to them. They were surprised to find there was some negativity around shooting in Australia and noticed the disapproval often portrayed by the media.

But this didn't hamper them in teaching their Australian-born daughters about the sport. Introducing the girls at an early age was a natural thing and was done with an air rifle before progressing to a .22LR rimfire. There are benefits in taking time with children during their first experience, as doing so with knowledgeable family members can improve the chances of making shooting a lasting family pastime.

Tobie and Riki recognised that familiarising teenagers with larger calibre firearms should be a conscious progression, especially to give them time to develop appropriate skills and safe practices with firearms which have little to no recoil. A wise decision, as it's common to hear of adults who had negative first experiences from the recoil of a large calibre as a youngster, with that moment vividly embedded in their memories. Having progressed slowly, both girls now shoot in competition with a .223 Remington.

From a brain frequency perspective, children aged five to eight are predominantly operating with alpha waves (8-13 Hz), which is a state of being relaxed and alert. This helps with being more receptive to



Talita says the skills she's learned from shooting easily transfer to other areas of life.



Tobie is a state champion and serves as a great inspiration for his girls.

learning, introspection and the internalisation of moral and ethical values influenced by their surroundings. This would support the theory that early introduction is a key factor in having less of a fear of firearms.

Tobie and Riki had the right idea when they introduced Nicolene as a youngster using an air rifle and later a .22LR rimfire to shoot at multi-coloured balloons. Making such experiences a safe, fun and enjoyable time for children will increase the likelihood of their ongoing interest. Riki said: "Why I enjoy my daughters being involved in the sport is more for their own self-discipline, as in that way they can learn how to control their emotions, their breathing, focus on one thing at a time and compete with themselves."

As children progress from eight to 12 years old, their brains move predominantly into beta waves (13-30 Hz), which plays a role in developing more cognitive skills, critical thinking and decision-making abilities. It's associated with more logical and analytical thought and this is where the theory and practice of marksmanship comes in. Proficient marksmanship is often linked to early exposure to developing the basic safe practices, skills and knowledge which becomes refined over time towards high performance in competition.

There are lots of opportunities for juniors due to the smaller number of youths involved, and this gives them a competitive advantage in becoming a champion. Tobie and Riki's daughters have both

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It's a family affair

become multiple medal-winning shooters, while Tobie himself has won numerous state titles in different classes of Practical Hunting Rifle and is the perfect mentor for his daughters who benefit from his advice and encouragement. Both admit their confidence came from his guidance and having him shoot beside them at events and as Talita said: "To become a better shooter you need to listen and take advice from those with more experience."

The family have found great support from fellow club members for the teenagers' safety and development as they keep a watchful eye on them and enjoy their youthful energy. Sadly, many children are exposed to firearms through movies or video games, which use violence for the purpose of evoking emotions for entertainment value that's counter-productive and far from the reality of learning a skilled craft.

Tobie and Riki's youth experience was very different given the generational influence and commonplace of firearms, which encouraged a passion for the sport that's been passed down to their daughters. Their experience shows how a community approach can bring together people of different ages, genders, culture and colour. Said Riki: "The girls learn to communicate

with people who are both older and younger and may look different to them."

Nicolene and Talita have seen positive results from the sport and promote the transferability of shooting to their life skills. Talita values the aptitudes of judging distances and developing an ability to focus when aiming, whereas Nicolene acknowledges the benefits of learning how to adapt to different situations, developing critical thinking, applying previous knowledge to improve and learning how to complete against herself and others. These abilities have become positive drivers behind the girls' competitiveness and aspirations to achieve results like their dad's.

Nicolene is a Sergeant in the Australian Army Cadets, which has given her experience with military-type firearms. She has growing ambitions to become a Warrant Officer then pursue an adult career as an officer in the Australian Army. She said: "Cadets is a great way for young people to



Top shots: Talita, Tobie and Nicolene.

gain safe exposure to firearms." Her sister has also joined Army Cadets and has aspirations of a career in medicine, while recognising that shooting will continue to be an ongoing interest.

Both teenagers believe having more young people participating in the shooting sports and promoting fledgling champions as role models will naturally attract other youngsters. Licensed shooters should be encouraged to look at the benefits of having their children and grandchildren involved, as the shooting sports may just prove to be the missing ingredient which makes a stronger family connection that can span generations. ●

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Lithgow Arms and Spika

announce joint venture

Allan Blane in Melbourne

The Spika headquarters at Carrum Downs south-east of Melbourne was the venue for the launch of a new partnership between Spika and Lithgow Arms last month, where the latter introduced their new and improved LA102 rifle range.

More than 100 industry insiders and invited guests attended, to hear Spika Managing Director Dean Anderson get proceedings under way by announcing the joint venture between the two Australian companies. Said Dean: "Here at Spika we aim to offer Aussie shooters some of the best products and services available and our partnership with Lithgow Arms, a company with a proud history going back more than a century, is yet another step in that direction."

Spika are the new distributors for Lithgow Arms and it fell to Lithgow Product Line Manager Chris Burton and Customer Support head Matt Jones to reveal details of three new rifle models being released to the Australian market. Said Chris: "We felt the current Lithgow Arms product line didn't have a broad enough appeal to meet the requirements of the wider Australian shooting community.

"So to remedy this situation and immediately reinvigorate the LA102 product range, a number of minor changes have



Spika Managing Director Dean Anderson opens the launch.

been implemented to create three uniquely different models which will appeal to a significantly wider cross-section of the Australian and international shooting community. These new models are evolved versions of the current LA102 Crossover rifle with the bulk of the changes being largely cosmetic and requiring only minor engineering effort to implement."

Matt Jones then explained those changes and presented three new rifles - the LA102 Hunter, Outback and Varmint - outlining the improvements the company has made to each as follows.

LA102 Hunter: A lightweight hunting rifle using a 20" lighter profile fluted barrel and existing magazine chambered in .204 Ruger, .223 Rem, .243 Win, 6.5 Creedmoor and .308 Win. The Hunter will be fitted into the current poly stock with a film-dipped camo pattern.

LA102 Outback: A Scout and Tactical truck gun, this is a midweight and compact utility rifle using an 18" current profile barrel, 10-round AICS-style box magazine and chambered in .223 Rem, .243 Win and .308 Win. The Hunter will be fitted into a Southern Cross Small Arms TSP-X chassis stock.

LA102 Varmint: A heavyweight precision varmint rifle using a 24" heavy profile barrel, 10-round AICS-style box magazine and chambered in .223 Rem, .243 Win, 6.5 Creedmoor, .308 Win and a new calibre in the .204 Ruger. The Varmint will be fitted into a laminate stock with updated bottom metal.

Lithgow Arms are also working on a range of other features including left-handed versions, an even lighter stock for the Hunter and more calibres including .270 Win, .30/06 Springfield and Precision Rifle Cartridges. ●



The LA102 Hunter.

The LA102 Varmint.



Matt Jones, left, and Chris Burton of Lithgow Arms at the launch.

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Respect *the rimfire*

Leon Wright puts a case
for the humble .22

Leon favours his short, heavy-barrelled CZ .22 rimfire for rabbit hunting at night.

On a recent rabbit hunting trip I came to realise, somewhat belatedly, how important it is to have a rimfire in your armoury. I say armoury because in the most recent firearms inspection by our local police, one of the officers as they were leaving said to my wife: "You must feel safe - he's armed to the teeth!" In reality my 'armoury' constitutes mainly shotguns and rimfires as I have three .22 rimfires and one .17HMR.

My affiliation with .22 rimfires goes back several decades and, like most hunters of my age, I started shooting with one. I soon yearned for something better than the little Sportco Huntsman .22 I was using and during the ensuing years many passed through my hands, with all of them being given a thorough workout on rabbits, hares and foxes and occasionally (and I must say stupidly) on pigs.

Here's a quick rundown of the .22 rimfires I've owned, or those I can remember. First was that Sportco Huntsman single-shot then came a Winchester Cooley with tubular magazine, a Sportco 71A self-loader, Winchester bolt-action, Erma lever-action, Stirling bolt-action, Anschütz .22 Magnum, Stirling .22 Magnum, Voere single-shot, Browning

breakdown, Vostock single-shot, Brno Model 2, two Browning single-shots, a CZ bolt-action .22 Magnum, Winchester lever-action .22 Magnum, CZ short heavy barrelled .22 and, finally, a Savage .22 Magnum with a thumbhole stock and heavy barrel. And of course I've fired many others belonging to friends.

So you can see I've had extensive use of the .22 rimfire in one configuration or another. I became serious about using them from the time my son wanted one, so I taught him to shoot with the old Sportco Huntsman and, when he became proficient with it, I bought a Brno Model 2. That was probably one of the better makes on the market at the time and its accuracy, straight out the box, was legendary.

I thought I'd step up from old ICI bullets to the new-fangled CCI Stingers, being touted at the time as the best thing since sliced bread. Boy was I in for a rude awakening. Fitted with what I considered an adequate scope in a Tiara 4x28, I set about firing a few groups to check the accuracy of the Brno with a target set at 25m. With this combination I planned on playing merry hell with the local fox population which had been enjoying chicken lunches at my expense, so you can imagine my surprise when my first

string of shots were lucky if they hit the outer ring of a standard 25m target.

After practically expending a packet of CCI Stingers with no improvement, I started looking at what else was the problem after dismissing the fact it was my shooting. The scope, while only a cheap Tiara, was good enough for a rimfire and was firmly attached to the Brno, with all screws tight and the barrel of the rifle not touching anywhere in the channel.

After much head-scratching the penny finally dropped - the ammunition just wasn't suitable for the rifle, nothing more sinister than that. After a visit to the local sports store and, armed with a few different brands of .22 rimfire ammunition, I tried again. Results were varied and vastly different but the one which shone above the rest was Remington Yellow Jackets which cut the centre ring with virtually every shot.

I learned a valuable lesson that day, one I've never forgotten and as the old saying goes: Everyone makes a mistake, the smart ones learn from it. From then on, every time I changed ammunition (usually due to lack of availability) I checked to see if it grouped suitably and, when the supply of Yellow Jackets dried up, I'd go through the process of elimination again and quickly

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Respect the rimfire



This fox was lured into range with a Scotch predator call and fell to a Winchester lever-action .22 Magnum.



Leon's current rimfires (from top) a Sportco Huntsman, Brno Model 2, heavy-barrelled CZ and Savage .17HMR.



Leon's fox-hunting outfit is simple but effective.

found the new Winchester Power Points were perfect in my Brno Model 2.

Speaking of choosing suitable ammunition, I went through the same process with my .22 Magnum. While the cost of .22 Magnum ammunition is substantially more than that for an ordinary .22 rimfire, I thought I'd start with some of the cheaper brands, something I was soon to regret. While testing groups with one of the lower priced brands in my old Stirling .22 Magnum, quite a puff of smoke came from the rifle when I fired it. The shot sounded louder than usual so I cautiously raised the bolt and dropped the magazine out. Along with the magazine, part of the extractor claw came with it after being fractured in firing. I knew the barrel was clear so it was definitely faulty ammunition.

The only trouble I had with my Brno Model 2 was the same as most other owners - the 10-shot magazine which always had feed trouble. Some managed to fix it with a bit of tinkering but I switched from the metal magazine to one of the newer polymer ones and the problem was solved. I personally found the five-shot magazine better but continuous reloading was a pain when rabbits were thick on the ground. Several pre-loaded five-shot mags helped but I eventually settled on a couple of 10-shots for the bulk of my rabbit hunting.

At time of writing I have four rimfires in my gun safe - three .22s and a .22 HMR - and I've no intention of selling any of them. The old Sportco single-shot Huntsman I've had for goodness knows how long only has a run now when the grandkids want to do a bit of plinking. There are two Brnos, or should I say one Brno and one CZ, and the last is a Savage 17HMR, each with a specific application it's best suited to and which I arrived at after years of experimenting.

The Brno Model 2 I've had since 1986 wears a Leupold V2-2x-7x variable these days and has been my walkabout choice for a number of years. If I just want a couple of rabbits for the dogs I'll favour it and if not using either a 12 or 20-gauge shotgun for foxes, I'll definitely reach for it.

I particularly like to call-in foxes with a variety of noises but mostly use a predator call and, if done properly, a fox can be lured into close proximity and I've found the .22

rimfire perfect for such occasions. Most foxes in early summer are suckers for a predator call and I couldn't guess how many I've taken with that Brno Model 2. The 40-grain projectile has enough punch to take them cleanly with something to spare if your shot is slightly off.

One I took recently fell into that category. Lured out of a stand of bullrushes, the fox sauntered in and at 30m realised all was not as it should be and sat with its head moving from side to side, trying to work out where the injured creature was. It about-turned and bolted and as it looked as though I'd lose it to the bullrushes I thought 'what the heck.' Aiming just above its head I fired and dropped it in mid stride, measuring it at 80 paces - a fluke maybe but it does show the little .22 rimfire has something in reserve.

Some years ago a mate and I were doing rabbit control work on a couple of farms with real problems, literally shooting them in the hundreds every time we went hunting. I started with my Brno Model 2 but found the long barrel awkward to use while spot-lighting, so I bought a new CZ 20" heavy barrelled bolt-action which was ideal. Paired with a good Leupold variable scope it proved devastating on rabbits. I was using 40gr Power Point ammunition and was buying it by the brick but as it became more expensive, I opted for Winchester 36gr bullets in bulk which were equally effective and at \$30 for 500 (at the time) very economical.

As for the Savage .17HMR, its forte is on rabbit hunting trips in colder months. Naturally numbers are down at that time of the year but the camping is great and anyway, you don't have to be taking rabbits in the hundreds to enjoy yourself. Most afternoons have them sitting at their burrow entrances enjoying the sun and the .17HMR gives a lot of satisfaction, pulling off shots between 100-150m.

To my way of thinking, rimfires have a lot going for them - cheap to run, no recoil for learners to worry about, good for a variety of small game and perfect for the target practice new hunters always need. After decades of using them and firing thousands of rounds, I reckon a rimfire should be found in everyone's gun safe, though you may think differently and I respect that. ●

*It does
show the little
.22 rimfire has
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in reserve*



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Com Games cancellation doing untold damage

Rachael Oxborrow



WA Police Minister Paul Papalia and Police Commissioner Col Blanch front a press conference announcing changes to WA's firearm laws. Image courtesy ABC News.



The sport of target shooting in an Australian and global context has been immeasurably impacted by the cancellation of the Victorian 2026 Commonwealth Games. This is the viewpoint the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA Inc) has shared in response to the Victorian Government's Select Committee Inquiry into the 2026 Games bid.

The cancellation of the Vic Games came as a shock to the public and a major disappointment to our sporting community, as the importance of shooting being included in 2026 was a key concern around the world after it was excluded from the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games. Shooting Australia led a well-executed campaign for its inclusion with support from their international partners. Grassroots support complemented those efforts with SSAA Inc and SSAA Victoria steering a campaign with the wider 212,000 members of our state and territory Associations showing the extent of the sport's fanbase nationwide.

In the fallout of the cancellation and subsequent Select Committee Inquiry, SSAA Inc has taken this opportunity to highlight the impacts on the shooting community, both professional and amateur, in a submission during public consultation.

National Firearms Register

National Cabinet met in August and a decision on the National Firearms Register was expected to be made. SSAA Inc is in regular contact with the Attorney-General's Department on the matter and will provide an update to members as soon as it becomes available. The A-G's Department says the matter is currently being considered at various levels within federal, state and territory governments.

Options for the National Firearms Register were informed via feedback provided by the firearms community and SSAA Inc earlier this year in an open consultation process. The Police Ministers' Council agreed to these options in early June in preparation for the National Cabinet to consider 'mid-year'.

Talks of a National Register began in the first few months of this year in the wake of a series of tragic events in rural Queensland in December 2022, when an act of domestic terrorism involving unlicensed people acting illegally with firearms resulted in tragic loss of lives. The kneejerk commentary which followed these events called for firearms law reform. As details of law enforcement access to firearms licensing details came to light, the tone of the conversation changed to a perceived need for a National Firearms Register, which would allow police from all jurisdictions to access firearms licensee details with more ease than they can at present.

WA Firearms Act consultation

Public submissions for the Western Australian Government's Firearms Act consultation paper were closing as we went to press. The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (WA) and SSAA Inc have been working with the WA Firearms Community Alliance (WAFCA) to motivate and empower the firearms community to have their say and join the fight. This was a situation where the number of submissions for the cause was the only way to make an impact and our community's involvement is to be commended.

The Firearms Act consultation paper was released in October after months of promises that the draft Firearms Act would be released to the public. Instead, we were presented with a document which attempted to justify the viewpoint of a government hell-bent on positioning law-abiding firearm owners as the root cause of firearm crime. Extensive research both in Australia and overseas indicates legally-owned firearms are not the predominant source of illegal firearms in the community.

As recently as last year, a Deakin University study found a "deep reservoir of illegal firearms exists for criminals to tap into, with police measures only able to recover tiny fractions each year". Furthermore, Australian Institute of Criminology research states the majority of firearms used to commit homicide in Australia are unregistered and the perpetrators unlicensed. SSAA Inc's submission to the WA Firearms Act Consultation Paper can be found on our website. The Act itself is expected to be tabled in February 2024 and we will update members as the situation develops. ●



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a shot *in the* dark

Rob Ieroianni endured a scary experience to take a forest buck

My son and I have been hunting NSW state forests for the past 14 years and every outing has provided opportunity to hone our bushcraft knowledge. As an educator, school holidays afford me flexibility to access beautiful state forests more than my son, who works in a corporate role, so on this occasion I was heading out alone. I set off into the Central West for a three-day hunt which looked promising on Google Earth though with several unknowns.

The weather forecast looked great as I crossed dusty roads deep into the forest, the location taking me a long way from anywhere. My first objective was to find the possible campsite identified via a web search and when I did it proved an excellent location with ample flat ground and a stream nearby. All packed with binoculars

strapped on and the Mossberg .308 ATR over my shoulder, I was on my way. Walking was relatively easy with undulating sections leading into a series of gullies, first impressions being the forest was very dry and it was difficult to step quietly across thick leaf litter and sticks, though various game trails looked promising and made for a more silent pathway.

After an hour or so, doubts were forming as to my planning and assumptions made when analysing the terrain on my computer. Then suddenly from my left, cantering down the opposite face of the gully was a fallow buck, the likes of which I'd never seen before. He was about 80m away and looked to be at least six feet from hoof to antler tips, dark tan with distinct white chest and broad at the shoulders.

Dropping to one knee, heart racing I had

time to raise the .308 with a clear view of my target. Flicking the safety off, cross-hairs were placed squarely on his chest though in that split second, a fraction of doubt clouded my thoughts that I might wound this magnificent creature and not deliver a clean kill. The hesitation gave him enough time to catch my scent, sway right and disappear into the trees. The stalk was over.

I rocked on to my backside to take in what happened - I'd just missed the fallow buck of my dreams out of fear and hesitation. The only silver lining was my decision to remain in this area was now made and I knew the next three days would be interesting. Staring into the campfire that night I replayed the encounter a thousand times. All the 'what if' questions I considered were just theoretical as I didn't think this opportunity would ever come my way again.

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*I was now
in total darkness
without GPS and
only a dimming
headlamp*

**The pine grove kept its
secrets deep in the shadows.**

Next morning I was on my way in search of the buck as our freezer was empty and I was keen to fill it. I quickly picked up the game trail from the day before and followed it to a boundary with a neighbouring property dotted with sheep. As I approached a cluster of mature pines I noted the undergrowth had been turned over significantly, suggesting pigs may be feeding nearby and walking quietly parallel to the plantation, I saw movement in the shadows.

Through the binos I saw two small speckled piglets rooting around the litter. Once again the adrenalin flowed as I dropped to one knee, placed the shooting sticks under my rifle and steadied. Just before taking the shot I spotted a black sow in the shadows only a few metres behind the piglets which provided a new target as I lined her up and squeezed the trigger. The sow was despatched instantly as the piglets scurried off into the pines.

I spent the rest of the morning climbing and descending gullies looking for that elusive buck. The occasional rub-tree gave

hope but the rubs were relatively old and I reckoned the bucks had moved on, then as I turned back for camp I came across a narrow gully with a series of open areas, lush with grass and blackberries. This was quite different to the surrounding forest and I figured it might offer plenty of feed with good cover and the occasional hoofprint had me log the spot in my GPS for further investigation.

As cockatoos squawked above, I walked to the gully and positioned myself on a hill above a large grassy patch sloping gently below. From my vantage point I could glass across both sides of the track and hopefully observe critters moving from the forest into the open. Other than a kangaroo, little caught my attention so after a couple of hours I conceded, reconciling myself to starting over again the following morning.

I stood and straightened, relieving the tightness in my back and legs and lifting the binoculars for one final glass down the gully I caught sight of movement, realising a second later it was actually a doe feeding

beside a blackberry shrub. As excitement gripped me, I focused on the swaying of a thin sapling flicking vigorously and saw a buck rubbing his antlers up and down its trunk. I struggled to contain myself and quickly dropped and crawled to a position which offered a better angle.

Glassing the buck I noted he wasn't as impressive as the giant I'd seen on the first morning, though he was making light work of that sapling. I shouldered the rifle, placed the stock firmly against my shoulder and wound the scope up to nine times magnification. The buck was now in view but at more than 100m in fading light I could only just see him standing broadside.

With the shooting sticks giving a steady rest and the reticle placed just behind his shoulder, I squeezed off a round as the blast sent three does scattering. Feeling confident I knelt, taking deep breaths before glassing down the gully to confirm the kill. It was getting late with daylight fading fast so I couldn't see the buck but walked quickly towards the sapling where he'd



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A shot in the dark

been standing. To my relief he was lying motionless, the bullet piercing vital organs to drop him where he stood. There was no exit wound.

Processing the deer in the remaining daylight was going to be tricky. Not wanting to leave him overnight to risk the meat spoiling or offering an easy meal for predators, I tried dragging my quarry closer to the track to load him into the ute. In trying to shift the animal I realised I'd have to drag him uphill, so with my knife I removed the innards to drop some weight which proved futile. A new plan was needed and that's when things started to turn bizarre.

Marking the buck's position in the GPS, I made haste to the car and returned with the tools needed for the harvest and carry out. As darkness fell I organised equipment, including a head lamp and drove down the hill. Quickly locating the deer I removed the hind quarters and with these wrapped in my pack I looked up into total darkness, with only treetops silhouetted against the

twilight sky visible. I took out the GPS to retrace my path to the vehicle to find it flashing 'Low Battery' and as I watched, the screen went blank.

I was now in total darkness without GPS and only a dimming headlamp. This was going to be an interesting search as I couldn't determine from which direction I'd come. I spun around in a bid to make out any familiar silhouette, paused and took more deep breaths before moving off in an uphill direction. Surely I'd cross the track at some point? After searching for a while and with the weight of deer on my back, I eventually found the track and followed it to the ute. I reckoned the only way to ensure I could find my way was to switch on the hazard lights which made for a useful beacon in the forest blackness.

I returned to the general location of the fallen deer and spent what seemed forever searching. It was now 7.45pm and I'd been harvesting venison for the past two hours. Once found, I committed to heaving the

remainder of the buck to the vehicle with the flashing amber lights indicating it was only 50m. Eventually I managed to lift the animal into the tray before making it back to camp for another couple of hours completing the harvest. Exhausted in my swag, I felt grateful for the creature taken to feed my family for months to come and for another amazing opportunity to hunt in magnificent NSW state forests. ●



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Heat-seeking Falcon by Hikmicro
impressed **Ben Unten**



The compact unit fits
nicely in the hand.

Said to be a game-changer in recent years, the development of thermal technology has become more affordable while the quality has increased. Having previously reviewed several infrared and thermal devices I was keen to check the latest offering by Hikmicro - the Falcon FH35 thermal monocular. The unit comes in a reinforced padded carrycase weighing 1325gm and roughly 245mm long, 200mm deep and 100mm high.

Inside is the FH35, a padded neoprene travel sock, two HM-3632DC rechargeable lithium-ion batteries (one's a spare) with double-bay digital charger, a USB-C charging cable, cleaning cloth and quick-start guide. There's also a carry strap with pad for the travel bag and a neoprene-type neck strap. The monocular itself is 192mm long and 55mm in diameter at the widest point and weighs 565gm on my digital kitchen scales with battery fitted. The FH35 is slightly tapered from rear to front with a padded eyepiece behind a knurled focus ring which adjusts for the internal screen.

A wrist lanyard can be attached to both the left-hand and right-hand side of the unit. There are three control buttons as well as one power button on top, while the front of the FH35 features a larger, second rubberised-knurled focus ring which allows you to direct the device on objects in the distance. This objective lens is protected by a spring-loaded, pop-out lens cap.

The FH35 features greatly increased sensitivity with better quality imaging which makes animal detection much easier and has a built-in 64MB memory, allowing for hours of video and photographic storage. I love the fact it comes with replaceable batteries rather than a 'battery pack' type configuration as it makes replacing batteries and having spares much easier and cheaper. It's claimed to have a detection range of 1800m and while I'm not sure exactly what that translates to, I can confirm I was easily able to identify man-made structures at more than 1000m.

In the field

After installing one of the provided batteries, ensuring correct polarity, the

battery cover is closed and locked into place. The unit is turned on by a long press of the front power button and after a short warm-up period of about 12 seconds, the internal screen is visible. Adjust the ocular focus to suit your eyes and objective focus ring to suit the range to your target and you're under way.

A short press on the centre menu button cycle takes you through the four thermal viewing options - white-hot, black-hot, fusion and red-hot. The remaining control buttons are intuitive and straightforward while the arrow button (the one closest to your eye) is to cycle through the zoom options of 1x, 2x, 4x, 8x and back to 1x.

I set up over an oats paddock on a property with a fairly serious pig infestation, steadied the monocular on shooting sticks and began sweeping the surrounding area just after dark. After cycling through the available colour options I settled on black-hot, where the thermal imprint of the object is black against a white background.

It takes a little while to get used to interpreting some 'dark shapes' but once you realise animals rarely stand still and warm

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Come in from the cold

rocks and shrubs don't move, it's pretty clear-cut. Eventually a fox wandered into view and, being so easy to identify, I felt a bit foolish for staring at inanimate objects for so long. I ranged the fox at about 218m though sadly there was no shot offered due to machinery and sheds in the background.

In terms of distance, the FH35 is designed for long-range spotting with pig-sized animals easily identifiable at more than 400m. With familiarity I was able to confidently call an animal's species based not only on the size and shape of the thermal imprint but also the amount of movement.

On the second night I synced the Falcon to my android tablet which made a huge difference to my hunting mate Bammo, as he could now make out exactly what I was seeing in real time. He'd spent the previous night staring into blackness, waiting for me to give him a species and bearing so he could turn his scope-mounted torch on and take a shot. With the tablet he could take screenshots and videos as well as change numerous settings on the Hikmicro unit all via the touch-screen.

We spotted a large mob of pigs but with livestock in the background there was no shot available. I did spy a fox at 150m and gave Bammo the relevant 'clock-position', so he pointed his rifle and flipped on the scope-mounted light. The fox froze momentarily, the .30-06 boomed and through a cloud of smoke I saw the redcoat drop, never to move again.

There are even more applications for the FH35 including a replacement for a vehicle-mounted spotlight. A number of after-market mounting options are available which allow for your thermal device to be mounted on your through-the-roof or window-attached remote spotlight handle. I have two mates who use this system - one drives while the other 'swings' the thermal and views the images via a tablet from the comfort of a vehicle. Using this method means driving lights can be run on low and there's no 'million-lumen' spotlight to spook game (the same set-up can be used to run dogs).

Overall this is a terrific bit of kit. I did experience some minor glitching in the form of 'screen-freeze' but this wasn't frequent and lasted less than a second. Another observation is your handheld laser rangefinder can't be used in conjunction with a thermal monocular, as although the image is obvious through the viewfinder, as soon as you take it away you can't see what you're ranging in the dark.

The FH35 does have a rangefinder of sorts included which relies on knowing the approximate height of the target species. The various animals to choose from are all American species, so I selected a grey wolf with a nominal height of 0.8m (the set heights are adjustable) which is close enough to a large pig. After entering the ranging option you sight the 'topline' on the high point of the animal (usually the backline) and press the button, then put the 'lowline' on its feet or hooves and press the button again. The unit will calculate the distance based on its 'ranged' height and while this method is a little crude, it does give you some idea. Bammo and I found that ranging a few landmarks from various vantage points during the day provided a quick and reliable method of range estimation at night.

Battery life is said to be seven hours continuously running with Composite Video Blanking and Sync (CVBS) and hotspot function off (at 25C). The FH35 retails for \$2999 and there are four models to choose from. More at hikmicrotech.com ●



Within minutes the fox was spotted.



Dual battery charger with digital display.

I felt a bit foolish for staring at inanimate objects for so long



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Living on the edge

John Dunn and the tale of the Millthorpe Hunters

From the outset I'd like to make it perfectly clear the Millthorpe Hunter wasn't my idea, it came from the fertile brain of Steve Hurt from Outer Edge Projectiles. Like all life-long hunters he knows what he likes in a knife so when he asked me to come up with a custom-made one, I agreed so long as he provided a concept drawing of what he wanted. Within a week or so he'd emailed me a sketch and after some discussion and minor tweaking, I made a full-size drawing which in turn was used to create a cardboard, then a thin steel template so the design was reproduceable should it be required again.

Given that Steve hails from Millthorpe in Central NSW, the name for the knife was a no-brainer, necessary to distinguish it from other patterns I keep in a drawer in my workshop. Thus was the Millthorpe Hunter born. The profile was cut from a length of 4.5x40mm 1084 flat steel with a small disc grinder then finished to shape on my belt grinder.

The bevels were then ground and polished, the notch for the finger guard cut and filed to size and holes for the finger guard pins and handle screws drilled in the tang to attach the scales. The blank was then hardened and tempered to specifications in my electric kiln. The finger guard was made from 9.5x38mm brass bar, slotted on a milling machine then hand-fitted to a snug push fit. The guard is retained on the knife by the quality of the fit and a couple of transverse, annealed brass pins rivetted into tapered holes in the guard to ensure it'll never move.

On the first knife the scales were made from red gum, glued and secured to the tang with Corby bolts. Both the guard and scales were then shaped to final size on the belt grinder to ensure

they married together perfectly. After hand-sanding with 240 grit wet and dry, the scales were treated with multiple applications of Tru Oil gunstock finish which does a great job of bringing up the wood grain. All the metalwork was then polished to a bright finish and a fitted buffalo leather sheath made to suit the knife.

Steve was rather pleased with the finished article and duly reported back to me on how the knife performed in the field. In one culling session he skinned and dressed three goats for table fare then butchered a further 12 for dog meat before the blade needed a touch-up. That's music to a knife-makers ears, practically demonstrating the heat treatment of the blade is close to the mark.

Better still he had a mate with him who was suitably impressed by what he saw, made an enquiry about where the knife had come from, then ordered a similar one as a birthday present for his daughter, albeit with a slightly smaller handle to suit her hands. Making that second knife with slightly reduced dimensions had me thinking about the possibilities and the original design has now morphed into three models which share a common design origin but are all different in terms of blade thickness, depth and length, handle length and finished length.

The original (large) Millthorpe Hunter had a 4.5mm thick blade as that's what Steve asked for. With all the knives I've produced since, I've used 3.3mm steel. This reduces overall weight and improves the feel of the knife in the hand, a small refinement on what was already a very handy piece of kit. While the depth of the blade is set at 30mm, the length can easily be altered to suit individual hunters' requirements, as can length of handle.

The shape of the handle has also changed to now include a finger spur for a little more control. I'm still grinding straight handles as per the original but most buyers seem to prefer the additional

The large Millthorpe Hunter showing the plain and finger groove variations. Scale material is red gum (right) and black wood.

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Living on the edge

finger groove. Scale materials used to date include red gum, red box, yellow box, white box, gidgee, black wood and walnut, all of which I have in my growing collection of handle material.

The middle-sized Millthorpe Hunter remains essentially the same as its larger progenitor except the depth of the blade has been reduced to 25mm to make it more suitable for medium-sized game, though it will work on larger animals if required. The options for blade and handle lengths can be varied to suit individual needs as can preferred handle materials.

The small option has a blade depth of 20mm and is designed to be used as a bird and trout or bunny knife. The length of

both blade and handle have also been set but variations in both can be made to suit. Though small Corby bolts are available, to date I've also used brass pins to secure the handle scales.

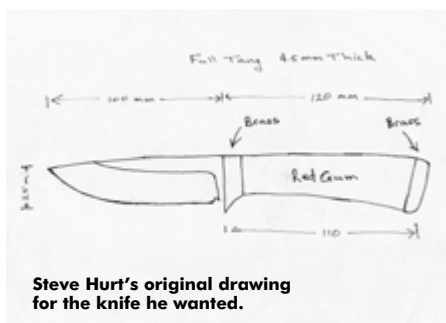
When I made the original Millthorpe Hunter it was done as a favour for a friend. Neither of us could've imagined that in just a few months one knife would have evolved into a (small) series, which to date has been very well received by the hunters and fishers who now own them. All the feedback I've received has included positive comments on how well the blades hold their edges, exactly what I wanted when I bought a kiln to ensure I could get the hardening and tempering process right every time.

A consequence of making these knives has been a need to provide them with a suitable sheath, which has taken me back to the basic leather working I first dabbled with way back in the early 1970s. As a result, I'm spending as much time in the workshop now as I was at the computer when writing was more important. It still is I suppose but clearly my priorities have changed and in that respect the Millthorpe Hunters have a lot to answer for.

• Next edition: The Murganella Hunters •



Though they vary in size, component parts of the Millthorpe Hunters are the same. This is a small Hunter with 10cm blade. Handle material is NT ghost gum, brass Corby bolts to attach the scales and a 416 stainless steel finger guard and pin.



Steve Hurt's original drawing for the knife he wanted.

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Leading light

Nick Rositano puts the Nextorch T7 to the test

Nextorch is one of the world's leading manufacturers of portable lighting products which range from specialised equipment for military, law enforcement and tactical to numerous outdoor applications. Under review here is the T7 Max Hunting Kit, a robust package that'll meet the demands of hunters in the field.

What immediately caught my eye in the T7 is its lithium 4800 mAh 21700 Li-ion battery which, on its most powerful setting (Turbo), gives an impressive three hours of constant run time with light output at a whopping 1200 lumens! On its lowest setting you can expect a staggering 80 hours of run time at 21 lumens, so gone are the days of having to replace batteries every few hours. It can be charged via a USB port, which gives you the handy option of being able to boost it in the car when you're on the road.

The unit weighs just 225g (without battery) making it a relatively light option to mount atop your riflescope as opposed to other products out there which are substantially heavier. Beam distance is claimed at a maximum of 1100m. The casing of the T7 is of robust aluminium, which gives the torch a barrier of resistance against the elements. It's also claimed to be waterproof to two metres, so if you do accidentally drop it there's no need to worry as Nextorch warrant this product for five years.

Unboxing it, the T7 Max Hunting Kit features a switch harness which plugs into the back of the torch, a quick-release mount to attach it to a riflescope and a USB charging cable. Nextorch have finished this

unit exceptionally well and for testing I attached it to my .17 Cometa air rifle to take care of some pigeons causing havoc at a family friend's hobby farm.

Although my air rifle isn't at the lighter end of the scale, on fitting the Nextorch above the scope I hardly noticed the difference weight-wise and after several hours one night bowling over pigeons, I was most impressed by how the T7 performed. I found myself sticking to the lower settings rather than the turbo option, though if I was doing more long-range shooting the latter would certainly have been preferred.

The torch did its job superbly and through the scope I'd no problem identifying my targets as for a unit so small it really does pack a punch (seven different modes can be flicked through using and holding the main power button). I didn't have to recharge it over the weekend but on the drive home I topped it up for my next outing. When the light flashes blue you

know it's still in the charging phase and on turning solid blue it's fully charged.

The Nextorch T7 can be used as a normal handheld torch for hiking and other outdoor pursuits and features a belt clip, so when not being used on a riflescope can be attached with ease. The quick-release mount which attaches it to your scope is surprisingly sturdy and even with a couple of bumps during use it didn't move, though can still be removed from the scope in a matter of seconds.

Torches have come a long way over the years, especially considering what's on the market today with LED globes as opposed to halogen. Not only have they become more powerful, they're also far more compact and lighter to offer the best of both worlds. Nextorch is at the forefront of these technological advances as demonstrated in the T7 and on shopping about you should find it for around the \$300 mark, a fair price compared to some of its rivals. ●



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Great Australian Outdoors Issue 4

We accentuate our great outdoors with 194 pages of 'destination, exploration and conservation.' A whole gamut of destinations have been explored, covering all compass points around this vast island. The plight of wildlife is put under the microscope in our extensive foray into conservation issues. And if you are planning an ambitious travel itinerary, there are tips to take on board among a raft of feature articles.

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SSAA Cooler Bag - Crib & Tote

Help keep your drinks and snacks cool with the SSAA Cooler Bag. Made from waterproof black canvas with a fully insulated lining, it is perfect for taking a snack to the range, drinks out in the field and, of course, getting groceries! Helping to reduce clutter, you can collapse it when it's not in use.

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Crib \$34.95 Tote \$24.95



Snake Bite Kit



In the SSAA Snake Bite Kit are two snake bite indicator bandages and an easy to follow first-aid guide specific to snake bites. Along with other necessary bandages, the kit is compact and packaged in a durable, soft canvas bag that can be worn on a belt, making it easy to take it with you wherever you go.

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SSAA Schrade Multi-Tool Silver



This handy tool can be stowed safely in its sturdy, fold flap pouch and securely closed with a tough Velcro patch. The belt/loop system helps you keep track of your multi tool so you can cut, file, pry and pinch your way through any job.

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SSAA Cool-Dri Polo Shirt



The SSAA Cool-Dri JB Polo is navy blue with white trim and made with a moisture wicking material, so you will always feel dry and cool.

The polo comes in sizes ranging from S to 5XL.

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SSAA Camping Lantern



This lantern is lightweight and ultrabright, with 450 lumens. Simply pull the SSAA Pop Up Camping Lantern upwards to turn on and push closed to turn it off. When you want overhead light, use the metal 'arms' to easily hang it. Runs on three AA batteries.

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SSAA Bush Kettle



These custom-made bush kettles run on a few twigs and leaves and will boil water in less than 10 minutes. Simply take a handful of twigs/leaves and kindling then place under the kettle and light it - the clever design directs heat into the kettle to boil the water.

The kettle can be used with gas stoves and has a stainless construction.

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SSAA turns 75 this year!

To celebrate the SSAA's 75th anniversary we have a special production run of 75-year anniversary pins and cloth badges.

The 75-year anniversary pins are uniquely numbered and measure 25mm x 30mm (approximately). The 75-year cloth badges measure 75mm x 60mm (approximately).



Pin \$29.95

Cloth badge \$19.95



SSAA Caps

Great caps in a variety of colours with embroidered logos on the front.

\$19.95

National

National Muzzle Loading Postal Shooter

July 1–December 31, 2023
Program: 1 x Military 50m offhand Class 1; 1 x Traditional 50m offhand Class 2; 1 x Flintlock 50m offhand; 1 x 100m bench rest Class 1 & 2; 1 x 100m bench rest Class 3; 1 x 25m Precision revolver Class 1 & 3; 1 x 25m Precision pistol Class 2; 1 x 25m Snap pistol Class 1 & 2; 1 x Percussion shotgun; 1 x 100m bench rest BP Cartridge. Matches to be shot during programmed matches at your range and scores witnessed by range officer. Rule Book Number 8 applies. All scores to the Muzzle Loading Chairman by end of December; results announced January. Medals sent by end of February. All targets signed by Range Officer; include name/address of competitors and the event entering. Send scores to Steve Nicholas National Discipline Chairman; GPO Box 2013, Adelaide South Australia 5001 or muzzleloading@disciplines.ssaa.org.au, secretary@ssaapara.org.au

Australian Sporting Clays National Championship

February 3-4, 2024
T42 Riddell Range, 770 Woodsdale Rd Runnymede, Tasmania. Program: Saturday 3rd - 100 targets; Sunday 4th - 100 targets. Nominations open via postage. MCMS opening soon. Rules: Current version of National shotgun rules. Be aware of rule changes. Prizes: Medallions, sashes and raffles open over the weekend. You must be present to win raffle prizes. Facilities: Unpowered campsites with toilets/laundry. No showers or campfires. Fully catered canteen all weekend. Event Contact: Dale Foggo dalepest@msn.com or 0408361638.

National 5 Stand Clay Target Championships

February 10-11, 2024
SSAA Tasmania (T42) Riddell Range, 770 Woodsdale Rd, Runnymede, Tasmania. Program: Saturday and Sunday 100 targets each. Nominations by post with cheque or via MCMS after November. Nominations on the day will incur a late fee. Rule book 4.3 to apply. There are modified rules so please read up on them. Sashes, medallions and prizes with lucky entry raffle. Range has camping, with toilets/laundry, hot water but no showers. No campfires allowed. Contact Dale Foggo on dalepest@msn.com or 0408 361 638.

SSAA Gallery Rifle National Championships

March 2-3, 2024
SSAA Ipswich, Millmerran Downs, Qld
Program: March 1: Practice; March 2: 50m Precision, T&P 1, 1500 Match; March 3: Multi-target, Granet, 1020 Match in Classic. Prizes: National medals for 1st, 2nd and 3rd. Facilities: Accommodation units on-site, camping available. Contact: Don Robinson 0428 986 070.

SSAA National Lever Action Silhouette Title

March 23-25, 2024
Westbury Shooting Club (T05), 1053 Birralee Road, Westbury, TAS
Program: Friday practice after 12pm. Saturday Match 1 Big Bore Lever Action Silhouette 80 shots. Sunday Match 2 Pistol Cartridge Lever Action Silhouette 80 shots. Monday Match 3 Rimfire Lever Action Silhouette 80 shots. Presentations to follow. Matches follow current SSAA Lever Action Official National Rules. Fees include breakfast and lunch each day for competitors. Small fee for non-competitors. Camping with toilets, tank water, no electricity or fires. Entry form from admin@westburys shooting.club. Fees direct deposit or cash/cheque. Contact Steve Collins 0459 834 885 or via above email address. Fees: Adults \$30/match or \$80 all. Juniors \$10/match or \$25 all. Full details on SSAA National website.

ACT

Early Australia Day Rifle Metallic Silhouette State Championship

January 19-21, 2024
Majura Range, ACT
Program: Friday: 80 shots air rifle; Saturday: 80 shots rimfire; Sunday: 80 shots centrefire. Facilities: Camping with water, power and showers, \$10 per person per night, juniors no charge, canteen facilities all weekend. Contact: Mark 0401 867 839 or email mn11@live.com.au or Scott 0411 465 254.

Black Powder Cartridge Rifle Silhouette State Championship

January 22, 2024
Majura Range, ACT
Program: Dawn to 8am practice and weigh-in, 8.30 Black Powder Cartridge Rifle match; 2pm 40 shots Black Powder Cartridge Rifle. Facilities: Camping with water, power and

showers, \$10 per person per night, juniors no charge. Contact: Mark 0401 867 839 or email mn11@live.com.au or Scott 0411 465 254.

NSW

Handgun Rendezvous

February 2-4, 2024
Windamere Shooting Complex, NSW
Program: Two Black Powder matches, six main Handgun matches (count towards score in your nominated category), full details on National website. Facilities: Free basic camping for tents/caravans with toilets and showers, lunches and drinks for sale, range dinner for purchase Saturday night. Contact: Graham Roberts 0429 839 622 or grahamroberts5@gmail.com.

Tas

SSAA Tasmania STATE Lever Action Silhouette Title

March 9-11, 2024
Westbury Shooting Club (T05), 1053 Birralee Road, Westbury, TAS
Program: Friday practice after 12pm. Saturday Match 1 Big Bore Lever Action Silhouette 80 shots. Sunday Match 2 Pistol Cartridge Lever Action Silhouette 80 shots. Monday Match 3 Rimfire Lever Action Silhouette 80 shots. Presentations to follow. Matches follow current SSAA Lever Action Official National Rules. Entrance fees include breakfast and lunch each day for competitors. Small fee for non-competitors. Basic camping with toilets only. Tank water, no electricity and no fires. Entries available from admin@westburys shooting.club. Fees direct deposit or cash/cheque on the day. Contact Steve Collins on 0459 834 885 or the above email. Fees: Adults \$30/match or \$80 total. Juniors \$10/match or \$25 total. Full details on SSAA National website.

Qld

SSAA Qld Long Range Precision Championship

May 24-26, 2024
Host: SSAA Luna, Captain's Mountain Complex
Program: 23 May range open for Zero checking 2pm. 24th - 8am sign-on, 9am start; Match 1 Rimfire 150m on Mini-core Target; Match 2 - Rimfire 250m on Mini-core Target. 25th - 8am

sign-on; 9am start. Match 3 - Centrefire 500m on Mini-core Target; Match 4 - Centrefire 600m on Mini-core Target. 26th - 8am sign-on, 9am start; Match 5 - Centrefire 800m on Core Target; Match 6 - Centrefire 1000m on Core Target. Nominations from SSAA website. Send to Secretary: luna@ssaaqld.org.au or PO Box 101, Inglewood, Qld 4387. Rimfire: \$50, Centrefire: \$60, all events \$80, single event \$25, juniors half price. Pay by 25 May. Cash on the day. Event is for Rimfire and/or Centrefire Class A or Class H of the Rifle Field Events. SSAA Long Range Precision Shooting Official Rule Book No. 1 applies. State medals for 1st-3rd for Rimfire, Centrefire Class A and Class H and Juniors, Aggregates and Teams medals. Cabins and camping available. See SSAA website for pricing. Contact: Richard White (07) 4652 4270.

SSAA National Event Cancellation/Postponement Policy

SSAA National championship events may be subject to border controls and other COVID-19 impacts. In addition to general border closures, many states and territories may prohibit persons from known COVID hotspots. An event may be postponed or cancelled at any time by SSAA National, SSAA State Office or club directive. It is recommended competitors consider any potential COVID-19 impacts on travel, accommodation plans and insurances etc. SSAA National will not be liable for reimbursement to competitors for any costs associated with a postponed or cancelled SSAA National championship event for any reason, including COVID-19. Competitors planning to attend an event should consider options for free cancellation or refund of travel and accommodation costs where available.



Sponsor a JUNIOR

SSAA National's 'Sponsor a Junior' campaign was launched to help introduce youngsters to recreational shooting. Juniors are essential to the ongoing strength and vitality of the SSAA and we are seeking your support to protect and ensure the future of the shooting sports in Australia.

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Members are reminded that if you are using membership of the SSAA as your genuine reason for your firearms licence, you must ensure you renew your SSAA membership in time. Please be aware that state and territory police firearms registries regularly cross-check firearm licences and your member status. To support your genuine reason and keep your firearms licence and to make sure that SSAA can support you, make sure you renew your SSAA membership.

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Australian Shooter October, 2023

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#2 Pietro Mazza, NSW
#3 Malcolm Wilson, Vic
#4 Barry Perks, Qld

Top Shots Mug
Mervyn Fisher, NSW

Juniors – Winchester Prize Pack
Kaydee Reynolds, Qld

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Christmas in July

Christmas in July. You know that Aussie peculiarity where you enjoy a traditional Northern Hemisphere-style knees-up in winter when all that hot and heavy food makes more sense. You can dress up in silly jumpers, deck the halls with plastic holly and maybe, depending on where you live, enjoy a white 'Christmas'.

'Bah humbug' I say. If you're not sweating like a demon by midday, if the barbecue isn't ready to

forge steel and the beer's not icy cold, it's not Christmas. Yet maybe there is some advantage to the notion. For us, Christmas in July is winter hunting with close friends and, for the past five years, my eldest boy. True to its name, in some ways it had become a second Christmas - there are even gifts.

For my eldest it might be a new puffer, boots or other cold-weather kit. For my youngest, as he tends to stay home with mum, it might be Lego. My lovely wife usually receives something too and, of course, I always seem to get exactly what I want from Santa (KUIU clothing this year). It's a movable feast and occurs sometime during the June/July school holidays. On 'Christmas Eve' we gather in convoy and head south to cooler climes to enjoy hunting, a good campfire, plenty of food and the odd drink.

This year we ventured to a forest above Tamworth and on the way down passed a couple of ice and snow signs which really added to the winter feel. Our base camp was just less than 1300m and while there was no snow, Jack Frost showed up. Each Christmas is a little different and this year a newcomer joined us as Graeme, a lifelong

friend, wanted to experience it all. He's not a hunter though I think the winter-hunt bug may have bitten him. While he didn't bring a rifle he did supply a well-appointed camper trailer which acted as a kitchen and bunkhouse for most of the crew. For me and my son it was the first year we took something more than a hike tent.

After the 2022 winter hunt I realised that dad, a growing boy and lightweight hike tents don't necessarily mix, so we bought the largest tent I've ever owned.



Learning curve . . . the young van den Boogaart is a hunter in the making.

It's a canvas instant-up style set-up, plenty of storage, large enough to sleep four very comfortably and tall enough for me to stand up. With Graeme and my eldest under my charge I guessed I'd be more tour guide than dedicated hunter and exactly how that would play out was pretty much determined on the first morning. Leading the crew, I managed to spot the pigs first and on whispering to my charges there were pigs ahead, they both lifted their heads and asked 'where', at which point the porkers hit the go button. Okay, so this might be a little trickier than I thought.

That scenario became the norm over the following five days and, while we came close, we couldn't bring home the bacon. Thinking about it all I've come to realise that for me, for the foreseeable future my hunting is going to play out in one of two ways. Its either going to be hunting or huntin'. The definition is one I've used in the past to describe fishing. If I'm heading out to the rocks or in the boat with good mate Terry, we're fishing. If I was taking friends for an afternoon on the river or local

estuary we're fishin'.

Same activity, different approach and expectations. And so it seems it is with my winter hunt. The thing is that huntin' is no less important as it creates a space for others, it's where newcomers can learn and, for my son, it allows him to develop as a hunter and as a young boy in the company of older, wiser heads. He turns 11 next year which opens doors via the Minor's Gun Licence so there will be range time, short trips with dad to the Brisbane Valley and other hunts.

But that's the technical side of things. The true gift will be the experience he'll gain from being in camp and the mentorship provided by those more experienced in

living an outdoor life. That's what huntin' will give him and with all that giving then maybe, just maybe, our winter hunt is Christmas in July after all. To everyone who's travelled with me during my first year as a back-page columnist, here's to a very merry Christmas and a safe, happy and prosperous new year to you and yours.



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