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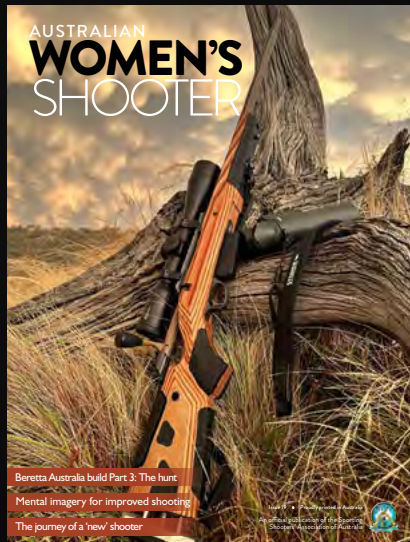
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FIREARMS

- 32 Schuetzen feast!**
German masterpiece a rare treasure, writes Dick Eussen
- 48 Go your own way**
Sako S20 a bit of a trailblazer, writes Mark van den Boogaart
- 54 Elite company**
Franchi's latest Horizon offering impressed Con Kapralos

HUNTING

- 28 Thrill of the chase**
Mark van den Boogaart had to hunt tough for an NT buffalo

PRODUCTS

- 22 X-factor**
- 38 Heat-seeker**
- 58 New case trimmer**
cuts more than brass
- 66 Look sharp!**

AND MORE

- 16 Hunter's mancave**
Derek Nugent reflects on a lifelong antlered obsession
- 44 Double take**
Shotgun gauge reducers aren't new but Leon Wright put a 410 version to good use in his 20-gauge
- 46 Memories are made of this**
- 52 Legislative Action**
- 60 Green light pending for new ADF rifles**
- 70 In praise of the trusty .17 calibre centrefire**
- 76 A treasure trove for firearms collectors**
- 76 Let's put youngsters on the road to shooting fun**

REGULARS

- 6 National News
- 7 Letters
- 7 Insurance Q&A
- 8 Open Season
- 10 Reloading
- 12 Clay Target Q&A
- 14 Top Shots
- 77 SSAA Shop
- 78 Competition News
- 81 Competitions
- 82 An Outdoor Life

NEXT ISSUE

Of all the current Benelli Lupo models the Walnut is cream of the crop. It looks beautiful with its glossy BE.S.T. barrelled action and AA-grade walnut with subdued satin finish and the rifle's inherent design features give it the utmost in form, fit and function for the discerning hunter.

Our Hunter's Mancave series continues as Scott Heiman salutes his heritage and more in a purpose-built space, including reference to Trial Bay Gaol where his family was interred during World War One and even though they were all born in Australia, it happened because of their German heritage.

Sam Garro has been puzzling over unpredictable rabbit cycles, one of the mysteries of nature where only the creatures themselves sense or know when it's the right time to procreate and/or adopt predator-evasive behaviour. As hunters it can be tricky trying to figure out what's going on with rabbits in an area when one time there's plenty of them and a few months later virtually none.



Our July cover - see page 22



16



28



66



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75th Anniversary marked at National AGM

Adelaide was the venue for the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia's 61st annual general meeting in May, National President Lance Miller addressing a delegation of more than 50 people representing the SSAA's state and territory associations.

This AGM marked the 75th anniversary of the Association and Lance spoke about the history and strength of the SSAA through its successes and challenges over the years. The milestone was made even more significant with National Life Members Terry Rafter, Les Pratten, Dave McAllister and Max Coady attending the meeting along with delegates and Life Members Alf Bastian, Bob Green and Kaye McIntyre.

Max, who recently retired from the role of National Benchrest Scorer after more than

60 years, also spoke to the meeting and discussed the significant advances made by the Association over several decades and shared his insight into the early development of the SSAA. Max's father, John 'Pop' Coady, was made a National Life Member in 1973.

National Chief Executive Officer Tim Bannister outlined the achievements and challenges of the past year and thanked staff for their support and expertise and the National Board for their efforts. At the close of the meeting the SSAA National Executive Board positions were elected as follows: President Lance Miller, Senior Vice-President Andrew Judd, Junior Vice-President David Scherek, Secretary Kaye McIntyre, Treasure Alf Bastian. All delegates in attendance were gifted SSAA 75th Anniversary cloth patches and pins to mark the occasion.



SSAA National Life Members Les Pratten, Terry Rafter, Dave McAllister and Max Coady attended the 61st AGM, marking the Association's 75th anniversary.

SSAA - Protecting shooters since 1948

A thing of rare beauty

AS A POSTSCRIPT to my two articles on Melbourne gun shops (*Shooter*, March-April 2023), some years ago I was fortunate to be shown a well-preserved silver cup won by the great Donald Macintosh on October 26, 1889 at the then Melbourne Sparrow Shooting Club. The cup is now in the possession of Tim Brewer of Alcock & Pierce, a current wholesale-only firearms trader who was kind enough to allow me to photograph it (I think of it as the 'Holy Grail' of Australian shooting in a safe and sacred repository).

The height of the imposing trophy is roughly 22-25cm from the bottom of the base to the lip and on the cup is a list of about six previous winners whose names I sadly didn't record. Engraving on the rather extravagant and beautiful Members Trophy coincidentally confirms the original name of the current Melbourne Gun Club.

The cup was discovered on the closing of the third and final address of the Donald



Macintosh Pty Ltd company in Elizabeth St, Melbourne where it had been operated by a Miss Odham who, along with Horrie James, had continued the business bequeathed to them by Donald Macintosh in Latrobe St, the final move to Elizabeth St coming after the retirement of Horrie James.

Lionel Swift, via email

Filling bigger shoes

LIKE MARK van den Boogaart with his column *An Outdoor Life*, I've also taken over from people I admire so I'm sure many will know how Mark feels. And yes, I'd often turn to the back page first to read of John Dunn's life experiences and I'm sure it'll be the same with you for many years to come.

I enjoyed finding out how you came into hunting as, like you, I'm a city boy from the suburbs of Brisbane. My hunting didn't begin until I was 50 when I was driving home through Pullenvale and a fallow deer jumped in front of my ute. I said to my mate: "A bloke should have a rifle and take out some of these deer." My mate said he used to hunt but didn't have a licence any more so we decided to go for it. The rest, as they say, is history.

Like you, the smell of a campfire and hunting with friends brings me a lot of peace. I've been taking my son since he was 12 and now he's 20, we have access to a new 1800-acre property close to home. Like me, he loves being around a campfire with his pals. I feel sorry for those who don't understand these things. All the best in the new (old) job Mark.

Brad, via email

Insurance

SSAA GENERAL INSURANCE BROKERS

Send questions to: insurance@ssaaains.com.au



Introducing SSAA General Insurance Brokers account executive Nadia Borrett

Nadia began working for SSAA General Insurance Brokers (SSAAIB) in February of last year and while new to the shooting sports, she's built a career in insurance which gives her great insight and abilities to offer options that suit the unique needs of each client.

During the past 12 months she has learned a lot about shooting and hunting,

the wider firearms industry and enjoyed her first target shooting experience. Nadia handles all general insurance options at SSAAIB and works closely with members by the nature of the brokerage and believes it's important to understand the needs and interests of her clients.

"I actually came to the insurance industry through my family but over time have worked hard and gained some valuable experience," Nadia said. "I love it. I enjoy the diversity, every day is different and I'm always learning something new."

Nadia's experience spans international and local brokerages dealing with domestic home and contents and motor vehicles through to business packs and commercial needs. In her spare time she enjoys spending days with her family and travelling.



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



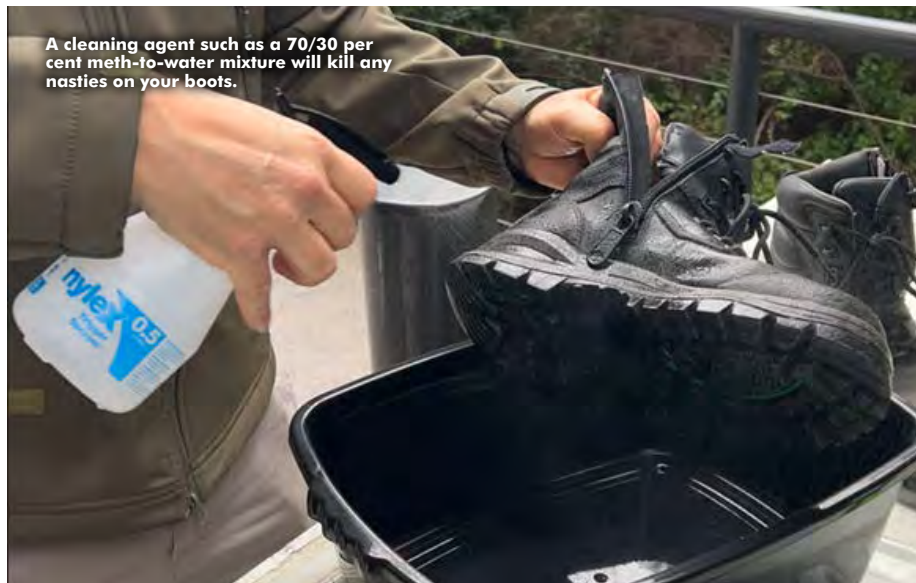
Hunting BioAware: It's on you to do the right thing

When we're hunting or conducting pest control on farmland we have several things to consider, as animal welfare is an essential component we as ethical hunters must be mindful of every time we set out. We practise our shooting to ensure we're competent in the use of the firearms we carry and use hunting techniques to make certain we operate effectively to enable a clean one-shot kill.

We have total control over the activities we undertake and at the end of the day are responsible for our actions. But one thing we don't necessarily have control over is the presence of biosecurity risks on properties we have access to hunt on. What we can certainly do is take steps to prevent the potential spread of biosecurity risks from one property to another.

SSAA National has recently teamed up with Grain Producers Australia to form a partnership aimed at promoting greater awareness, vigilance and understanding of the different farm biosecurity risks we might encounter. The 'Secure Our Farms - Hunt BioAware' cooperative was formed to share and promote important resources and communications, to help boost community education and create a greater understanding around biosecurity risk prevention.

This is certainly not a new concept for most hunters but the need to follow and adhere to property access rules and standards is a vital component of hunting BioAware. Unfortunately, the most significant biosecurity risk comes from those entering properties without authorisation. Farm-



A cleaning agent such as a 70/30 per cent meth-to-water mixture will kill any nasties on your boots.

ers can't conduct basic surveillance and inspections for 'trespasser' pests if people are accessing properties without their knowledge, which poses a risk to authorised hunters encountering a biosecurity threat without the farmer or them even knowing there is one.

We shouldn't worry unduly though as hunters can easily protect themselves and the properties they hunt, by picking up a few items from their local hardware store and putting together a simple biosecurity kit. Such a kit would include paper towels, hand sanitiser or wipes, dustpan and brush, cleaning agent (70 per cent methylated spirits in 30 per cent water), disposable gloves, garbage bags and a note pad and pen.

The two main things we can do to hunt BioAware is firstly wash around the wheels

and undercarriage of our vehicles before and after trips to hunting properties. The second is basic but significant in reducing the spread of biosecurity risks and that is simply to clean your footwear, as brushing and wiping soil from your boots followed by a spray with a cleaning agent will negate any possible contamination.

And remember we should always report weeds, sick-looking livestock and/or pest animals to the farmer so they can investigate further. Stopping the spread of biosecurity risks is a duty for every one of us.

Send questions to:
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The Winchester .44-40 - a 150-year-old success story

Whenever I see a .44-40 cartridge I visualise a Model 92 Winchester rifle which, many years ago, was the first centrefire rifle I owned. Oddly enough the .44-40 cartridge had its beginnings not with Winchester but with several other manufacturers, including the Volcanic Repeating Arms Company with their rimfire .44 calibre rifles and pistol cartridges and later with the famous Henry repeating rifle, named the .44 Henry after inventor B. Tyler Henry. The cartridge was initially loaded with 26 grains of black powder behind a 216gr lead bullet, then a couple of years later the bullet weight was reduced to 200gr with a slightly heavier load of 28gr of black powder.

In 1866 Winchester moved their manufacturing plant from New Haven to Bridgeport, Connecticut and changed their name to the Winchester Repeating Arms Company. They began production of the Model 1866 Winchester rifle which still used the .44 rimfire cartridge, until seven years later they introduced a brand new rifle in the Model 1873.

The most important improvement was the switch to a longer cartridge with a centrefire primer system. The cartridge now held 40gr of black powder instead of the previous 28, still behind a 200gr bullet which increased muzzle velocity from 1100 to 1300fps, resulting in a flatter trajectory and, according to Winchester, now effective and accurate to 600 yards. The cartridge was initially called

the Winchester Model 1873 calibre .44-40, later described as the .44 WCF before becoming universally known as the .44-40 (.44 calibre with 40gr of black powder).

Other manufacturers including Remington and Marlin released their own rifles and pistols chambered for the round, then in 1878 Colt offered the .44-40 as a chambering for its single-action revolvers. Because



the same cartridge could now be used in both rifles and pistols it became very popular with ranchers, prospectors and cowboys of the time who needed to keep what they carried in their saddlebags to a minimum.

Another manufacturer, Union Metallic Cartridge Co (UMC), also sold the cartridge and called it the .44-40 which used the same 40gr of black powder and 200gr lead bullet. Then in 1886 it began offering a heavier 217gr lead bullet with the same 40gr of black powder but with a slightly lower velocity of 1190fps so Winchester, not to be outdone, followed suit and also offered a 217gr version.

The next improvement came 22 years later, when in 1895 the first .44 WCF smokeless powder cartridges appeared on the market with Winchester using 17gr of DuPont No.2, a smokeless-type powder patented by DuPont in August 1893. It occupied the same volume as 40gr of FFG black powder and was said to have a velocity of 1300fps, about the same as the black powder loading. The following year in 1896, UMC reintroduced the 217gr cartridge using smokeless powder for a muzzle velocity of 1235fps.

Over the years many different bullet weights from 122 to 217gr have been offered by the various manufacturers, using anything from plain lead to fully jacketed bullets as well as some loaded with small lead shot for vermin control. Although the cartridge has very much been replaced by more modern ones for hunting, the popularity of cowboy (Single Action) shooting has seen a resurgence in the ever-popular .44-40, only one of a handful still in factory production after more than 100 years.



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Q This is a serious question so please treat it as such though I would ask you withhold my name. I'm seeking your opinion on whether or not you believe transgender athletes should be allowed to compete in shooting competitions such as those at the Olympics Games. I have a close relative who's interested in pursuing clay target shooting but is facing some personal issues.

Personally I don't believe there's an advantage in either gender for any of the shooting disciplines, though some may say in events such as shotgun that strength is certainly a factor. I'm keen to hear your take on this and if you believe there will be any backlash or discrimination towards anyone who tries this.

Name and address supplied

A I haven't revealed your name and location as requested due to the sensitivity of this topic, as I don't want to start a verbal battle among our readership. I do respect your question and will pre-empt this reply by stating these are my personal views and not those of the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia, Australian Olympic Committee or anyone else I represent. These are purely my opinions in direct response to your question.

Firstly let me outline some of the current requirements for any person born a male who's planning to cross over and compete in female competitions. Among other things way too involved and complicated to address here, an athlete must adhere to the following conditions to be considered for a place in the Olympic Games as decreed by the International Olympic Committee in 2015:

1: The athlete has declared her gender identity is female. The declaration cannot be changed, for sporting purposes, for a minimum of four years.

2: The athlete must demonstrate her total testosterone level in serum has been below 10 nanomoles per litre (nmol/L) for at least 12 months prior to her first competition (with the requirement for any longer period to be based on a confidential case-by-case evaluation, considering

whether or not 12 months is a sufficient length of time to minimise any advantage in women's competition).

3: The athlete's total testosterone level in serum must remain below 10nmol/L throughout the period of desired eligibility to compete in the female category.

4: Compliance with these conditions may be monitored by testing. In the event of non-compliance, the athlete's eligibility for female competition will be suspended for 12 months.

It may surprise you that four athletes competed at the 2021 Tokyo Olympics as transgender or nonbinary in the sports of weightlifting, BMX, football and skateboarding. The argument of male strength is the most common criticism offered up though it may also surprise you to know at the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona in the shotgun event of Skeet, which at that time was solely an open competition with no separate category for men and women, a petite Chinese lady by the name of Shan Zhang won the gold medal after shooting a perfect 200/200 over three days of competition.

I know Shan well and she hasn't a masculine muscle in her body being as feminine as they come, which somewhat negates the strength argument. All of which begs the question: Is strength a major factor in air pistol events or non-Olympic competitions like prone or benchrest rifle for that matter? Interestingly in 2017 in the US, the 11th-ranked women's air pistol shooter was an athlete who qualified under the above criteria and 'they' declared their intention to try and qualify for future Olympic Games.

And so to my view on this issue and again, purely a personal opinion. Initially I struggled with it a little as I have a daughter who shoots occasionally in small competitions and I feel she'd be at a physical disadvantage against the men. But here's the thing, she doesn't feel that way at all. She has an attitude like Shan Zhang that when she competes she aims to shoot the highest score irrespective of what gender of competitor has entered the event, so her approach now puts me firmly 'on the fence' with the whole topic.

I admit I don't know any male athlete in our sport who wants to make the change so can't comment from experience, though I guess if someone is born male and feel they should've been female, meet the above four criteria and desperately want to compete in our sport at the highest level, then the door's open. I don't accept discrimination against any human being based on race, religion or sexuality and although this is a different topic, I feel my views will be seen as somewhat hypocritical. For that I apologise if this offends you or any readers contemplating this change as I'm sure it's a long road and terribly difficult decision.

Finally will there be any discrimination or backlash? If it's permissible under the rules then there shouldn't be discrimination. Will there be backlash? Sadly, I have to be honest here and while I certainly wouldn't condone it, I'm not sure everyone in the shooting sports is ready for transgender athletes just yet, but again that's just my opinion.

It's only a matter of time before the national organisations governing the shooting sports in Australia are faced with this complex issue at domestic competition level, so I suggest they get on the front foot to formulate and openly publish their policy before it becomes a problem. It's a topic we can all have a viewpoint on and one, I'm sure, where we won't all agree. Welcome to 2023!



Questions to:
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Got a question - ask our TOP SHOTS?

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

email: edit@ssaa.org.au

Q I bought two muzzleloading matchlock muskets from some local Bedouins while working in northern Yemen some years ago. I understand they're a popular gun in Yemen, made at a town called Al Mukalla on the Gulf of Aden. The locals fit a chunky butt piece made of palm wood so they're more comfortable to carry on a camel.

There are some markings on them, most of the metal is just thin sheet metal around the wood though one has an ivory inlay and the other a number on the barrel. I hope to have them restored as they're deteriorating in my non-desert environment. If you can tell me more about them I'd be most grateful.

Rob Klau, via email



A Restoration of older handmade guns like these is likely to be very difficult, more a job for an art conservator than a gunsmith I think. You have two very fragile old guns with rusty iron, corroded copper alloys and white metals which may be silver, badly cracked timber and markings that can't really be read due to being hidden under thin metal bands which shouldn't just be removed recklessly.

Your guns are possibly 18th or 19th century. I'm not sure how you might get them aged as unlike more modern guns featuring date codes, proof marks and so on they've remained similar for hundreds of years. In Europe, matchlock firearms were superseded by wheel-locks then flintlocks around the middle of the 16th century while in Afghanistan, matchlocks were being widely used far more recently. Called 'Jezails'

(from the Pashtun word for 'long barrel') in the hands of local tribesmen they were extremely accurate at long ranges.

The style of your guns and limited information from auction sites suggests they may have been made or at least partially made in Coorg, India. Matchlocks remained popular across the Indo-Arabic region until much later than in Europe, as they were simple to make and use. Many were later converted to flintlock using scavenged locks from military guns like the Brown Bess. In his 1939 book *The Flintlock*, Dr Torsten Lenk regrets the fact that more information isn't known about the origins of the matchlock, while more recent muzzleloaders have a better understood history.

Geoff Smith

Q I've just entered the nightmare world of the #22 K-Hornet wildcat. I own a Brno Fox Model 2 rifle in 22 K-Hornet and also have Sako brass and a set of RCBS full-length sizing dies so I can load ammunition. In my research looking for reloading components and equipment I understand there are variations in chamber dimensions but doesn't this make reloading impracticable as the resizing die wouldn't work as intended? There has to be a 'standard' case that reloading equipment is made to.

I also asked on a forum if anyone had advice on a starting load for this ammunition to save me some time and money and give me a start point. I got this back: "No one else's loads will work in your rifle as there's just too much variation in barrel lengths and chambers." I'm really hoping someone out there can please explain this to me and how it works if it has such a large variation?

Jason Thies, via email

A The .22 K-Hornet as you say is a wildcat cartridge based on the .22 Hornet and was developed in early 1940 by Lysle Kilbourn (hence the 'K'). In fact the Hornet was one of the first cartridges ever modified or 'improved' by fire-forming a stan-

dard cartridge case to fit a newly-reamed chamber with a sharper shoulder angle and straighter body shape, thereby increasing powder capacity to achieve higher bullet velocity. All that's required to fire-form cases is to fire standard .22 Hornet ammunition in the K-Hornet chamber.

Another famous wildcatter P.O. Ackley, who himself went on to develop many improved cartridges, records velocities in his *Handbook for Reloaders and Shooters* of 3450fps from the new cartridge, though in those days chronographs were scarce and the true figure is more likely to be just 100 to 150fps improvement on the standard .22 Hornet. Keen to jump on this wildcat bandwagon at the time, gunsmiths made up chamber reamers based on Kilbourn's design and went ahead opening up Hornet chambers to the new 'K' shape.

Yet not all reamers were made exactly the same and as with many wildcats, no two tool-makers or gunsmiths made identical reamers as, back then, there was no 'standard' other than Kilbourn's original specifications. However, this in itself is not a great problem so long as the brass you fire-form is only ever used in your rifle and not in other firearms which may also be tagged 'K-Hornet'.

This same principle applies to any reloading where only the neck of the case is sized rather than the body and/or shoulder by additional full-length sizing. Once your brass is fire-formed to your chamber, only neck sizing should be required for the life of the brass. Prior to editing, your question also mentioned the L.E. Wilson case-trimming die and this too will be affected by chamber dimensions as the case is supported by the body.

You'd be better off using a conventional trimmer which measures case length from the rim. Gradually work up your loads from a conservative starting point, watching for pressure signs as you go and using loading manuals as a guide only. As you also stated Jason there will be variations in loading data from one manual to another - they're not called wildcats for nothing.

Rod Pascoe

Q I have a property that has occasional problems with foxes and wild dogs. It's clear, softly undulating country and I've been using a .223 Remington to deal with ferrets but have struggled to make longer shots beyond 200m, particularly on smaller animals such as foxes. 'Guesstimating' the bullet drop of a .223 beyond 200m is a bit of a challenge and I've been taking shots out to 400m with mixed results.

I was considering going over to a .204 Ruger as on paper at least this calibre seems to answer all my prayers, being one of the flattest-shooting rounds with low recoil and ammunition relatively easy to obtain. Yet I notice there's a dwindling number of manufactures making rifles chambered for .204 Ruger, Sako and Tikka being among the most prominent makers to drop it from their line-up in recent times.

My question is this: What gives? The .204 is still popular as far as I can tell and remains one of the best performing of the common centrefire calibres available. I still feel the .204 Ruger is my best option, particularly as I like to avoid heavy recoil for this type of shooting, but I fear I'm about to hitch my wagon to a calibre whose days may be numbered. I'd appreciate your insight and guidance.

Pete Tyquin, via email

A The .204 Ruger is nowhere near as popular as it was when first released. Though factory ammunition is still available from Hornady, Winchester, Remington and Sellier & Bellot, sales aren't as strong as they used to be and the ongoing cost rises of factory ammunition probably contributes to that. In a couple of 'best-selling' lists I've seen recently the .204 doesn't even rate a mention, no doubt due to the ongoing popularity of the .223.

In many ways the .204 is a niche cartridge and while there are lots of long-range rabbit and fox shooters out there who love the round, even they acknowledge it does have its limitations. The round was designed to take varmints and small game and from personal experience it doesn't

perform particularly well on anything larger than foxes beyond 250m, unless shots are very precisely placed.

That Sako and Tikka no longer produce rifles in the calibre is most likely a reflection of their sales figures rather than a death knell. Remington, Ruger and Savage are still making rifles in the cartridge and I was recently told Lithgow will be chambering a rifle for it. Reloading components are available so it's not likely to disappear any time soon though that said, if you really are shooting out to 400m I think a .22/250 would be a better choice.

John Dunn

Q I'm trying to find every way I can to improve my 5-Stand and Sporting Clays scores and have put a lot of effort into getting my gun to shoot its patterns about 50/50 around the point of aim and am now happy with it. My question is: How can I determine the correct lead for all these demanding targets to improve my scores?

Bill, NSW

A You sound like a man on a mission, Bill. Nice work getting your gun-fit spot on as you'd be amazed how few people take this seriously and flounder because they don't know where their gun is shooting. Once you can adopt a comfortable stance and have your gun shooting where you want it to and are confident with shell choice, the rest of the shooting equation is made up of some physical aspects like mounting and swinging the gun. Establishing both lead and line of flight is important and ultimately having the courage to pull the trigger, yet the biggest part of successful shotgunning is between your ears. Get the physical aspects right then leave them alone and work on the mental game.

Establishing lead is a personal thing which takes time to develop. It's a bit like a collection of photos/memories of past successful leads in your mind you can refer to when faced with different target trajectories and speeds. The lead is important but often

we miss because we haven't paid attention to the line of the target. In Sporting and 5-Stand this often causes misses over the top of the target so rising, falling, crossing and bouncing targets all require different approaches both in terms of lead and line.

Determine which methods of lead you're going to use like swing through, pull away or maintained lead and you'll see each requires a different amount of lead on any particular target to be successful. Gun speed is also an issue but again that's something personal for you to work on. Go to YouTube for an instructive video on SSAA-TV and search for: 'How to lead a target when shotgun shooting'.

Paul Miller

Q In your opinion which is the best long-range (600-900 metres) projectile for a .308 Winchester? Choose from 110gr at around 3000fps; 155-165gr at 2500fps or 200gr at around 2000fps using 2206 or 2208 powder. Any guidance appreciated.

Ray Daines, via email

A If I wanted to shoot out to 900m I'd choose a boat-tail projectile as they usually have the highest ballistic coefficient (BC), meaning they retain their velocity better at longer ranges. This would rule out using a 110gr projectile as it would have a BC of only about 0.29.

Now comparing a 165gr projectile with BC of about 0.475 and a 200gr projectile with BC of 0.49, we find the 165gr has 533 ft/lbs of energy remaining at 900m, compared to 448 ft/lbs remaining on the 200gr projectile. Furthermore, with both projectiles zeroed at 200m, the 165gr drops only 8.25m at 900m, compared to 13m for the 200gr. Taking into account the 165gr projectile has a higher remaining energy and less bullet drop than the 200gr then the former, at about 2500fps, would be my personal choice.

Barry Wilmot



Deer-themed collectables of European origin.

This is the sixth in a series on The Hunter's Mancave in which some of our regular contributors look back on treasured mementoes

Straight to The Pool Room!

Derek Nugent reflects on a lifelong antlered obsession

I'm sure I'm not alone in having, over the course of my lifetime, amassed a variety of trinkets, keepsakes and trophies which signal quite clearly my interests, life experiences and character.

It's a human trait to surround ourselves with 'souvenirs' which bring pleasure, evoke memories or perpetuate family history and such treasures require a repository. Some may call it a 'mancave', a den or 'she-shed' but in my case, to cite that well-loved movie classic *The Castle*, it's simply The Pool Room. This is my space, a gallery of mementoes which signpost many of the highlights of my life.

Hunting and shooting

No-one can walk into The Pool Room and not immediately realise that hunting and shooting are mainstays of my lifestyle,

with deer and wild boar being the preferred quarry, the walls adorned with a collection of largely modest trophies typical of each species. To others they may appear quite ordinary in nature but it's the stories and memories that lie behind them which are important, not their physical look.

Some are mine, some belong to my son and others are family pieces dating back decades, from the weighty 10-pointer red stag taken in the Brisbane Valley in 1930 to boar tusks taken by family members during a period of 70 years from Moonie to the tip of Cape York and many paperbark swamps in between.

Yet the single most dominant element is my obsession with all things deer-related. I'm besotted with deer and everything pertaining to them to an almost embarrassing degree. Most obvious are the

antlers and hides representative of many species: rusa (Moluccan and Javan), red, roe and fallow.

I've also deliberately accumulated a diverse collection of deer-themed artifacts from around the world including Asia to Europe and good old Oz as well. Bespoke amateur knives, pewter goblets, china, glassware, statuary and books all feature either deer motifs or products. We all have our pet projects, for some it's coins, others vintage cars and with me it's deer. I can't explain why but there's a majesty about the Monarch of the Glen which really resonates with me and as a result is made manifest in my space: The Pool Room.

Cherished memories

It's not surprising then that each piece evokes strong memories of past

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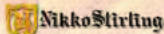


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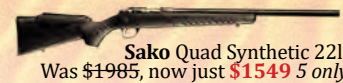
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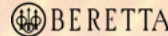
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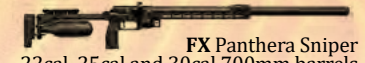
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adventures, from my first stag taken in the drizzly aftermath of a tropical downpour as the crafty old-timer deliberately knelt in the undergrowth and allowed my hunting companion to stalk past him unnoticed, all the while being fatally oblivious to my presence and intent. Or the time my son and I found ourselves surrounded in camp at 2am during the height of the roar as four stags circled, shattering the silence of the night with their close-range symphony.

Yet my most cherished memory relates to a modest four-point red rack which was the first one grassed by my son Joseph. It draws me back to 7.30 on the morning of April 6, 2016, cautiously stalking two stags only to have them wind us and run off at the last minute but, with perseverance, relocating them and my son taking one. I recall vividly his excitement at the prospect and abject disappointment as the opportunity seemed to vanish over the ridge. His exclamation as he relocated the stag, deep yet ragged breathing as he steadied himself for the shot and triumphant cry of "got him" as he claimed his first. It's in all regards an ordinary trophy except for the sense of contentment and pride it still brings me almost a decade later.

Treasured possession

As stated I've gathered a plethora of deer-related items to fill The Pool Room and value each piece for its uniqueness, though the one I treasure most is something altogether different: a piece of furniture, a chair to be specific. I stumbled across it in a Brisbane antique shop in 2010 and subsequently made a rude offer which, to my surprise and delight, was accepted and I found myself the proud owner of a truly unique piece.

It was described as a bespoke hunting lodge chair, the rear legs consisting of two Austrian (circa 1862) breech-loading Trapdoor rifles in .68 calibre as used in the American Civil War. Two imitation swords serve as the front legs while faux stirrup straps and motifs make up the armrests and side panels respectively, all of which is handcrafted in brass. It suits the room perfectly and fulfils the role of throne.

Family heirlooms

Another important function of The Pool Room is to house an assortment of family heirlooms, items encompassing many generations of family history stretching back to the late 19th century. My great great-grandfather George John Jones (1854-1928) joined the Queensland Navy in 1902 and served as gunnery officer and later gunnery instructor on HMQS Gayundah. To that end I'm custodian of his field glasses and shooting medal.

The source
of our family
tradition of
military
service

The Gayundah was the first vessel ordered for the Queensland Navy in 1884 and was quite heavily armed with 1x8", 1x6", 2x1.5" Nordenfelt guns and two machineguns. She saw service from 1885 to 1921, was the first Australian warship with wireless telegraphy and served mainly as a training ship, though during WWI she conducted patrols of the East Coast.

She was decommissioned in 1921 and ended her days abandoned at Woody Point in Redcliffe, the main gun relocated to Rockhampton Botanic Gardens where it sat as a curio for decades. It is now, I believe, residing refurbished and resplendent at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra and is a family connection I'm immensely proud of.

George's son Ernest Hedger Jones (1885-1949), my great-grandfather, continued the military tradition as a Naval Reservist and interestingly was also a marksman of note, having won a substantial number of trophies for shooting prowess. I was fortunate enough to secure these from a relative who attached little value to them. I often presume these two men were the source of our family tradition of military service and it seems the love of firearms and associated shooting proficiency I inherited and passed on to my son with some pride.

Sanctuary and museum

My Pool Room and contents are highly important to me and a source of interest and conversation with my peers. The space exists not only to display the inter-generational trophies of a family of riflemen/hunters and the memories they evoke, but also to preserve family memorabilia spanning three centuries.

This is a tangible link to the origins of our family ethos and traditions containing the 'finds' of a lifetime, collecting both the weird and wonderful in respect to hunting in general and deer in particular. It's an enticing space to contemplate the past and plan for the future, to have a game of pool, a beer and watch the footy. Most importantly though this is my space, a reflection of my personality, interests and values and to that end is priceless. Every home should have one. ●



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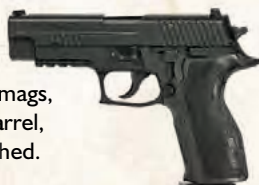


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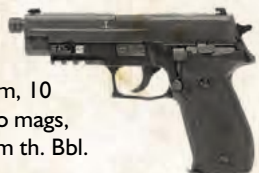


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X-factor

Epicshot riflescope a boon for beginners, writes **Geoff Smith**

The people at Xhunter online store invited us to run the rule over the 3-9x40mm Epicshot X-Class riflescope which looks a good entry-level unit that would suit a newcomer to the sport. So after discussions with the suppliers, it was agreed we'd combine a review with a 'how to do it' in the hope it would be of particular help to beginners. I elected to fit the scope to my CZ Model 452 .22 rifle as this remains popular among fledgling shooters.

A scope sight doesn't make the shooter more accurate, although it does give a better image of the target while revealing more of the 'wobbles' in your hold on that target. Fitting a scope is a fundamental job all shooters should be able to do competently. This one comes with lens covers and a neat set of alloy mounts to suit a 10mm dovetail, with socket-headed 4mm screws and matching Allen key.

Some good basic instructions are supplied, including the names of the parts. The eyepiece end incorporates a

friction-controlled magnification changing ring, which ensures the setting remains where the user selects from 3x magnification through to 9x. Importantly 'less power is often more', meaning it's frequently better (and safer) to use the lower power as you'll see more of the background.

It's normal to experience a bit of movement when trying to hold on a target especially if shooting offhand. Even Olympic shooters accept this and try to control movement down into a tiny sideways 'figure 8' with the centre of the 8 on the middle of the target. Setting the scope on the highest power means movement will be magnified too. The eyepiece is 40mm in external diameter, the tube 25.4mm (1") and outer diameter of the objective lens end 47mm. The actual objective lens has a diameter of 40mm as indicated in the scope's name.

Overall the scope weighs 320 grams and is 310mm long, its cross-hairs stepped with the finer inner sections being divided into five each side of centre with small dots. The instruction leaflet suggests the cross-hairs

have been centred at the factory, something which can easily be checked by rotating the scope while looking through it at a fixed point. If the cross-hairs are centred their intersection won't move as the scope is rotated.

With the cross-hairs checked the scope can now be fitted. The majority of this task, up to bore-sighting, can be done safely at home (preferably out of sight) provided any ammunition is carefully locked away and your neighbours aren't intimidated! After taking the rings apart (noting their orientation), the lower part of the mounts are loosely placed on the dovetails on the receiver. When the position of the mounts has been established the scope can be laid into the lower halves and, after loosely putting the upper halves back into position, eye relief can be set.

Eye relief is the correct distance between eye and eyepiece when holding the rifle in the shooting position, too close to the eye or too far away meaning the image will not comfortably fill the eyepiece. Should the image be blurry, the eyepiece can be



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Pictured: Geovid Pro 8x42

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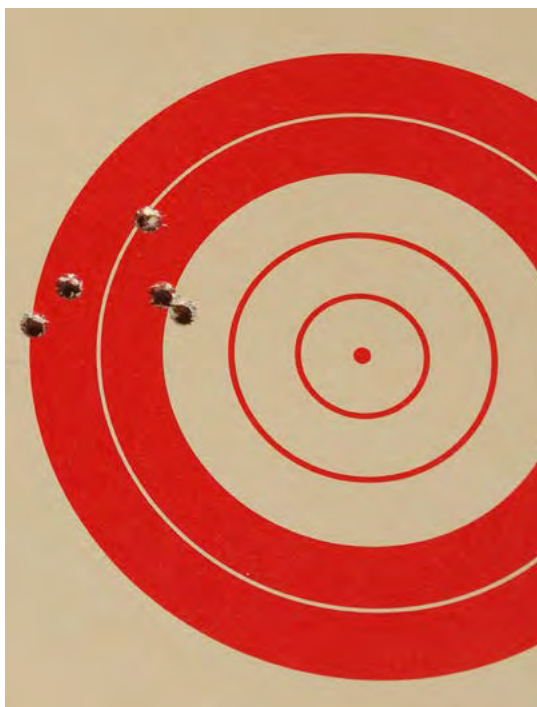
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X-factor



Scope as supplied with mounts and instructions.



After bore-sighting this five-shot group at 50m the scope needed about 25 clicks to the right to bring shots into the centre.



John Coventry demonstrates the correct hold for offhand shooting.



The 50m group of 10 shots using CCI standard velocity cartridges shot on a windy day was impressive. This set-up would enable rabbits to be cleanly taken out to about 70m.

focused for your own eye by loosening its lock ring and screwing the eyepiece back and forth until the clearest image is attained. The lock ring is then tightened.

The vertical cross-hair must be aligned truly vertically while holding the rifle in the normal shooting position and the best way of doing this is to line up on something vertical. If there's no structure nearby whose corner enables this, a piece of string with a weight on the end can be suspended some distance away where it's in focus.

With the scope set up and at proper eye relief the screws can be gently tightened, starting with the bases on the receiver and then in a sequence, a little at a time, in tightening the rings. It's important not to overtighten these little screws as they're going into aluminium and can easily strip

the thread. After the screws are firmed it's time to boresight the rifle. This involves removing the bolt, placing a target at 15m or so then carefully lining the rifle's bore with the centre of the target. For this you'll need a rest of some sort and a couple of small sandbags. Before beginning you'll have to unscrew the dust covers from the adjustment turrets.

The rifle is now placed on a bench or other suitable flat surface in such a way it'll stay there without being held. Small sandbags and a rest under the fore-end are useful here. After lining up the bore with the target (by scanning through the barrel) without moving your rifle, look through the scope and carefully shift the cross-hairs up or down, left or right, so they coincide with the centre of the target. This ensures the rifle's bore and

scope are now 'looking' at the same spot and it's time to find a location where we can start shooting.

Groups of three carefully-rested shots, initially from about 15m, should enable a mean Point of Aim to be established, then it's time to move the target out to the range at which you wish to properly zero the rifle. In my case I set a target at 50m initially and fired another three shots.

At 50m each click of adjustment represents about 3mm on the target. This group was about 75mm left and 20mm low so the cross-hairs were raised (up seven clicks) and shifted to the right (25 clicks) which resulted in the next three having a centre pretty much exactly on Point of Aim. Further minor adjustments may be made to fine-tune the process if necessary, with a change in ammunition usually resulting

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X-factor

in slight shifts in scope zeroing, meaning a repeat of this.

While this product comes in a box branded as a 'mil dot riflescope' it's a conventional scope calibrated in quarter Minute of Arc clicks (actually labelled ¼" at 100 yards). The reticule doesn't change size when altering magnification so it's a second focal plane scope (genuine mil dot scopes use the more expensive first focal plane construction).

For our purposes, to avoid further confusion, we can forget what's written on the box and treat this scope as a regular 3-9x which uses the older system where each click shifts the cross-hairs by about 6mm at a distance of 100m. Once properly sighted-in with CCI standard velocity rimfire ammo, a five-shot group that was later graphically analysed showed remarkably an average group radius of 0.22 MOA.

It's not the dots on the reticule but the distance between them that can be of use with some thought. To check the spacing of those dots I used the scope set on 9x and, at my 50m range, fired one group with cross-hairs centred on the target then a second group with the scope aimed at two dots above the intersection. I then measured the distance between the groups to find them 125mm apart. This equates to about 8.6 Minutes, in other words the distance between these dots on the 9x setting is about 4.3 Minutes

of Arc or roughly 16-18 clicks. Further checking showed the distance between the dots equates to approximately 10 Minutes on 3x through to four Minutes on 9x.

One important test conducted later involved firing rested 10-shot groups over 50m with the scope set firstly on 3x power then shifting to 9x to see whether Point of Impact moved. The day on which the tests were done was windy with a bit of misty rain, but subsequent graphical analysis of both targets gave mean group centres not significantly different.

Whether spacing of the dots on the cross-hairs are used or not, this scope performed well, mounted easily and gave a clear, bright image. It was loaned for review by the Xhunter online store (www.Xhunter.com.au) where it currently sells for around \$109.95. ●

Dust-caps cover the adjustment screws and must be removed to shift the cross-hairs and change Point of Impact.



With caps removed the adjustments can be clicked around with the fingers.



A steady rest is important for sighting-in. Here the butt is supported in a V-shaped sandbag and fore-end rested on a homemade benchrest stand and small sandbag.

The rifle bore and scope are now 'looking' at the same spot

The power selection ring is friction controlled and doesn't move once selected.



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Thrill of the chase

Mark van den Boogaart had to hunt tough for an NT buffalo

It started over a podcast chat with Brian, a fine bloke with encyclopaedic knowledge of hunting and practical experience to match. He suggested Ian, Jono and I should head to the Northern Territory to hunt buffalo so a date was set and thoughts turned to the build-up. Getting hotter, getting dryer, not bad for the hunter or for game concentration. The location was a cattle property near Elsey Station, the setting for Jeanie Gunn's autobiography *We of the Never Never*.

Attention then turned to gear and luckily with a Territory connection we'd have access to camp equipment though we'd still need to take plenty, most importantly rifles. We agreed to take one large expedition bag and a rifle case each so ended up with a single rifle case, a double and our audio/video equipment filling the third. In those cases were a 9.3x62mm Sauer 100 topped with Swarovski Z6, a Sako 85 Hunter with Steiner Ranger 6 (also in 9.3) and a Beretta BRX-1 in .30-06 with Aimpoint Micro H1. Ammo was a combination of Sako and Sellier & Bellot, 180-grain for the .30-06 and a selection of 250 to 286-grain for the 9.3s.

We landed in Darwin and hit the road and on meeting Brian, Matt and Martin headed south. Arriving after dark we met the station owner then established an overnight camp along the Roper River. We had five full days of hunting in front of us, the plan

being to camp up on the hill for a couple of days then move to a wetlands area. Monday morning found us walking the Roper on an acclimatisation hunt along a sandy creek bed where we spotted a couple of pigs, but couldn't get it together so around 11am we packed up.

Next morning we were following a dry creek bed close to camp and about 30 minutes in spotted our first fresh buffalo sign along with prints and harsh indentations in the dirt, so they were in the area. Eventually we came across water with several freshwater crocodiles. Local knowledge told us if there are lots of freshies it's unlikely there's a salty about, even so we gave the water a wide berth.

We split up with Matt and Ian cutting wide while Jono and I dropped into the dry creek wash-outs until a couple of shots filled the air. We stopped, listened then slowly headed towards the sound

where standing under the trees were Ian and Matt with a monster pig, a huge sow which had been stopped in its tracks by a 180-grain pill. Changing teams, Matt and I bumped into a couple of pigs though again without firing a shot, while Jono and Ian dropped another good-sized one, the kind which in most instances you'd be talking about for days, yet after 'Hogzilla' it was decidedly second tier.

A while later we were back at camp and making plans for a hunt around the Roper River. After a dusty drive we arrived at a series of now dry billabongs which drained into the main body of water and so began what would be a long walk in hot afternoon sun. We moved north with the sun to a low escarpment on our left and 20 minutes later spotted a lone domestic cow then, out of nowhere, a buffalo herd. None of us had seen them before so it took a while to comprehend what stood about 200m away,



A good-sized freshwater crocodile.



It looks beautiful but is just for looking.



Ian with BRX and buffalo.

Eventually we came across water with several freshwater crocodiles

a true herd with at least one dominant bull and a few contenders.

We approached but 20 to 30 pairs of eyes are hard to sneak up on and at one stage the head bull turned and looked straight at me. I promptly moved behind a termite mound but raising his head he winded me and, in doing so, adopted that quintessential pose with chest forward, nose in the air and massive horns spreading from both sides of a brutish head. I lined up on the boiler room and considered the shot until he turned slightly, placed a foreleg and shoulder in the way and with that move I'd lost the shot so lowered my rifle. With the herd moving off we turned away from the afternoon sun and back to our starting point.

The following days were tough going. We covered plenty of ground and experienced some true Territory wonders but game was nowhere to be seen so the decision was made to head for the wetlands. The move took a while and it was early afternoon when we arrived in a country of contrasts with rocky ridge lines to the west and huge lagoons to the east. Surveying the skyline you could picture vast amounts of monsoonal



Ian with Hogzilla though the photo just doesn't tell how big it was.

Thrill of the chase

rain being channelled by ridge lines into the lower basin but for now, the ridges and much of the foreground was bone dry.

We camped along a smaller lagoon, more of a wetlands system where we could hear geese and one afternoon while climbing the ridge lines we were able to see pigs which were absolute monsters. Amazingly the kilometre-wide corridor between the rocky, dusty ridges and wetlands was frequented by buffaloes with fresh sign everywhere. Next morning in the slowly increasing light we spotted a big pig on the safe side of the wire and later the buffalo which had cut our tracks from the previous evening. Following the sign we first heard then saw the birds - this was a poached buffalo and only hours dead.

That same afternoon Jono, Brian and Martin put in the hard yards and managed to take themselves a couple of buffaloes. After spying a large saltwater crocodile they decided to move away from the water and with the day almost done, spotted movement which turned into two buffaloes. Opening up they put down one on the spot. The second disappeared into the fading light and after another 30 minutes of searching they decided to pull out and return in the morning. They looked around and found the dead buffalo not far from where they'd lost it the previous night.

With Jono adding to the total it was turning into a successful hunt though for my part I hadn't even closed the bolt on a game animal. Heading out that Friday afternoon Jono, Ian and Matt pushed east while Martin chauffeured me and Brian directly north of camp. Pulling up we cut into the scrub for a couple of kilometres, eventually hearing red-tailed cockatoos so we moved towards their sound.

On spotting them we assumed they were roosting above water and while that turned out not to be the case, after a little more searching we found our first puddle. With that we turned into the wind in search of more water and arriving at a deep creek line, crossed over to find more puddles and patches. A little further on the water formed into a single, winding line along which was buffalo sign, most of it old but we stuck with it.

Eventually we cut very fresh sign as around us the creek line first pushed right then back in front and we could see where the game track dropped down, before rising again on the opposite bank. Suddenly we took a nostrilful of buffalo. Sometimes when hunting you smell game, your nose tells you it's about, while other times you'll catch an odour that says there's game right here, right now. This was unquestionably the latter.

Looking at each other, Brian signalled to load-up and cycling the bolt I flicked the Sako to safe and moved further down the track. Within sight of the edge I saw a large wet stain in the dirt, put my hand to it and the water lifted. They're here. Just a few steps more and I saw it, a small bull in the water facing away from me at roughly 50 yards so I sat down, took aim and fired the 9.3, striking it in the base of the skull.

Sitting there I was playing it back in my head when the second buffalo, the bigger one, burst from wherever it was standing and began moving up and out of the water towards the steep slope of the far bank. I

immediately fired, striking it in the heart/lung zone for a double success.

I've come to think of hunting as the pursuit of a moment of chance, countless hours, energy, practice, money and the rest all compressed into a few moments. But that moment's not assured, not guaranteed as all you've done is create a chance and now you have to take it. Our trip to the Territory really was just that, the compression of so much effort into the chance to take a buffalo. We grasped it and like the ever-hopeful punter with winnings burning a hole in their pocket, we're already thinking about next time. ●



A classic NT buffalo.



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A sketch of the times when rifle shooting attracted serious interest.

Schuetzen feast!

German masterpiece a rare treasure, writes **Dick Eussen**

Old rifles are interesting and few more so than traditional German/Swiss Schuetzen (shooting) types and until recently I'd never seen one as they're extremely rare with the majority being in Germany and the US. These are the pinnacle of German/Swiss firearm manufacturing.

Genuine Schuetzen rifles were painstakingly handmade and are breech-loading single-shot cartridge items of mostly falling block actions and purpose designed for 200m target shooting. Schuetzen sports shooting was introduced to the US by German and European settlers in the mid-1800s, many of whom brought their guns with them to the Wild West. The Boerne Shooting Club, formed in 1864, continues the traditional shooting sport while German/Swiss origin Schuetzen shoots remain popular across Europe and the US.

American gunsmiths made fine Schuetzen-style rifles based on Winchester High Wall, Ballard, Peabody-Martini and Stevens actions chambered in .32-40, .38-55 calibres and .22 rimfire. Yet they rarely copied the elaborate European engraved stock designs, making do with something more practical though there were exceptions, as some European rifles were fitted with standard stocks. European gunsmiths also used US actions though it appears the Aydt System 11 and Peabody-Martini options were preferred and custom rifles with stocks which only fitted the shooter were popular if you had the money.



Mike Little using his original Schuetzen rifle the traditional way.

Big in their day

Shooting matches were at their most popular in Europe during the 19th and start of the 20th century and were known as Schuetzen, Match or Free Rifle shooting, the firearms used being purpose target rifles free of restrictions and calibre, trigger, sights and weight.

Such matches have been practised for decades across Europe and remain unchanged, being shot on standing targets from 90-180m outdoors and 23m indoors (.22 rimfire), though sadly the sport declined in the 1920s, especially in the US when all things German were shunned after World War One. Some regeneration occurred

following WW2 when a resurgence in rifle shooting saw clubs formed in their thousands in countries which allowed firearms, including Australia. Much of this growth was in smallbore .22 rimfire target shooting, especially Free Rifle and Gallery events.

Yet many reckon true Schuetzen shooting ended around 1917, as no more big matches were advertised due to the Kaiser drawing his sabre as Europe entered yet another war phase. Traditionalists feel anything to do with the sport before that year is highly collectable and considered it the end of the first generation of traditional Schuetzen rifles, though it endures as events and rifle manufacturing continues today.

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Schuetzen feast!

Rare find

My friend Mike Little showed me a true Schuetzen rifle he bought in Mick Smith's Sydney gunstore in 1976, the manufacturing plates showing it's an Aydt System 11 built by Otto Lang, a gunsmith based in Schweinfurt, Bavaria. Auction sites in the US listed an engraved Otto Lang Schuetzen rifle in 8.15x46mm which sold for \$2588 with a similar rifle in 4mm for sale. Both were based on the Peabody-Martini action.

Schuetzen rifles were chambered in several calibres, the first being 11.15mm which may dictate the year of introduction because in line with the US, where target shooters progressed down from .44 to .40 to .38 in the 1880s and .32 in the 1900s, the Germans started with 11.15mm followed by 10.4 and 9.5 before settling on 8.15mm after 1893 when improved rifling that coped better with black powder loadings was

introduced. Preferred cartridges were black powder loadings and generally of .32, .33 and .38 calibres, one of the best purposely designed for 200-yard shooting being the .38-55 Ballard. That was introduced in 1882 but today the .32-40 reigns in popular US Schuetzen shoots.

Traditional Schuetzen centrefire contests are highly popular in Europe and the US where there are two major events, each with their own following. One is offhand where the shooter holds the rifle in a standing position with only the arms and body supporting it. A 20-shot match takes an hour to complete though three-shots-per-minute matches are common. Scores are based on 200m German Ring Targets shot at 200 yards in the US and 200m on the continent, the X-ring diameter being 6.2cm with scores at 25 points a hit and bullet holes scored from the edge to the centre. It's not a team sport as spotters and coaches aren't permitted, while talk on the line is considered bad manners as it's distracting to others.

Also popular is benchrest shooting which, while not traditional, is undertaken from stands and sandbags which provide good support for the best possible accuracy. Targets are similar and many use the old string method when scoring, the string laid from the centre of the target to the bullet hole with the shortest string winning. Black powder is used in traditional matches so there's plenty of noise and smoke.

Modern rifles

Today's US Schuetzen rifles have long sloping stocks designed for offhand and bench shooting and share little with the elaborate European stocks which are impossible to shoot from a bench or prone position.

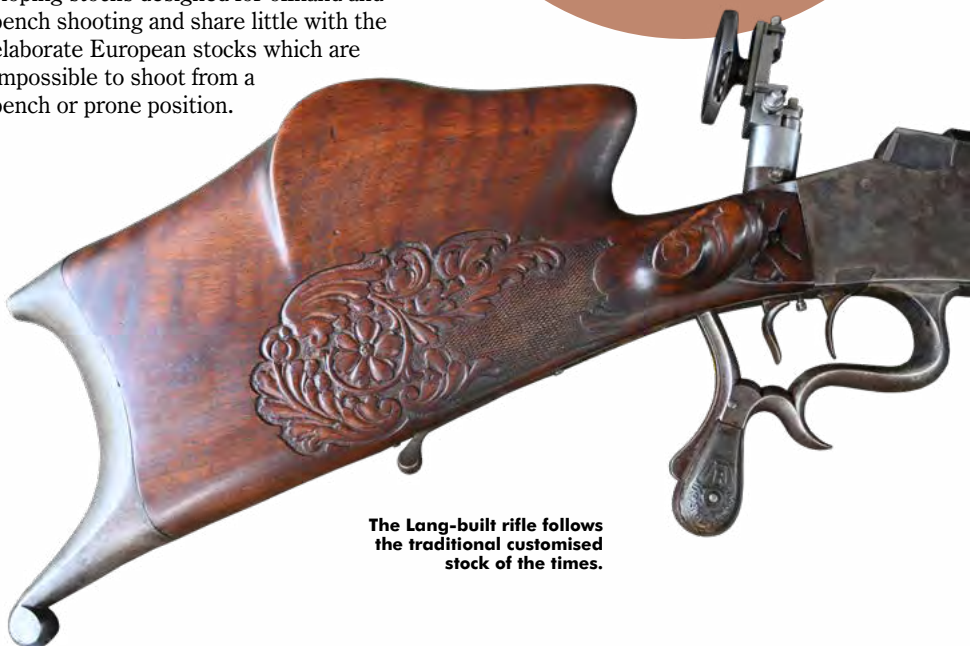
These stocks have hooked buttplates dating back to the pre-firearm era of flintlocks, being designed to snugly secure the rifle to the shoulder shot after shot. US Schuetzen rifles lack the intricate curved butt-hooks and merely sport a lower prong and short upper one, while traditional twin-set triggers have vanished on some models.

The Germans made arguably the world's best triggers and the Schuetzen rifle's double-set versions are ideal for precise shooting. The hammer is pulled back to cock and rear trigger pulled which sets the front one to 'touch' mode, the rear trigger cocking the hammer while the front releases the mechanism to fire it. Triggers are fully adjustable for personal choice while on the other hand, the single trigger functions when the hammer is pulled back and cocked.

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Rich ornate silver inlays and engravings were found on many custom-built Schuetzen rifles.



The Lang-built rifle follows the traditional customised stock of the times.

Sights

US shooters 'improved' Schuetzen rifles by fitting purposely designed telescopes, Fecker, Unertl and Lyman scopes ranging from 6, 12 and 20x in power being popular. These scopes have tubes longer than most barrels and were first used on rifles in the US Civil War. Even early models were advanced for their time, having both external windage and elevation adjustments and 3/4" tubes and replicas continue to be available.

Many shooters prefer traditional vernier aperture sights which are fully adjustable,

having windage and elevation and are mounted just below the hammer on the stock grip. Old-style sights were slow to adjust for windage but modern models can be tweaked for rapidly changing conditions (front sights generally have interchangeable insert reticules). Original US Schuetzen rifles are true works of art with many custom built by craft gunsmiths of the highest skills on Ballard, Stevens, Sharps, Winchester, Maynard and Remington actions during the heyday of offhand shooting.

Traditional

Most European and US Schuetzen rifles are made to be disassembled and assembled without tools. Mike's rifle is easily pulled to bits without tools as finger-grip lock inserts make it simple to dismantle for cleaning. His rifle was in bad shape and he spent much time restoring it, which included making a set of purpose aperture target sights modelled on traditional sights. The rifle is impressive with its elaborate flora carved inlet stock and fore-end, chequering highlighted by the curved triggerguards,



The front sight is a simple wide blade.



MVA continues to make traditional scopes for Schuetzen and long-range rifles, note fully adjustable mounts.

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Schuetzen feast!

double-set twin-set triggers, sights, curved steel butt-plate, shoulder hooks and 815mm hexagon barrel, a magnificent example of European gunmaking.

Missing is the popular front-end hand grip piece which attaches to the fore-end and is used with the free hand to balance the rifle, though many shooters stabilise the rifle on the fingers of the free hand when aiming. The rifle weighs 6.30kg but bench and prone shooting is impossible due to the stock design, unlike US versions with standard-style 'straight' stocks.

It's built on a System Aydt 11 rotating block lock action and dates to September 1927 (Carl Wilhelm Aydt of Suhl, Germany patented this action in February, 1884). There are two models, the earlier System Aydt 1 and improved Aydt 11 which saw his company booming and turning to large production when demand soared. Aydt also made actions for .22 rimfire rifles and pistols but wasn't alone as falling block actions from Buchel, Hiller and Martini were popular, while the US has the better-known brands of falling block actions previously mentioned. Even early Model 1871 Mauser were used for Schuetzen rifles though mostly with standard stocks.

Shooting

Mike Little's Schuetzen rifle is chambered for the 8.15x46Rmm cartridge, a popular target and hunting choice of the times. It was



This stock was built by a true woodworking artist, note the steel butt-plate.

introduced in the 1890s by Frohn of Suhl and quickly became a cartridge of choice for 200m Schuetzen events in Europe, though remained largely unknown elsewhere until after WW2 when the rifles were brought to the US by victorious troops.

Factory ballistics indicated velocity of 1900fps for a 151-grain SP bullet, 1500fps for a 190-grain lead bullet (Lyman #338237) and 1805fps for the 151-grain RWS factory load (loading must be kept to low pressure due to the age of guns chambered for it). RWS ammo is hard to find but reloaders can make rounds from .32-40 Win or, as Mike does, from .30-30 Win cases. Black powder is the preferred choice for traditionalists though modern powders like 4895 or 3031 are suitable, ADI powder equivalents being AR2206H and Benchmark 2.

More long range

Those early Schuetzen events led to long-range shooting (up to 1000 yards) in the US with single-shot 'buffalo' rifles now used in Cowboy long-range matches. Both have similarities and use somewhat comparable rifles, apart from larger calibres that can only be .30-30 (.30 WCF), .38-55 Marlin & Ballard, .43 Spanish or .45-70 G chambered in single-shot rifles that must be originals or replicas which were in vogue from 1860 until 1899. Rifles must have exposed hammers while scopes, sights and mounts must be of the period.

Another long-range event, Black Powder Cartridge Rifle, uses Creedmoor-type target rifles like the Browning High Wall chambered for the .45-90, which uses a 525-grain bullet at 1300fps. It's a serious rifle with a 34" barrel and is also chambered for the .40-65 and .45-70. Schuetzen shooting is fascinating and, as I said, old rifles are interesting and traditional matches make them even more so. ●



While hard to find, several books including this one have been published about the sport.

The MVA Winchester B Series scope is based on traditional models used in the 1880s.



Rifle shooting based on traditional European Schuetzen events were popular in the US with rifles readily available.

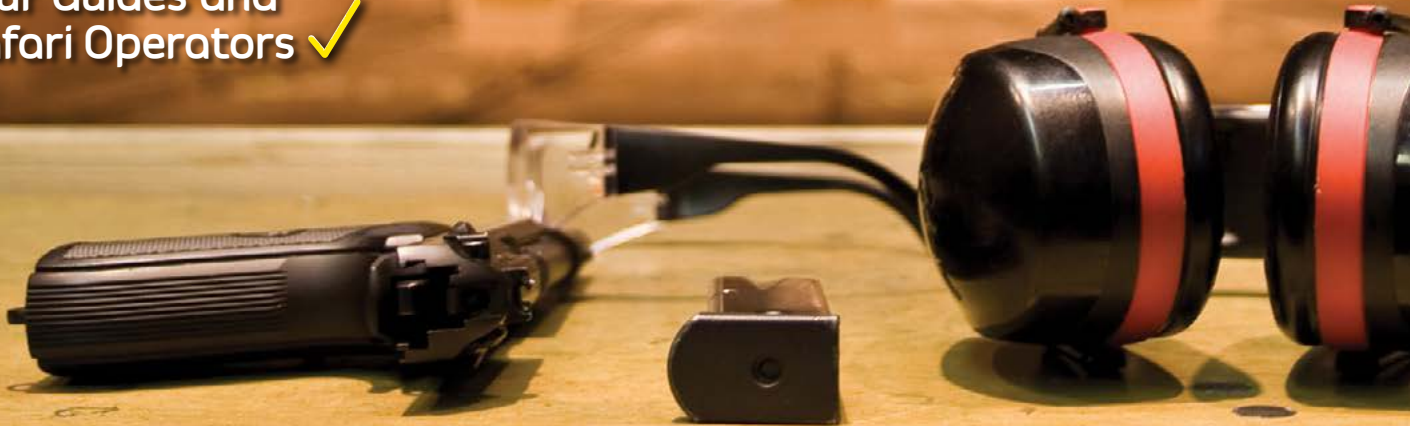
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Heat-seeker

SQ50 thermal scope put **Matthew Godson** in the picture

The Stellar thermal riflescope is Hikmicro's first-ever thermal tubed design and comes in four different options - the SH35, SH50, SQ35 and SQ50 - all with renowned high-quality Hikmicro thermal imaging. The conventional 30mm tube chassis allows attachment of the scope to a rifle with standard scope rings which makes fitting it a breeze and ensures the user can achieve perfect eye relief.

The SQ50 comes in a Hikmicro branded sturdy case which includes the charging cable, spare battery, manual/warranty information and a strap for carrying over your shoulder. The case's internal dimensions offered enough space to accommodate the scope and rings attached to it during the review. The Stellar SQ50 is so named as it has a 50mm lens which affords greater depth in the image to make it capable of medium to longer ranges compared to 35mm models.

Stellar scopes have a sleek ergonomic design with all main controls within easy reach and, from back to front, it has a

rubber eyepiece as standard then the smooth-functioning diopter adjustment ring which enables focusing and viewing of the menu systems. Nearby you find the three main control buttons, the on-off (plus standby), video recording and palette switch. Following that is the control jog dial (left side) which, when rotated, adjusts the digital zoom forwards and backwards for viewing and targeting purposes.

This control jog dial has a tactile click so you can both hear and feel movement of the wheel. When the dial is pressed inwards it lets you enter or exit the menu control system, a turn of the dial either way enabling you to scroll through and select menu items. A long press will enter or exit the menu, short presses mean you can select or change various menu options while the data exchange on the right side lets you charge the device as well as transmit data via the USB cable.

Between those on the top of the unit is a turret-style compartment where an extra battery can be installed for use beyond the internal rechargeable batteries. The focus

ring at the front allows you to adjust focal length to improve image quality and at the very front is a flip-up cover to protect the lens from the elements when the device is not in use.

Tech and features

The Stellar SQ50 has a Hikmicro 640 x 512px thermal sensor with a sub-35mK NETD and 50Hz refresh rate, all of which means it produces clear images with a high degree of thermal sensitivity (ability to distinguish temperature differences). Paired with the 50mm lens the SQ50 delivers high magnification and detailed images with base magnification of 2.3x (with 8.80o x 7.03o Field of View).

It has a claimed detection distance of up to 2600m for a human-sized object and with 8x digital magnification available at the turn of the jog dial, the effective magnification range of the SQ50 is a versatile 2.3-18x, the focusable lens meaning you have a clear picture across the entire range. There are four colour palettes to choose from in Black Hot, White Hot, Red Hot and Fusion.

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Heat-seeker

Run time is always an important consideration and the SQ50 provides exceptional battery life, the two internal lithium batteries being claimed to provide 15 hours of operation which certainly covers a night's activities. The additional battery compartment allows you to add a back-up CR123A battery for another hour of use.

If you're after a thermal scope with multiple zeroing options so you can use it on different firearms, the SQ50 provides up to five profiles and you can also add five reticle choices per profile. For example I initially installed a single profile for a rimfire rifle with four reticle settings, two for subsonic ammunition at different zero distances and two others for standard ammunition, again with two different zero distances.

While on zero distances I should mention the SQ50 has a one-shot zero function to guarantee you're on target quickly. It may take some practice to master the freeze function and you'll work out quickly that a stable rest is required to help you freeze the image where you want to, but apart from that it's a simple process to set the zero where you just aim, shoot then move the cross-hairs to the point of impact.

When it comes to recording and sharing videos and pictures of your shooting activities, the SQ50 has the option of recoil-activated recording so you can automatically capture video both with or without sound. This and manually recorded content will be held on the 64GB internal storage ready for download via the USB-C port to a computer.

With its inbuilt Wi-Fi you can also connect to the Hikmicro Sight app which allows you to stream, record and control the SQ50 from a phone or tablet. You can capture and stream the action to your friends in real-time or send clips later via normal messaging apps. The app also provides access to the SQ50's controls to make adjustments to colour palettes, brightness, contrast and magnification which improves usability of the unit and enables users to customise the configuration to match their preferred image settings from either the scope or mobile device.

In use

I fitted the SQ50 to my Ruger American .22LR rimfire, the plan being to attach and zero the scope on a couple of different rifles (one rimfire and one centrefire). I wanted to be able to switch between firearms while maintaining zero and, with this in mind, sourced a scope mount which was both return-to-zero and quick to detach/reattach. After some research I decided on an American Defense MFG AD-Recon-SEW scope mount.

The SQ50 is a thermal scope designed to look like what hunters have used for years.



Below: The menu wheel, battery compartment and USB interface resemble traditional scope turrets.

I visited a small farm to sight-in the SQ50. Sighting-in a thermal scope requires a little extra thought with regard to target selection as you can't use plain old paper targets because you need ones which show thermal contrast. After more research I found the GlowShot Thermal Target System, these passive targets being perfect for my intended use and they're highly visible due to a unique material that displays natural thermal contrast. They provided a good aiming point at both short and medium ranges and the 1cm grid pattern would also help identify the required point of impact correction for those scopes without one-shot zeroing functionality.

The targets come with repair patches you can buy separately to ensure longevity. What I recommend is using the main target to get on paper then one of the repair patches to mark point of impact. This will let you make best use of the one-shot zero function as the point of impact covered with a patch is easy to see. At short ranges you could even just



The power, palette and capture buttons are within easy reach near the eyepiece.



The scope is snug and protected in its case even with a quick-release mount system.



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

Heat-seeker

use the patches, one for point of aim, shoot and then walk to the target and cover point of impact with the second patch, then go back to the shooting position and begin the scope zeroing process.

Once zeroed I detached the SQ50 and reattached it to my rifle about a dozen times to test the QD mount. I shot four separate groups and determined that point of impact remained where I wanted it which gave the American Defense MFG AD-Recon-SEW scope mount a big tick. A couple of weeks passed and it was time to go out into the field again and use the scope for pest control. The property I attended had a few rabbits about and the SQ50 paired with my Ruger American rimfire proved an effective tool.

I found the base magnification (2.3x) of the SQ to be excellent in that you could easily scan open areas looking for potential targets. When a heat signature was detected, a quick turn of the jog dial zoomed in on the image (8x) so it could be identified. When zooming in on a rabbit-sized target you need to be a good judge of distance, especially when using subsonic .22LR. The SQ50 does offer a stadiametric range-finding function to measure the distance between a target and the observation position.

The SQ50 also offers a ballistic-type reticle option so you can spend some time at the range to validate bullet drop over different distances to reduce 'guesstimates'. When the magnification increases or decreases, the cross-hairs in the SQ50 will also increase and decrease in size relative to the target but let's face it, with thermal the need for longer-range shots is reduced as you can move closer to a target undetected.



A fox heading for the fence line.

Activating the Wi-Fi, I connected the SQ50 to my phone and the Hikmicro Sight app to let me see the scope view and record images and video at the touch of the screen, a feature which enabled me to share my night's successes. While my rifle was securely attached hands-free to a Racken Rest, the SQ50 broadcast the live thermal view directly ahead of the vehicle to my phone screen as I slowly navigated the property. When a potential target was detected, I'd stop and use the app to zoom in and out to identify it. I was able to change contrast, brightness and palette colour via the app without needing to look through or touch the scope, a great function.

When there are several targets in an area, zooming in and out can be distracting and potential to lose sight of the next target is real. This is where the picture-in-picture function comes in handy and allows easier tracking of multiple targets across a wider field of view.

The Stellar SQ50 is an excellent thermal scope. From its traditional-looking styling to technical features it provides the user with loads of functionality in an easy-to-use package, the peace of mind warranty extending 10 years for the sensor, three years for the body and 12 months for the battery. The SQ50's RRP is around \$6499 with the Stellar range starting from \$4099. More at www.tsaoutdoors.com.au ●

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Double take

Shotgun gauge reducers aren't new but **Leon Wright** put a 410 version to good use in his 20-gauge

A voice from the cab of the ute enquired: "Yabbies or rabbits Leon?" "Yabbies," I replied, "though I saw a lot of rabbits, hares and the odd fox further down the paddock. I'm going fishing for a few days and will sort them out when I get back." And with a wave of his hand in acknowledgement my farmer friend was gone.

I was quite surprised at the number of rabbits I'd seen as I usually flush out the odd one while poking around after a fox but this time there were quite a few, with a number of them further out in the stubble paddock. I'd put my yabby nets in two dams a couple of hundred metres apart and came across the rabbits as I walked between dams.

While surveying all the freshly-opened burrows I glimpsed a fox mooching along the fence line adjoining the stubble paddock. A mob of kangaroos clocked me and started heading off, in turn spooking the redcoat which began trotting towards me. He was still advancing when at about 20m I spoke to him which stopped him in his tracks. "You're a lucky boy today, no gun, but you better lift your game or else." And with that he bolted for the scrub.

A week later just on first light I found myself parking the ute beside the stubble paddock. I'd been taking care of vermin on this property for some time, with shooting rabbits around the main house being first port of call. I've always found it amusing

that while the 'Lord of the Manor' and his wife are watching TV, I'm wandering around their garden after dark (with the aid of a light) shooting rabbits a mere 20m from their lounge room window. Being country folk the booming of a 12-gauge doesn't even ruffle their feathers, such is their faith in me operating safely.

Over time I gradually switched to a 20-gauge and recently struck on the idea of using 410-gauge reducers in this shotgun. By using these the noise level is lowered considerably yet the gun is still capable of taking rabbits hopping about the garden, so the plan was to use No.3 shot in the Beretta Silver Pigeon for whistling foxes, then slip the gauge reducers in for any rabbits I spotted.

While crossing the stubble paddock in semi-

darkness I saw two hares moving off at my approach and mentally noted the location where they disappeared for further attention later that morning. When I reached the point where I'd seen the fox last time I had a quick glance around but surprisingly didn't see the fox or any rabbits.

I was dressed in full camouflage so sat down on a handy stump among a couple of fallen branches and went to work with the predator call, though the wailing did nothing but stir the kangaroos so I left in search of a rabbit. Twenty metres on I caught sight of the fox emerging from the far end of the paddock and simultaneously he spotted me out in the open but instantly chose to ignore me.

Thanks to the camo gear he couldn't make me out so I slowly sank to the ground and reached for the tin whistle around my neck. A few squawks grabbed his attention and another couple of pathetic wails had him trotting in, playing it cagey and hugging the water's edge in a bid to pick up my scent.

If the fox kept following the edge of the swamp



A close-up of gauge reducers and cartridges.

around he'd pass no more than 30m from where I was waiting in the high grass. His attempts to be cunning proved his downfall and when directly opposite me I dropped him with a single load of No.3 from the 20-gauge. After slipping the 410-gauge reducers into the Beretta I moved off in search of another stand to call a fox from, though with the hope of flushing a rabbit or two in the process.

About 200m down the track with no rabbits seen, I made ready to lure another fox. The first wails of the predator call had instant success but instead of a fox, a black wallaby bounded from the scrub in front of me - followed by a redcoat. This time I was well hidden but this prowler, as with the first one, stopped warily and took everything in. A soft pleading with the predator call had it on the move again though it too tried to skirt around me, obviously searching for a tell-tale scent.

Each time it stopped a soft wail brought it that bit closer but still it was coming in on an angle. The gentle breeze was full in my face so I just let the fox work its way around to the side of me until at 30 paces I raised the Beretta and fired for an instant kill. This was a young specimen, probably from the same litter as the first one with both in excellent condition.

While moving down to my next fox-calling stand I spotted one heading across the stubble paddock. It couldn't have seen me as I was moving adjacent to the tree line and blending into my surroundings thanks to the camo gear. A loud wail on the call stopped the fox in its tracks and, as it looked back towards me, I almost had it convinced until a mob of roos hopping through the paddock changed its mind, the predator slipping through the wires into some high grass bordering the fence line.

I'd no doubt the fox would hide in the high grass until it thought the situation was safe enough to work its way back into the scrub behind me so, moving to where the high grass ran into the scrub, I stood quietly in the shade in case the prowler tried to slip by. My dog Missy loves hunting foxes and if she'd been with me it would've been a simple matter of running her through the grass to flush the target. But she was at home as spear grass is deadly on dogs at that time of year and I wasn't prepared to take the risk.

It was still only 7.30am but heating up rapidly and I knew from past experience that foxes in this area would be well on their way home by now if not already there. I decided to work my way towards the ute and check for the hares I'd seen earlier and hopefully a fox in the paddock at the end

of the property (I kept the Beretta loaded just in case). As luck would have it I flushed a big hare hiding in heavy cover. It was quick off the mark but well in range of the 20-gauge and a load of No.3 shot sent it tumbling as the pattern caught up.

At the sound of the shot another hare broke cover but at extended range so I thought better of it and held fire as I'd a trick up my sleeve I was confident would work. The predator call I use is great at luring foxes but equally successful with hares and their antics when engaged can be hilarious at times. I knew the shot when it came would be quite close, the perfect time to use the 410-gauge reducer in the

20-gauge, so I slipped them in with a couple of 410 cartridges and closed the action.

Although hares are quite large, almost the size of a young fox, they're easy to topple so I'd no worries about using the 410 and at the first cry from the predator call it hopped out of the bushes about 40m away. The second call had it heading straight for me and at no more than 6m it stopped, sat bolt upright to gather its bearings and fell to a load of No.4. I quickly field dressed both hares knowing the dogs would be pleased with a fresh feed that night and with conditions too hot to continue I headed for the ute. Those rabbits will have to wait until next time. ●



Memories are made of this

Senior correspondent **John Dunn** created something special on request

If there's one thing I've learned since I started making a few knives it's that knife owners and users are a funny mob as, like firearms owners, every one of us has our own ideas about what we think is the ideal knife. We all have reasons for our views and thankfully they're all as different as we are. Sometimes some of us even think in ways no-one would expect and a friend of mine is a good example of that.

Darren Black, universally known as Blacky, is what my Old Feller would've called a rough diamond and if there are times when the rough outshines the diamond that's just because of the way he is. We've been helping each other out for years and just before Christmas last year he came to me with an idea. His daughter had given him a nice little single-blade folding knife with an inscribed bolster as a birthday present and it clearly means a lot to him.

"Mr Dunn," he said as he pulled the knife from his pocket and opened it. He only calls me Mr Dunn when he wants something or is having a dig, which is most of the time. "I want you to make me a fixed-blade knife the same shape and size as this. It'll be a Christmas present for Sharney and I'm happy to pay whatever you think it's worth."

The sentiment of what he was saying wasn't lost on me. He was reciprocating his daughter's gift in his own way, knowing she'd appreciate the thought and use the knife simply because he'd given it to her. Blacky's a haggler from way back and when

the trade-off had been agreed, he left the folder with me and asked that I give him a call when the new knife was finished.

The first step I took was to draw a profile of the open knife on light cardboard which became the template for marking out the project on a piece of 3.3mm thick 1075 steel. This is thicker than the original blade but given it was likely to be worked a little harder as a fixed-blade I reckoned it would do - and anyway, I didn't have anything thinner. I cut out the rough shape with a small disc grinder then profile ground it until it was as close as I could get it to the original.

From there it went on the grinder where I formed the bevels on the blade, taking care to keep the length of the cutting edge the same as the original. I took the plunge line almost up to the spine of the blade in a bid to reduce the weight a little without compromising strength, the edge of the blade left a little under 1mm thick for final sharpening when the bench work was finished.

The sentiment of what he was saying wasn't lost on me

With the blade formed I marked and drilled the tang for a couple of brass rivets and a lanyard tube at the rear of the handle, something Blacky specifically requested. He didn't want a bolster so that made the job easier. The first pair of scales were cut from a piece of red gum Blacky had given me about 18 months previously, a nice thought which didn't work out. The wood was too dry and brittle and not at all amenable to being thinned down to knife scale thickness. Three times I tried, the last with a liner glued to the inside of the scales for extra strength but in the end I put the pieces in the bin and made another set out of sassafras which worked perfectly.

Before committing the blank to the kiln for hardening I polished the blade to a bright 1200 grit finish, coated it with a layer of anti-scale compound to prevent carburizing then hardened and quenched it in oil. On cooling it went back into the kiln for two, two-hour tempering cycles with an air-cooling break in between and another after the second temper.

While that was happening I cut some pin stock for rivets and tempered them with a propane torch so the ends would rivet over without cracking, then made a lanyard tube on the lathe. When the knife was cool I cleaned everything up and buffed the blade

to an almost mirror finish with cloth wheels and finishing compound then wrapped it in masking tape and fitted the scales. With a small tapered reamer I lightly opened out the rivet holes in each scale to allow room for the rivets to expand.

Before I glued it all together I did a dry assembly run to make sure everything fitted as it should, the inside of each scale then coated with epoxy glue as were both sides of the tang. The scales were then guided into place on the pins and when they were sitting flat on the tang I clamped them together and pushed the lanyard tube into place, rivetted the ends of the pins over and set it all aside to dry overnight. From there it was only a matter of finishing the shape of the scales and polishing both the wood and the ends of the rivets to a 400-grit finish. Finally, the scales were treated with Birchwood Casey Tru Oil stock finish.

The finished article isn't what a lot of people would consider an ideal shape but I like it. The project took on a life of its own as it went and I was pleased with the result. Anyone who's ever used a small folding knife can relate to the shape and feel of the knife and, like the folder, it was derived from a knife that'll be useful in many ways. In Sharney's hands it will probably be put to work as a fish and/or rabbit knife.

Subsequent knives I made in the same style moved on to new homes almost as soon as I'd finished them though most importantly Sharney loves her little knife and, at the end of the day, that's all that really matters. ●



The finished knife with a 50c coin for size comparison.




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Preparing for red deer scouting with the S20.

Go your own way

Sako S20 a bit of a trailblazer, writes **Mark van den Boogaart**

On receiving a call from the guys at On Target Sporting Arms I was quick off my mark to pick up a new arrival from Beretta Australia in the shape of the Sako S20 with Steiner Predator 8 scope along with a couple of boxes of Sako 180-grain ammo in .300 Win Mag. My immediate impression was the S20 really wasn't a Sako as I know them. To explain, my past experiences have been of the Models 75 and 85, classic timber hunting rifles, but on the counter was a fundamental departure from timber and blued metal finishes.

Even models like the Finnlight and Carbon Wolf which make use of modern materials still follow some of the more traditional Sako lines in their builds but, as with the Sako TRG series, the S20 goes its own way. The other instantly noticeable characteristic is the S20 is all about a long-range view of the world. This isn't a short barrel walkaround rifle, the ubiquitous scrub gun or its more modern interaction, the Scout rifle. No, the S20 wants to reach out from a long way back.

In support of its departure from the traditional Sako aesthetic the S20 is built differently. Available in a variety of calibres including .243 Win, 6.5 Creedmoor, 6.5 PRC, .270 Win, .308 Win, .30-06 Springfield, 7mm Rem Mag and .300 Win Mag, the S20 draws on a standardised manufacturing approach used primarily by Tikka. At the same time it includes features previously associated with the Sako TRG range, like a dedicated chassis system, so this combination of build philosophies offers something unique from the Finnish manufacturer.

I think this was a clever move by Sako as with the S20 you have a recreational version of the TRG platform for about half the retail price, yet unlike the TRG



Mark's first look at the Sako S20.

the S20 is modular, allowing you to buy a rifle you can change to suit your intended purpose. With the S20 you can shoot over long distances, be that in a hunting or precision rifle setting, Victorian Highlands sambar, New Zealand chamois, long-range precision rifle competition, the choice is yours. And yes, if you want to buy the hunting and precision rifle set-ups you can do both.

In detail

As supplied from Beretta Australia the rifle is a Sako S20 finished in Strata timber pattern, chambered in .300 Win Mag and topped with the superb Steiner Predator 8 3-24x50mm scope fitted with ballistic turrets. Its designated confirmation is the ergonomic hunting rifle variant with thumbhole stock and matching fore-end. The S20 looks substantial and with a combined estimated weight of 4.45kg (I didn't have a weight for the scope rings) it's no bantam. Yet it shoulders comfortably and I'd be happy to carry it in the field and wouldn't

really want a featherweight pushing out 180-grain .300 Wig Mag ammo anyway.

The metal work is a granular matte finish, the Strata timber pattern having a subtle colour scheme less vibrant than a typical American woodlands style camouflage pattern. The magazine is black and almost flush mounted and I believe the S20's is a unique design, so these magazines can't be used in Sako and Tikka rifles, nor are other Sako and Tikka magazines suitable for the S20.

The story of the S20 starts with the chassis and while described as 'full aluminium' this doesn't mean one-piece, rather the *full* chassis encompasses a fore-end, barrel bed and skeletal buttstock which bolt together. This is the



The famous Sako action, though a little different than what Mark's used to.



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Go your own way

defining feature of the Sako S20's modular approach, it's really the platform from which you start your customisation. If you're looking for a long-range hunter there's a stock and fore-end configuration to suit, as there is for a long-range practical target rifle. Sako refers to these configurations as take-down stocks though for some that could be a little misleading. As mentioned previously, if we consider the chassis as the bones, the stock assemblies are the skins that wrap around it.

The Sako-described 'S20 ergonomic hunting rifle stock' incorporates a thumb-hole stock with matching fore-end, the synthetic stock featuring removable pistol grip scales, adjustable height cheekpiece, adjustable length of pull and ability to mount your sling on either side of the rifle. The S20 tactical precision rifle stock (again as described by Sako) has additional features compared to the other one including four M-Lok placements on the bottom and sides of the stock. The fore-end is also wider and flatter than the hunter and in both cases the fore-end extends all the way back and includes the magazine port and triggerguard assembly.

There are also several factory accessories available including a dedicated scope mount, larger capability magazines, muzzle brakes and extra length of pull spacers. For the precision shooter there's also a barricade stop, a monopod for the buttstock and thumb rest mount, all of which would help you really customise the S20 from the get-go.

Looking at the action, along with the barrel they're typical of Sako's dedication to quality in manufacturing, the smooth and positive operation complemented by a three-position safety. It also features an integral Picatinny rail or, more correctly, two short forward and rear rails to allow direct mounting of your scope.

The cold hammer forged barrel is sensibly fluted which lightens the barrel without removing too much meat for a Win Mag chambering. Making those shots count the S20 is fitted with a multi-adjustable trigger with 7mm of positional adjustment on the horizontal axis (3mm back and 4mm forward) and between 1-2kg in weight of pull so you can set it to your personal preference.

In the field

The Sako S20 arrived just ahead of the red deer 'roar' season and I was spending every available minute scouting the Brisbane Valley, so whenever possible I took the rifle with me. Consequently I sighted in the S20 on the bush range with the help of a Caldwell shooting rest and folding table. Sako rifles have a well-earned and



Mark's bush range set-up.

respected reputation for accuracy and the S20, while a departure in design, stayed true to its heritage and smooth handling. At 100m it was on paper and shooting reasonable groups with minimal effort, in fact it took longer to find level ground for the table than it did to tune in the rifle.

It was during my trigger time with the S20 I encountered the only downside to the rifle. While the stock and adjustable cheekpiece are neutral, the grip is most definitely shaped for the right hand, a perennial problem for us lefties but you do what you can with what you have.

For all its modern features and challenge to traditional design, the S20 upholds Sako's well-deserved legacy of building some of the best practical rifles on the market. If long range is your thing - be that hunting, precision shooting or both - the Sako S20 is a suitable consideration and while it's not a cheap rifle, the money you spend would be well worth the investment.

Furthermore, considering you could in real and practical terms have two purpose-built long-range firearms from

a single-base rifle, the initial outlay doesn't seem all that expensive after all. The S20 in this review was supplied by Beretta Australia and is available via good gunshops around the country. ●

Specifications

Rifle: Sako S20 Strata timber pattern

Type: Bolt-action

Chambered: .300 Win Mag (supplied)

Capacity: Five rounds (supplied), 10-round (optional)

Barrel: 610mm with stated one-in-8 twist

Overall length: 1146mm.

Weight: 3.7kg (bare rifle)

Stock: Thumbhole configuration (supplied), Precision (optional)

Trigger: 1-2kg weight of pull, 7mm horizontal travel

The Strata timber camouflage pattern.



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International outdoorsman recognised for selling hunting lifestyle to the masses

Rachael Oxborrow

An international hunting, industry and shooting sports organisation - of which the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA National) is a founding member - is celebrating the work an American outdoorsman does to translate the lifestyle of hunters and fishers to the public with a prestigious award.

Steven Rinella, creator of the MeatEater podcast and television show, is the 2023 recipient of the World Forum on Shooting Activities (WFSA) Dr Vito Genco Shooting Ambassador Award.

The award seeks to improve the public perception of shooting sports by recognising the extraordinary contributions made by key influencers in the hunting/sport shooting community.

In accepting his award Steven talked of how the outdoors, fishing and hunting as a child had given him countless great opportunities in his life.

"I was brought up by my father as an avid hunter or fisherman and trapper and shooter," he said.

"My dad always said to focus on doing what you love for work and so ever since I was a little kid, I knew I would find a way to make a living in the outdoors."

Steven is most well-known for his long-running television show MeatEater and associated podcast. The television show is now in its 11th season and is streamed on Netflix. He is also a *New York Times* bestselling author of 10 books covering wildlife, hunting, fishing and wild game cooking. His books include *The MeatEater Guide to Wilderness Skills and Survival*, *Outdoor Kids in an Inside World: Getting Your Family Out of the House and Radically Engaged with Nature*.

Steven's award was given at the WFSA Plenary Session 2023 in Germany in early March in conjunction with the International Trade Fair for Hunting and Sport Shooting.

On our shores, the Australian Federal Government released a report into the first 12 months of the Permanent National Firearms Amnesty, revealing 17,543 firearms and weapons were surrendered and around one third of these were subsequently

registered for legal ownership. Firearms parts and accessories can also be handed in as a part of the amnesty and 606 items had been surrendered during the first 12 months.

The amnesty was approved by the former Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management in November 2019 and commenced on July 1, 2021. Individuals are encouraged to surrender unwanted, unregistered or otherwise illegally held firearms and firearm-related articles by providing protection from prosecution for the act of surrendering a firearm or related item. People can choose to register, sell or destroy the firearms they hand in.

Some states and territories provided information around whether firearms handed in had previously been reported as stolen or missing. There were 16 firearms previously noted as stolen that are now accounted for and 30 missing firearms accounted for across New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania.

The Permanent National Firearms Amnesty continues and allows anyone in possession of an unregistered or unwanted firearm to surrender it anonymously without penalty. It also allows for the registration and sale of firearms. The process for surrendering a firearm for each state and territory can be found at www.crimestoppers.com.au/firearmamnesty/ ●



Steven Rinella.

Surrenders Made Under The Permanent National Firearms Amnesty

Jurisdiction	Firearms and Weapons	Firearms parts and accessories
Australian Capital Territory	520	27
New South Wales	6704	417
Northern Territory	146	0
Queensland	2835	18
South Australia	1044	81*
Tasmania	916	33
Victoria	3279	Not available
Western Australia	2099	30
Total	17,543	606

*South Australia's figures on firearms parts and accessories have been taken from a property report for surrendered firearm accessories and are not limited to the amnesty.

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Elite company

Franchi's latest Horizon offering impressed **Con Kapralos**

I've been fortunate to have reviewed Franchi Horizon bolt-action rifles on several occasions. Since those early days the Horizon has continued to be made with models encompassing blued and stainless barrelled actions as well as coloured synthetic stocks and, more recently, newer versions imported by Beretta Australia offer options which include Cerakoted metalwork and synthetic stocks with upmarket hydra-dipped camouflage patterns.

One such model is the Horizon Elite Strata which encompasses a Midnight Bronze Cerakoted barrelled action with Strata True Timber camouflage hydro-dipped techno-polymer stock. *Australian Shooter* secured one in .308 Winchester for review coupled with a Steiner Predator 8 3-24x50 riflescope.

At a glance

The gun arrived in the customary orange and white Franchi carton, the rifle being a turn-bolt repeater with 22" (560mm) sporter weight barrel and purpose-designed techno-polymer stock with the Strata True Timber pattern applied to its surface.

The rifle is supplied with a detachable three-shot box magazine and fitted with two-piece Weaver bases for scope mounting, a comprehensive user manual, warranty card and test target completing the package. The firearm weighs 3.01kg, is 1075mm long with length-of-pull at 355mm and is offered in calibres of .223 Rem, .243 Win, .270 Win, .30-06 Sprg, 6.5 Creedmoor and .300 Win Mag as well as the .308 Win review version.

Action

The receiver is made from circular steel bar-stock and extremely well finished to exacting tolerances. It maintains a circular design and measures 215mm which includes a small rear tang. The receiver tube is 172mm x 34mm wide with a well-defined ejection port on the right with top milled flat, drilled and tapped in the Remington 700 pattern for scope-mounting provision.

The left of the receiver has the bolt release lever on the rearward section along with the serial number, model name and country of manufacture inscribed, the right side devoid of markings except for proof marks on the rear ring. The receiver is finished in Midnight Bronze Cerakote which complements the barrel with its identical finish.

The Horizon action has a well-proportioned bolt-handle and two-position safety within easy reach.



The 'Dependa bolt' is a substantial piece of steel with three locking lugs up front.

Review rifle as supplied.



The bolt is termed 'Dependa bolt' by Franchi and is smooth in travel and operation. The one-piece steel bolt measures 78mm x 25mm and weighs 395 grams with the body and bolt head finished in hard-wearing nickel plating. The head is of a three-lug design which allows 60-degree bolt lift and accommodates a spring-loaded plunger ejector through the face and claw extractor on the rim of one of the bolt lugs, an arrangement which makes for reliable ejection and extraction of fired and unfired cases.

The bolt body is fluted in a spiral pattern which means a slight reduction in weight but looks the part. The body has a long slot milled into it which mates with a corresponding lug in the receiver wall, resulting in smooth and efficient bolt travel. The only blued components on the bolt are the rear shroud and bolt handle and knob, the latter with its conical design being of a tactical nature though comes to the hand well and is suitably placed for quick cycling of the action if required.

Barrel

This is of a sporter configuration. The crown has a recessed target-style profile with the muzzle threaded to accept accessories and supplied with a protective cap.

The barrel is chrome molybdenum steel and cold hammer forged to achieve that sporter-weight profile and the one-in-11" rate of twist should see it perform well with projectiles in the 130-180 grain range.

Trigger, safety and magazine

The trigger unit is referred to by Franchi as the 'Relia trigger' and is fully adjustable from 0.8 to 1.9kg. At the factory it was set at 1.5kg and broke cleanly and crisply with no excessive creep or drag (owners may wish to adjust this and a gunsmith is the best option).

The safety, an integral part of the trigger unit, is a two-position affair just behind the bolt handle notch. Working in a linear manner the most rearward slot blocks the sear/firing pin but permits the bolt to be cycled and chamber loaded or unloaded. Moving the selector fully forward the rifle fires as normal and the bolt cycles, a red dot on the stock indicating this position.

The triggerguard and magazine shroud are a single entity made of polymer as is standard on many factory rifles, the front of the guard also housing the magazine release lever which easily disengages the magazine for removal. The detachable box

Its greatest attribute is its affordability

magazine arrangement continues on the Horizon Elite Strata with a single three-shot polymer version supplied (four in the .223 Rem).

Stock

This is described as 'techno-polymer' but is essentially a synthetic unit made from glass-filled polymer which gives the stock inherent strength and stiffness, its surface hydro-dipped in the Strata True Timber camouflage pattern. Dipped synthetic stocks have been around for many years and look attractive in the multitude of patterns available, though with hard use the pattern will eventually wear and fade.



The rifle is supplied with a polymer detachable box magazine holding three rounds in .308 Winchester.

Elite company

The stock has panels of chequering on the pistol grip, two small panels either side of the magazine well and a large one on the sides and underside of the fore-end. The execution of these is excellent and offers positive grip without being excessively sharp or abrasive. Franchi's TSA (Twin Shock Absorber) recoil pad is fitted and is fairly soft in composition, while provision for attaching a sling is served by two points moulded into the stock rather than sling-swivel studs (one on the underside of the buttstock near the toe and another under the fore-end). While these points serve their purpose and have a steel insert for additional strength, I'd have preferred studs but must praise Franchi for thinking 'outside the square'.

Internally the bedding arrangement is the standard design offered on the Horizon, an aluminium 'V-block' inletted into the body of the stock mating with two slots milled into the sides of the receiver tube. This actually gives a superior bedding system with the barrel free-floating in the process. The rear of the receiver bears directly on to the polymer and the barrelled action is secured by two action screws, one into the rear tang and one into the underside of the front receiver ring.

Range test

Some of Sako's best in the 150-grain Super Hammerhead and 180-grain Hammerhead loads complemented others from Sellier & Bellot and Hornady for accuracy testing. While my previous testing regimen used to entail five 3-shot groups at 100m, I've decided to start shooting four 5-shot groups for a better assessment, being mindful to let the barrel cool between shots. Most manufacturers give a 3-shot Minute-of-Angle guarantee and while this is a valid selling point, shooting an extra two-shots gives a better indication of the rifle's (and barrel's) potential with the ammunition used.



Franchi Horizon Elite Strata fitted with a Steiner Pradator 8 riflescope makes for an excellent hunting and stalking outfit.

Franchi Horizon Elite Strata in .308 Winchester accuracy test			
Ammunition	Best group (mm)	Worst group (mm)	Average group* (mm)
Sako Super Hammerhead 150gr Bonded Soft Point	25	33	29
Sako Hammerhead 180gr Soft Point	32	42	37
Hornady Precision Hunter 178gr ELD-X	20	30	26
Sellier & Bellot 150gr SPCE	22	37	29

* Average calculated from four 5-shot groups at 100m from a Caldwell Benchrest and rear bag

All average groups hovered around the Minute-of-Angle mark with the exception of the 180-grain Sako load but all test ammo would be perfectly suitable for hunting medium to large game species in Australia. Some tight groups from 20-25mm across three brands of ammunition also is indicative this rifle isn't fussy. The Horizon Elite Strata was a pleasure to shoot but that's not surprising, as it follows the previous three Horizon rifles reviewed in offering a reliable and well-made sporting and hunting firearm.

Summary

The fact Beretta Australia offers the Franchi Horizon Elite Strata in seven calibres shows they believe in the rifle platform and I've yet to review a Franchi Horizon that didn't shoot well. Its forte is purely as a hunting rifle and is not intended to be a long-range or tactical option. Its greatest attribute is its affordability and with a RRP of \$1320 it should make your shortlist if looking for a new hunting rifle. More at www.berettaaustralia.com.au

Specifications

Manufacturer: Benelli Armi, Italy

Model: Horizon Elite Strata

Distributor: Beretta Australia

Action: Turn-bolt repeater

Barrel: Chrome molybdenum cold hammer forged 22" (560mm), one-in-11" rate of twist, muzzle threaded for accessories

Calibres: .308 Win (tested), .223 Rem, .243 Win, .270Win, .30-06 Sprg, 6.5 Creedmoor, .300 Win Mag

Magazine: Detachable box, three-rounds all calibres (four in .223)

Overall length: Standard calibres 1075mm, Magnum 1125mm

Weight: 3.01kg (bare as tested)

Metal finish: Midnight Bronze Cerakoting to barrel and receiver

Stock: Techno-polymer with hydro-dipped Strata True Timber camouflage pattern

Safety: Two-position

Warranty: Seven years (mechanical parts)

RRP: \$1320 (bare rifle) as quoted



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New case trimmer cuts more than brass

Rod Pascoe

From the makers of the Ugly Annealer which we reviewed in our December 2021 issue, comes another piece of clever engineering in the shape of the Ugly Case Trimmer. The Australian manufacturers who've made a name for themselves in the case preparation market have added another device to their range which saves time in an otherwise time-consuming part of the hand-loading process.

Where most case trimmers have to be manually fitted with the correct calibre pilot and the cutter adjusted to the right length, then repeated each time you change from one cartridge size to another, this new invention uses dedicated stainless steel collets (metal bands) machined for a particular cartridge.

The Ugly Reloading SRT (Shoulder Reference Trimmer) relies on taking its trim measurement from the shoulder of the cartridge case rather than the head as in conventional systems. This means the user holds the head of the case and inserts it into the collet, much like using a pencil sharpener, rather than locking each case into a clamp one at a time.

Only top quality materials have been used to make the system, for example the high tolerance CNC-milled main body is 6061 aircraft grade round stock and the milling blade is extremely sharp and durable. Key to the system is the French-made deep groove ball-bearing press-fitted into the main body, the collet itself inserted

into the smooth-running bearing at the business end of the tool and held in place by a tight-fitting rubber O ring.

The shaft of the cutting mill will fit any electric drill chuck and you simply insert the case into the collet and hold it there or alternatively, without a drill, you can rotate both cartridge and trimmer by hand. There are 31 collets available for bottle neck cases, ranging from .22 Hornet to .338 Lapua Magnum, all of which have been machined to achieve the correct 'trim-to-length' for each individual cartridge. A blank collet (#0) can be machined by DIY gunsmiths to suit cartridges such as wildcats and others not listed in the available range, while the photos explain the relationship of collet, cutter and bearing.

Australian Shooter was offered a review case trimmer from distributor Australian Tactical Precision and I specified a #3 collet for the 6.5mm Creedmoor cartridge. Unlike conventional case trimmers the end mill cutting tool doesn't require individual adjustment from cartridge to cartridge which is a massive time saver. However, there is a user-adjustment if a longer than minimum trim length is desired and by loosening two hex-head screws on the side of the tool, the end mill can be removed and a spacer such as a feeler gauge or simply one or more pieces of paper can be inserted and the cutter

replaced. The kit also includes a device for removing the collet from the bearing.

Visit australianacticalprecision.com.au for more information along with the current range of collets available. At around \$70 for the tool and one collet, that's a fair price to pay for a speedy and easy case-trimming tool. ●

The collet is machined for a number of cartridges.



The package with collet.



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Green light pending for new ADF rifles



Thales bullpup pattern rifle for the new 6.8x51 cartridge on display.

It's said to shoot virtually flat out to 600 metres

John Maxwell

Defence company Thales, which manufactures the Steyr rifle and Minimi light machinegun for the Australian Defence Force (ADF), has developed a pair of rifles for when Australia follows the US and adopts the new 6.8 calibre cartridge. One is in bullpup format, same pattern as the familiar Steyr which has been in service since 1988, the other more akin to the AR pattern rifles used by the US and many others.

Most significantly Thales, through its Australian Munitions subsidiary at Mulwala, NSW and Benalla, Victoria has developed a cartridge, a version of the new US 6.8 x 51, which it says delivers comparable ballistics. That's significant as the US cartridge, slated to eventually replace the 5.56 and 7.62 NATO in US service, achieves its impressive ballistic performance through very high pressure (a stated 80,000psi against 60,000psi for the 7.62 NATO). It reaches those pressures using an unspecified propellant in a special case, conventional brass but with a stainless steel base held in place by a lock ring. That works but it does add manufacturing complications and costs.

Thales says it can achieve comparable ballistics using a conventional all-brass cartridge case but isn't saying how. Matthew Duquemin, Thales director of integrated weapons and sensors said the

company, working with Wedgetail Industries of Melbourne, started looking at new weapons and a new cartridge well before the US military announced the winners of its Next Generation Squad Weapons (NGSW) program in April 2022.

The US military launched NGSW in 2017 as, with conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan concluded and no current wars, they wanted to refresh their small-arms and ammo. In Iraq and Afghanistan the 5.56 NATO cartridge had proved mostly effective against lightly equipped insurgents but in Afghanistan in particular, insurgents often initiated contacts at ranges greater than 500 metres, well beyond the most effective scope of 5.56. Furthermore, in both those conflicts some hardy insurgents kept fighting after taking sometimes multiple 5.56 hits.

In this era of renewed superpower tensions, future combat could pit US and ally forces against peer or near-peer adversaries clad in modern body armour which can shrug off most 5.56 hits. First up, the US Small Arms Ammunition Configuration Study concluded what seems pretty obvious: body armour could only be defeated by heavier projectiles at higher velocities. From that the US military decided the new cartridge would be in 6.8mm calibre (for civilian shooters that's

.270) with a 135-grain full metal jacket projectile as standard loading.

It adopted the unusual stance of providing the 6.8 projectiles and leaving it to companies competing in the NGSW program to come up with suitable cartridges and weapons to fire them. That eventually came down to a shortlist of three - SIG Sauer US, General Dynamics and Textron Systems - each proposing its own particular cartridge design and firearms which more than 1000 US soldiers, Marines and Special Forces used during a 27-month trial period.

In April 2022 they announced the winner as SIG Sauer with its XM5 rifle (a derivative of its MCX Spear) and XM250 belt-fed LMG, both chambered for their new 6.8x51 cartridge, the X meaning these new firearms remain experimental. Neither the military nor SIG have revealed much about the ballistics of the new cartridge, though it's said to shoot virtually flat out to 600 metres and still penetrate a Level 4 ceramic body armour plate. Such a plate

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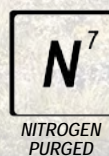
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Green light pending for new ADF rifles

can withstand a hit from 7.62 NATO (.308 Winchester) at 10 metres.

So just how did Thales come up with a pair of new rifles and a comparable new cartridge in pretty much the same time it took the best of US industry? This appears to have involved some inspired engineering as, firstly, Australia knew the US proposed a 6.8mm 135-grain projectile delivering specified ballistic effects. From that it could be deduced this required a high velocity which could only be achieved with higher than standard pressures and all from a cartridge of comparable size to 7.62 NATO (a larger one like .270 Winchester might deliver the required effect but in a bigger and heavier rifle).

Mr Duquemin said Army asked Thales to develop a 6.8 rifle of similar nature to the NGSW program, looking for a fully sovereign-designed and manufactured system of ammunition and firearms. "The NGSW program started with projectiles supplied by the US government," he told *Australian Shooter*. "We did a similar thing where we had a cartridge which was closely related to 7.62 in the early stages while we were gathering test data." For the trials Thales actually used a modified 7.62 case necked down to 6.8.

"Now the NGSW decision has been [made] around a certain cartridge, we're using the commercially available outer dimensions of the SIG Fury cartridge," Mr Duquemin added. If you want to see what that looks like, check out the website of US Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute (SAAMI).

Because of Army's familiarity with the Steyr it initially sought a rifle with similar controls and handling characteristics. Thales subsequently developed another rifle in more conventional AR pattern which can be chambered for 6.8x51 and other calibres. "The engine of the system, the gas system, barrel and gun-lock have been firing for more than 12 months now



as we've developed the ammunition with Australian Munitions," Mr Duquemin said. This is nowhere near ready to be issued to troops as it has only been fired in a factory setting and not by a human operator.

Further comprehensive trials started late last year, firing the rifle as a complete assembled unit. These trials will be used to finalise cartridge case design and operating pressure, as well as rifle weight and barrel length though Mr Duquemin said an issue rifle could still be 10 years away. "Army as a collective for certainly the next decade will still be using a high proportion of F90s, even if they introduce this into service," he said. "It remains to be seen where the 6.8 program goes in the US. It's a lot of work and a lot of time before that'll ever be an operational capability and

longer still before other countries consider what they want to do."

All of which leaves this country well prepared for this next generation of small-arms as other than the US and Australia, no-one else has started this journey. On the face of it this remains a conventional rifle with some advanced features and until someone comes up with viable energy weapons, that's how small-arms will remain. Yet major strides are being made in sighting systems to improve hit probability and in the two decades since the US went to war in Afghanistan and Iraq, military and sporting optics have come a very long way.

In conjunction with NGSW the US military conducted a separate contest for a new infantry optic, won by US firm Vortex with its M157 Fire Control Unit (FCU). At its

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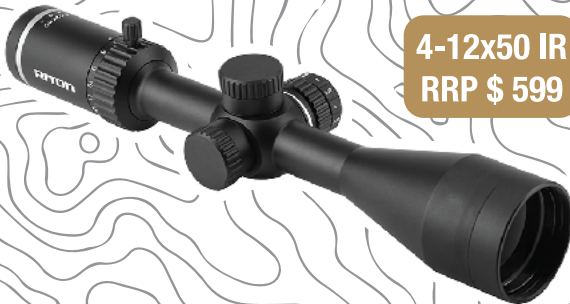
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Green light pending for new ADF rifles

heart is a conventional 1-8x30 scope but with integrated ballistics calculator, laser rangefinder, visible and IR aiming lasers, digital compass and environmental sensors along with the ability to wirelessly network with other soldiers.

Sound impressive? Indeed it is - and expensive - though technically M157 is not a true FCU unit as it doesn't integrate with the rifle, actual firing remaining the sole responsibility of the operator. Genuine FCUs exist and models by Israeli firm Smart Shooter have been displayed on one of Thales' rifles, demonstrating the potential direction of ADF small-arms.

Lachlan Mercer, Smart Shooter manager for Australia and New Zealand, said their sight operated by tracking the target inside the sight's field of view through what it terms a dynamic reticule pattern. To operate, a soldier acquires the target which is 'boxed' by the dynamic reticule, done by a switch operated by the shooter's supporting hand.

The soldier, maintaining sight picture, then pulls the trigger but the rifle only fires when the sight sensor determines it's in a position for highest hit probability. In practice that means one or maybe two shots to strike a moving target such as a running enemy soldier or distant drone. Typically an unsupported rifle barrel in offhand position moves in a figure-of-eight pattern but with Smart Shooter, the rifle only fires when the muzzle crosses the target. However, unless a target is specifically selected the rifle will

fire as normal. As any competition shooter or hunter knows, shooting accurately unsupported from offhand or seated positions is challenging and that's even more so for a soldier.

Mr Mercer said using the Smart Shooter sight he was able to place every shot on stationary and moving Figure 12 (infantryman) targets from the standing offhand position at 200 metres. With this type of technology in mind, the new Thales rifles have been designed with a digital programmable trigger.

Fire control systems of this sophistication aren't cheap (think upwards of US\$5000 each) and this is a military-only capability,

though would be spectacular against fast-moving targets such as a mob of pigs. These sights are now in service with the Israeli Army and are being trialled by the US Army and Marine Corps and German Army.

Smart Shooter's latest Integrated Weapon Overmatch Optic is a contender for the US military's NGSW optic phase two with the Australian Defence Force also interested. Smart Shooter won Defence Innovation Hub contracts through Thales in 2017 and 2018 to integrate the sight to the Steyr rifle, the current Steyr optic being the Elcan Specter DR, a high-quality conventional scope worth around \$2500. ●



Thales design for a more conventional rifle for the 6.8x51 cartridge.



Thales AR-pattern rifle with suppressor at the Land Forces Conference.

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Editor: [unreadable] 037

Look sharp!

John Dunn road-tests a precision adjustable knife sharpener

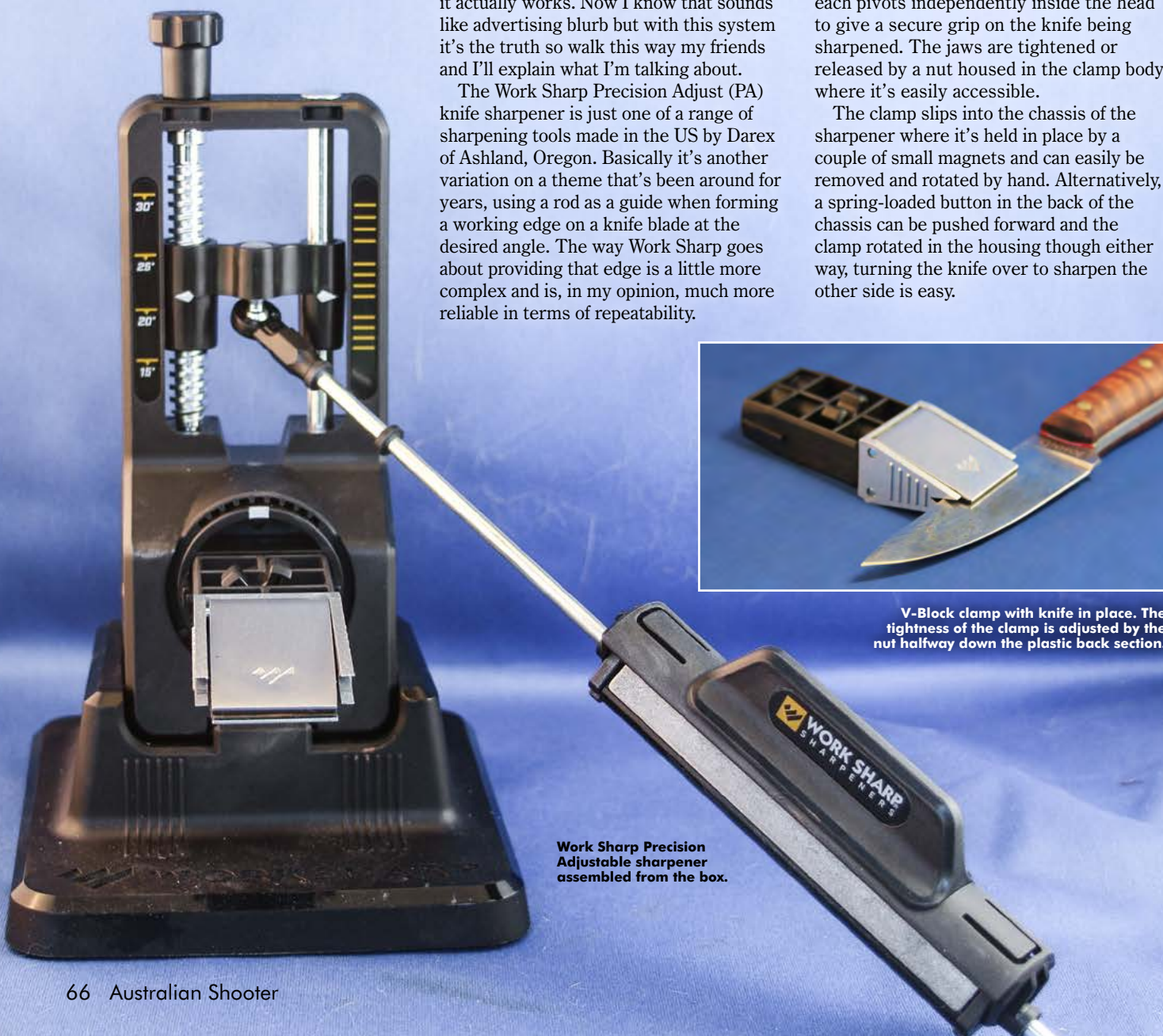
Though it's probably a little late in the day to come clean, I have to admit I've never been much good at sharpening knives. Several people have tried teaching me down the years and, if I try really hard, I can usually produce an edge that'll do the job but shaping an edge to hold for any reasonable length of time is a skill I've never mastered.

Like so many others who share my plight, I long ago put my faith in one or more of the various sharpening systems available these days. All of them work to a greater or lesser degree but most have their individual problems and before long it's back to the work bench for another sharpening session, usually before you expect it. So recently I came across a sharpening system which greatly impressed me, not only for its simplicity of operation but also because it actually works. Now I know that sounds like advertising blurb but with this system it's the truth so walk this way my friends and I'll explain what I'm talking about.

The Work Sharp Precision Adjust (PA) knife sharpener is just one of a range of sharpening tools made in the US by Darex of Ashland, Oregon. Basically it's another variation on a theme that's been around for years, using a rod as a guide when forming a working edge on a knife blade at the desired angle. The way Work Sharp goes about providing that edge is a little more complex and is, in my opinion, much more reliable in terms of repeatability.

The body of the sharpener consists of two pieces, a base and a sharpening chassis which clip firmly together to sit flat on a work table. In the absence of any specific details a scratch test with a sharp point would seem to indicate both are made from black, high-impact plastic. The bottom section of the sharpening chassis houses a metal V-block clamp with adjustable jaws. The clamp head is triangular, the clamp plates have plastic liners and each pivots independently inside the head to give a secure grip on the knife being sharpened. The jaws are tightened or released by a nut housed in the clamp body where it's easily accessible.

The clamp slips into the chassis of the sharpener where it's held in place by a couple of small magnets and can easily be removed and rotated by hand. Alternatively, a spring-loaded button in the back of the chassis can be pushed forward and the clamp rotated in the housing though either way, turning the knife over to sharpen the other side is easy.



V-Block clamp with knife in place. The tightness of the clamp is adjusted by the nut halfway down the plastic back section.

Work Sharp Precision Adjustable sharpener assembled from the box.



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Look sharp!

The upper section of the chassis provides sharpening angle adjustment from 15 to 30 degrees in five-degree increments on the left and one-degree increments on the right. Adjustments are easily made via a knob on the top of the chassis, the cumulative setting indicated by an arrow on either side of a central beam which moves up and down as the knob is turned.

The beam also houses a pivot hole for the rod which guides the working head of the sharpener, held in the bottom of the beam by a small internal magnet, the rod having a universal ball-joint to ensure the sharpening plate in use always sits flat on the edge of the knife. The distance the head slides up or down the guide rod can be adjusted by moving one or both rubber O-rings.

The working head is what the makers call a Tri-Brasive assembly. It houses three different sharpeners including a coarse 320-grit diamond plate for shaping the blade edge, a fine 620-grit diamond plate

for sharpening and a fine ceramic stone for honing the edge (the plates rotate as required inside the head). This is a dry-sharpening system so no oils or water are required to lubricate the plates and dirty stones can be cleaned with paper towel or piece of cloth. Serrated ribs along the side of the Tri-Brasive head provide a firm grip for working the sharpener.

Work Sharp PA in action

I used the PA to sharpen a range of different knives which had come off my workbench in the previous few months, including camp/kitchen blades and different-sized hunting knives. The coarse 320-grit diamond abrasive cuts quickly with only minimal downward pressure required and it didn't take long to create a burr on the bottom side of the edge being sharpened. After checking to ensure the burr ran the full length of the edge the knife was rotated and process repeated on the other side.

I then used the 600-grit plate to sharpen the knife, again making sure there was a full-length burr before turning the blade over. With that achieved I rotated the head



The Work Sharp PA will readily sharpen a wide range of knife of all shapes and sizes. All knives shown were made by the author.

to the ceramic plate and polished the edge to 'shaving' sharp. I found that only applying light pressure on the forward stroke of the ceramic head seemed to give a better finish, a trick I learned a while ago on other sharpening systems. Both camp/kitchen knives had been sharpened before and I've no doubt that helped speed up the process considerably. The hunting knives hadn't been sharpened and consequently took a little longer to reach a point where they'd shave the hairs off my arm so the exercise was informative to say the least.

The standout observation was how easy the Tri-Brasive slide rod set-up was to operate, easy to grip, smooth and consistent in the way it worked. It required only light pressure to make each of the different plates cut and I actually found that too much was counter-productive in terms of work required to make the edges flat and even.

Minimal lateral movement in the V-block clamp under working pressure meant there was very little wasted effort, even on the point of the knife where too much push can swing it out of the clamp (this is counteracted by lightly holding the handle of the knife against the pressure of the sharpening stroke). The base sat flat and square on the work bench and though it wasn't required, can be lightly clamped to the benchtop if necessary.

For anyone after a knife-sharpening system that's easy to use and produces consistent results, it would be hard to go past the Work Sharp Precision Adjust which comes complete with quite a detailed instruction pamphlet and I recommend it to anyone. Cost of the unit is \$120 including postage, it carries a three-year warranty and is available online from Tools Warehouse (toolswarehouse.com.au) as are a number of other Work Sharp products. ●



Button on the back of the chassis is pressed to turn the knife 180 degrees.

The manufacturer recommends knife blades be sharpened from the ricasso towards the tip.



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SIFA



In praise of the trusty .17 calibre centrefire

John Hill

The .17 calibre centrefires have been with us officially since 1971 when Remington released the factory-loaded .17 Remington, a cartridge based on the .223 case necked down to .17 calibre with the shoulder pushed back to give sufficient neck length. Yet wildcat experimenters had been playing around with .17 centrefires long before the Remington came on the scene and every cartridge from the .22 Hornet and .22-250 has been used as a basis for a .17 wildcat at some time or other.

The .17 Remington enjoyed a strong following in Australia in the late '70s when the price of fox pelts was at an all-time high. Back then I owned a BDL model Remington 700 in .17 Remington and found it a great rifle for rabbits and foxes, particularly at longer ranges. Unfortunately the rifle was accompanied by severe powder and bullet jacket fouling, a loud muzzle blast and surprisingly short barrel life, aspects which soon took some of the gloss off owning a high-intensity .17 calibre centrefire.

I'd previously owned smaller .17 centrefires including a Mach IV Rimmed on a Martini action and two Ackley Hornets and while the larger .17s offer good long-range performance, I found the Ackley Hornet (the smallest of the .17 centrefires) met all my requirements for an effective small-game rifle. I finally settled on a Brno-actioned, thumbhole stocked rifle which I eventually passed to my son when it became too heavy for me to lug around the bush (it weighed 4.5kg, almost 10lb). Both the .17 Mach IV Rimmed and .17 Ackley Hornet were and still are wildcats with no factory loaded ammunition or rifles commercially available.

Just when all activity in commercial .17 centrefires seemed to be dead, along came the Hornady .17 Hornet. Hornady have been at the forefront of the .17 calibre industry for a long time and I used their 25-grain hollow-points in all my previous .17s. In more recent times their range of



The .17 Hornet has a sleek look and is fitted with Tikka mounts and a Bushnell scope.



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In praise of the trusty .17 calibre centrefire

bullets has expanded to include 17, 20 and 25-grain V-Max along with the original 25-grain hollow-point that's been available since 1968 (other manufacturers also make a variety of .17 calibre bullets).

Although I wanted a new .17 Hornet when they first appeared, I'd to wait a year or two for the right one to become available and it wasn't until CZ arrived with their 527 model rifles I finally put my money down on a lightweight .17 Hornet with 560mm (22") barrel. The other CZ alternative is a much bulkier version with a 50mm longer and heavier barrel. The CZ .17 Hornet is similar to my old Brno but much lighter to carry.

I know of other .17 Hornet rifles owned by friends - four CZs and two Savages - so it would appear this small-calibre centrefire cartridge is becoming popular in a limited way, though whether it maintains momentum depends on shooter acceptance and demand. The .17 Remington Fireball wasn't with us for long and I know of nobody who bought one.

As I'm now on my third .17 Hornet it would seem a small-calibre, medium-range rifle must have something going for it. What the .17 Hornet (and .17 Ackley Hornet) have to offer should be appealing to all small-game hunters as it produces a trajectory similar to a .223 out to 270m, recoil is so slight bullet impact can be clearly seen in the scope with muzzle report fairly mild and comparable to a .22 Hornet. And of course any centrefire cartridge that uses just 10.5-grains of powder (as per my reloads) is a most economical round to load.

Because of the rifle's superb accuracy, using it on rabbits allows head shots to be taken at considerable distances with the aid of a rest. I always aim for the head mainly because most rabbits I shoot end up on the dinner plate. The .17 Hornet is quite capable of taking rabbits out to 200m yet regardless of distance, I never launch a bullet in the direction of any animal unless there's a better than reasonable chance it's going to connect where I want it to. Where the .17 Hornet excels is as a fox rifle and they'll drop them out to 200m or more without much trouble. Placing a bullet anywhere in the front half of a fox will cause its instant demise with little or no skin damage, indeed it was minimum skin damage on foxes which established the .17 calibre half a century ago.

Contrary to my rabbit hunting whenever I shoot a fox I almost always aim for the chest, mainly because of the longer distances involved and if you reload the Hornady cartridge there's no need to stick to 20-grain bullets as several manufacturers make 25 and 30-grain bullets. No



doubt the Hornady research and design team spent considerable time deciding on what bullet weight would be best suited to the .17 Hornet. They came up with the 20-grain V-Max, a choice that suits me as 20-grainers have virtually the same ballistic coefficient as the old 25-grain hollow-points and will shoot faster and flatter.

The 20-grain V-Max produces an identical trajectory as the .223 does to 270m, whereas the old 25-grain hollow-points duplicate the .222 to about 200m, so if using the heavier bullet expect a drop in muzzle velocity of about 250fps. If you want to use the 25-grain hollow-point in either the Hornady or Ackley, a better choice could be the 25-grain V-Max which may be a little more frangible

than the old 25-grain hollow-point and has a better ballistic coefficient (it's also longer which may affect some magazine lengths).

Hunters who collect fox skins don't want their bullets exiting and ruining the pelt, so need to experiment in order to find that 'ideal' fox load which could be the one with a 20-grain bullet. Heavier bullets perform well in larger .17 centrefires where they offer some advantages but the 20-grain is a good choice for Hornet-sized .17 calibre cartridges. It gives higher velocities, shoots flatter and works well on small-game at ranges some shooters would doubt such a lightweight bullet could actually reach.

My reloads are using 10.5-grains of AR2205 behind a 20-grain V-Max bullet



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In praise of the trusty .17 calibre centrefire

and when fired from the 560mm barrel of my CZ, this produced a chronographed 3600fps and is only 20fps slower than Hornady factory loads tested in the same rifle in the same session. Hornady .17 Hornet brass seems to offer excellent quality with no fire-forming required and has a distinct advantage over the Ackley version which has to be formed from .22 Hornet cases. The Hornady cartridge is the same length as the .22 Hornet, whereas the Ackley round is slightly longer and something else to consider is the Hornady cartridge won't chamber in the Ackley rifle as they're not interchangeable.

One aspect of .17 calibre rifles is the myth regarding cleaning. There's little doubt larger .17s do have some problems, yet .17 Hornets aren't that way inclined and I've never had to clean mine any differently to my .22 calibre centrefire barrels as Hornet-size .17s don't foul up the same as the .17 Remington. Fifty years ago suitable .17 calibre barrel-cleaning equipment was difficult to come by and perhaps that's the reason why some barrels weren't cleaned properly, yet the advent of the .17 HMR has changed all that and quality .17 calibre cleaning rods and brushes are readily available now.

So there it is, I'm now on my third .17 Hornet and it's every bit good as the others. There's something about a .17 calibre rifle that works in well with small-game hunting and while I've always been a fan of the old .22 Hornet, the Hornady .17 Hornet out-ranges the .22 by a considerable margin. To my thinking the .17 Hornet cartridge when chambered in a lightweight outfit like my 527 model CZ make the ideal small-game hunting combo.

• Footnote: Have you ever wondered why the .17 calibre came into existence as it seems such a rotten mongrel size at 0.172" or 4.36mm? Well it's not a mongrel size at all, it's the standard Imperial measurement of 11 sixty-fourths of an inch, though some would argue 11 sixty-fourths is far from a standard size. If the British had decimalised the inch instead of using fractions it may have been a better system to work with. ●

The .17 Ackley Hornet is a wildcat and must be formed by necking down and fire-forming to its final shape using .22 Hornet brass. The advantage with the Hornady version is it's formed and ready to go.



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Proofs, Stamps & Trademarks for Rifles, Pistols, Shotguns: An international Guide, Edition of 2023
Compiled by Paul Fowkes, Edited with Ian Skennerton

Geoff Smith

Rather than being an 'original' book, this volume is a compilation of essential references that'll greatly interest collectors of firearms who seek to properly identify their origins. Most such enthusiasts have firearms on which the various trade brands, stamps and proof marks appear in a bewildering variety of forms and locations. Fowkes starts by referring to Gerhard Wirnsberger's *Standard Directory of Proof Marks* which has been the primary resource of collectors for many years, and it's nice to see Wirnsberger being properly acknowledged since lots of websites, annoyingly, simply hijack images from this book without the courtesy.

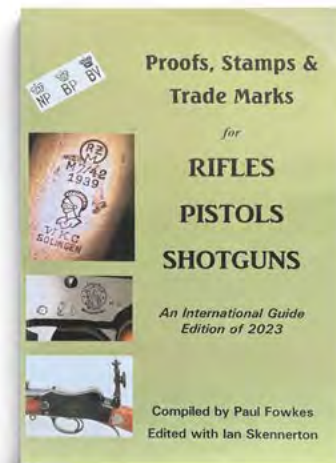
As well as this publication he has drawn a great deal of further information from military pamphlets (pams), websites and other books, especially Ian Skennerton's *The Broad Arrow Mk 2 - British and Empire Factory Production, Proof, Inspection, Armourers, Unit and Issue Markings* (2020 updated version) and the work of Belgium's Alain Daubresse.

Early on readers are invited to visit the Rockwood Collection (www.rockwoodcollection.net.au) from which many of the photographs in this book are derived, with sources of further information listed including numerous books and websites. A

short discussion follows about the types of marks typically found on firearms including brands and trademarks, year of manufacture codes, patent dates, codes which ensure the gun has been properly tested after manufacture and many more.

Cautionary notes are included to explain how sometimes firearms are sold as having been made in a certain place or by a particular firm, yet on inspection it's discovered that errors have been made. Many firearm registries are staffed by people who have no great interest in historical accuracy, so it's important particularly for collectors to be able to properly identify individual pieces. Dating is one area collectors are especially keen to determine as with some firearms this is easy while others are sometimes impossible to date beyond perhaps a model.

Space is devoted to a small assortment of tools which help provide the collector with better information, such things as hand magnifiers, bore gauges and digital microscopes along with close-up photographs which can be used to clarify individual markings. The formal definitions of marking types are described carefully since these need to be standardised to ensure accurate communication with other collectors, while the alphabetic listing of makers' marks, trade names and logos cover 26 very interesting and informative pages.



Pages 44-135 feature the main body of alphabetically listed marks from countries, including many examples. The book concludes with an addendum showing handgun grip logos, gun trade sample labels, cartridge packets, special markings found on counterfeit guns, firearms which were captured then reissued to different armies and a listing of NATO stock codes. This is followed by several pages of pictures showing Colt Walker revolvers and their markings from the Terry Rauchle collection.

In summary this is a remarkable collection of highly informative and useful data that'll be of great benefit to firearms enthusiasts around the world.

- A4 size, 144 pages, copiously illustrated, soft cover, \$80 plus postage. Contact Ian Skennerton via his website www.skennerton.com or by email at idskennerton@hotmail.com ●

Let's put youngsters on the road to shooting fun

One of the most important aspects of the SSAA's agenda is to pave the way for youngsters to sample the joys of recreational shooting. Juniors are quite simply the future of the shooting sports. They're the lifeblood driving the continuation of the SSAA and in time can progress to playing pivotal roles in their chosen disciplines as their skills evolve.

With this in mind, SSAA National has for some time been operating a campaign under its 'Sign Up a Junior' banner. There's no need to be physically orientated as the beauty of shooting is it caters to participants of all shapes and sizes and offers teenagers an escape from the often distracting world of social media. The

message needs to be: Discover the great outdoors, take yourself to the local range and enjoy the many rewarding things the shooting sports have to offer.

It's up to our thousands of adult members to encourage the next generation of aspiring sports shooters and this way, education and responsibility can be ingrained in the up-and-comers who'll eventually pass the baton to those who'll follow them. As part of the process, youngsters will gain an understanding of the environment while embracing new skills and an appreciation of the outdoors.

SSAA shooting ranges across the length and breadth of Australia will always be welcoming havens to potential recruits.

Often it's family influences which bring them into the fold as sons and daughters are taught basic skills by the supportive ranks of SSAA members, while others will discover the sport through contact with friends and peers. Family connections often result in amusing rivalries on our ranges as, with no age constraints, parents and grandparents find themselves aiming for better results with younger members for family bragging rights.

The SSAA's 'Sign Up a Junior' has delivered a healthy return for years, so to keep up the good work and encourage the next generation of Australian sports shooters, visit www.ssaa.org.au/new-membership ●



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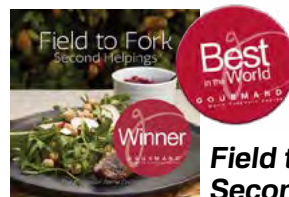
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National

Combined Services National Postal Shoot

May 1-September 4, 2023
All clubs and branches
Program: Full details on National website. Contact:
Steve Knight 0428 876 991.

Rifle Metallic Silhouette National Rimfire Postal Shoot

June 1-November 30, 2023
All SSAA Rifle Metallic Silhouette clubs
Program: 40-shot match in accordance with SSAA Rifle
Metallic Silhouette rule book. Contact: Kathy Tobler
email toblerkathy@gmail.com

SSAA National Junior Challenge

July 6-9, 2023
SSAA Canberra, ACT
Program: July 6: Pre-registration and practice; July 7:
Rimfire Rifle Metallic Silhouette, 10m Scoped Air Rifle
(subject to interest); July 8: Rimfire Field Rifle; July 9: 3P
Rimfire Rifle. Contact: ssaa.actjds@gmail.com

International Handgun Metallic Silhouette National Championships

September 28-October 6, 2023
Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA
Program: September 28-October 1: Small Bore,
Field Pistol. October 2-6: Big Bore. See National
website for full line-up. Facilities: Camping available,
canteen. Contact: Russell Mowles via email at
handgunsilhouette@disciplines.ssaa.org.au

SSAA Combined Services National Championships

September 29-October 1, 2023
Eagle Park Range, Little River, Vic.
Program: See National website for full details. Facilities:
Camping at range with showers and toilets, powered
sites, canteen on range open for breakfast and lunch,
dinner on Saturday at 6pm. Contact: Jim Oden
secretary@vmrc.com

Air Rifle Field Target National Championships

September 29-October 1, 2023
SSAA Range, Majura, ACT
Program: September 29: Practice. September 30:
Open Air Rifle FT. October 1: Open Springer Air Rifle
FT. Facilities: On-site camping \$10 daily per adult,
juniors \$5. No fires. Catering and supermarkets nearby.
Contact: Chris Dale 0418 255 874 or Darius Krivanek
0418 103 360.

Tas

SSAA Tasmania 5-Stand State Championships

November 10-12, 2023
State Complex, Woodsdale, Tas.
Program: Friday: Side x Side 50 targets HCP; Sub-gauge
50 targets HCP. Saturday: 100 targets 5-Stand; Sunday:
100 targets 5-Stand. Facilities: Camping on-site, limited
facilities, full canteen Saturday and Sunday. Contact:
Dale Foggo 0408 361 638 or dalepest@msn.com

SSAA (Tas) Single Action State Championships

November 25-26, 2023
Glenorchy Mitchell Range, Tas
Program: Saturday: 8.30 briefing, 6+ stages. Sunday:
9.30 briefing, 4+ stages, Master Gunfighter stage and
presentation. Contact: Ray Vallerine 0487 334 714.

Qld

Queensland NRA Pistol Metallic Silhouette Postal Shoots

All (SSAA) Qld branches with approval to shoot Postal
Metallic Silhouette Program: Shoot 1: February 1-May
31; Shoot 2: April 1-July 31; Shoot 3: May 1-August
31; Shoot 4: August 1-November 30. See National
website for full event details. Contact: Hazel Bozic
(07)4128 0467 or pms@ssaaqld.org.au

SSAA (Qld) Field Rifle, NRA 3P and 4P State Championships

August 18-20, 2023
SSAA Townsville, Hervey Range
Program: August 18: Practice. 19: Rimfire Field Rifle
(42 shots), Centrefire Field Rifle (42 shots). 20: Rimfire
NRA 3P (60 shots), Centrefire 4P (40 shots). Facilities:
Free camping at range with toilets and showers (limited
powered sites), kitchen on site. Contact: Tony Hilleard
0428 516 125 or Jennifer Ingram 0418 259 269.

SSAA (Qld) Lever Action State Championships

September 2-3, 2023
SSAA Townsville branch
Program: September 1: Practice. 2: Open match.
3: Classic Calibre match. Facilities: No catering but
barbecue available, camping at range with power,
toilets, showers. Contact: Kerry Guinea leveraction@
ssaaqld.org.au or 0409 262 966.

SA

SSAA (SA) Fly Shoot State Championships

July 15-16, 2023
Monarto Shooting Complex, SA
Program: July 15: Centrefire 500m Fly, five-target
competition plus practice target. July 16: 200yd Rimfire
Fly, five-target competition plus practice. Facilities:
Barbecue available all weekend, camping permitted
(limited power sites), hot showers, toilets and cooking
facilities. Contact: Pat 0455 280 024.

SSAA (SA) Gallery Rifle State Championships

September 23-24, 2023
SSAA Para Range, SA
Program: Saturday: Multi Target (24 shots) any sight,
T&P 1 (30 shots) any sight, 1500 Match (150 shots)
any sight. Sunday: 50m Precision (30 shots + unlimited
sighters) any sight, Classic Multi Target (24 shots),
Classic 1020 Match (102 shots). Contact: Dave
McCarthy atm3855@yahoo.com.au. Let him know if
you're coming for catering purposes.

Vic

SSAA (Vic) Single Action Black Powder State Championships

July 15-16, 2023
Eagle Park Range, Vic
Program: July 15: Long Range, four Single Action main
stages, dusk shoot. July 16: Six Single Action main
stages, presentation. Facilities: Camping with showers
and toilets, limited power, lunch both days, dinner
Saturday. Contact: Tony Diablo 0419 187 980 or
diablot6@bigpond.com

SSAA (Vic) Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

September 23-24, 2023
Eagle Park Range, Vic
Program: Saturday 80 rifle calibre; Sunday 80 shots
pistol calibre then 80 shots smallbore rifle. Contact:
Mark Butler 0409 135 740.

SSAA (Vic) Field Rifle, 3P, Scoped Air Rifle and NRA State Championships

October 22, 2023
Eagle Park Range, Vic
Program: Centrefire competition followed by Rimfire.
Contact: Mark Butler 0409 135 740.

WA

SSAA (WA) Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

July 6-10, 2023
Hedland Sporting Shooters, WA
Program: July 6: Practice. 7: Rifle Lever Action. 8: Pistol
Cartridge. 9: Small Bore. WA State team selection
will be on top 10 positions. Facilities: Canteen food
sales, camping, showers, toilets, barbecue area, limited
power, Saturday night meal supplied. Contact: David
Brougham 0432 748 703 or clas@iinet.net.au.

SSAA (WA) Sporting Clays State Championships

July 30, 2023
Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA
Program: 100 Sporting Clays targets. Facilities: Hot
food, cool drinks available to buy, free tea, coffee
and biscuits. Contact: Neil Cobb 0404 040 357 or
neilcobb@bigpond.com.

SSAA (WA) Shotgun Tower State Championships

September 17, 2023
Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA
Program: 15 Target DB, 15 Target SB, 15 Target
Points score and 15 Pairs (total 75 targets). Facilities:
Hot food, cool drinks available to buy, free tea, coffee
and biscuits. Contact: Neil Cobb 0404 040 357 or
neilcobb@bigpond.com.

SSAA National Event Cancellation/Postponement Policy

An event may be postponed or
cancelled at any time by SSAA National,
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SSAA National will not be liable for
reimbursement to competitors for any
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Keyboards, coffee and finding your own kind

As I sit here pecking at my keyboard it would be a fine thing to imagine I do so atop some wild peak, basking in the glory of a successful hunt. Truth be told my location is a Paddington coffee shop, my vista the Brisbane skyline and outside is a collection of electric scooters, European compact cars and EVs. Around the corner my diesel-belching ute sits under a Moreton Bay fig waiting for another chance to heat the planet.

Patrons drink, chat and fuss over fur babies and while I don't think anyone sips café latte any more, you'd be hard pressed to find a more stereotypical urban landscape. Sitting apart, I'm the only one in a Beretta T-shirt and can only surmise it might be mistaken as a tribute to an Italian fashion brand. My attention is on coffee and the exchange which accompanied its arrival as, while delivering it to my table, the server had politely enquired as to what I was working on.

I explained I'm a gun writer working on my column, something I'm still coming to grips with, so we were both probably a little surprised by the answer. I've a feeling it wasn't a shared surprise though as for me

it was vocalising an ideal and for the server, the content of my work. What followed was a conversation on hunting and writing about it and while it wasn't exactly easy, my felt difficulty to do so has lessened over time.

Great minds like Nietzsche might attribute this to me becoming my authentic self, while friends may say the interaction was just another example of my deep devotion to bravado and bulldust. I reckon Popeye the Sailor Man had it right when he said: "I yam what I yam and that's all what I yam." Whatever the reason, I didn't get here without some help along the way. As a young man I was the only hunter among my siblings, parents, relatives and almost all my friends. I was the anomaly and consequently was also always on guard.

With time things changed. My circle of hunting acquaintances grew and when I met my future wife, one of our first dates was a trip to the range and for our boys it's just who we are. It's not traditional, not yet anyway, but is most definitely a cultural component of our family life - we're blaze orange suburbanites. My boys talk about hunting to their friends, while my eldest looks forward to when he can legally come

to the range with me and learn how to shoot. In the meantime he shares images of his deer, pig and goat skull collection on Class Dojo, the school-approved social network platform.

My wife, the artist, regularly welcomes visitors interested in her work. Walking through the front door they encounter several large skull mounts and, along with the looks, there's almost always the question of 'are they real' to which she answers 'yes they belong to my husband, he's a hunter'.

It's within this reality that time and again I've been surprised by the undercurrent of fellow hunters around me. Recently at school pickup one of the fathers asked if I was the guy who writes for the shooting magazine. Guilty as charged. Andy's a fellow hunter, works in the industry and like all fathers is busily juggling hunting and shooting with family life. On the flip side is Sarah. I've been shopping at the local store where she works for years. What I didn't realise is Sarah and her family are hunters, something I found out when I spoke to her at my favourite gunshop and since that time, whenever I stop by we talk about trips planned and those just experienced.

Now I understand it's an undercurrent and people choose to stay below the surface. Some just like to keep to themselves, others are justifiably worried about the backlash and, as a pre and post-1996 gun owner, I know what that feels like and maybe it's even a part of what drives me. Problem is I'm a Queenslander of Dutch heritage so am biologically programmed to push against the system while I also like talking to people with similar interests and tend to find my own kind.

So what does it all mean? Two things I guess, the first being there's strength in numbers and a foundation of support allows us to grow. Secondly, in keeping with my inner city surrounds I've decided to adopt 'hunter' as my preferred pronoun. ●





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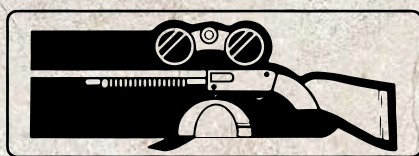
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