

AUSTRALIAN **WOMEN'S** SHOOTER

Beretta Australia build Part 3: The hunt

Mental imagery for improved shooting

The journey of a 'new' shooter

Issue 19 • Proudly printed in Australia

An official publication of the Sporting
Shooters' Association of Australia



Contents

- 2 Editorial
- 3 Taking aim with Laetisha Scanlan – Grateful to be involved with mental health initiative
- 3 Women's-only competition
- 4 Building your best with Beretta Australia Part 3: The hunt
- 9 Mental imagery - a tool towards better shooting
- 14 The journey - reflecting on five years with a firearms licence



Editorial

Gemma Dunn

I thought the very first Editorial for *Australian Women's Shooter* back in 2018 would be the hardest one to write by far. Well, it wasn't... this one takes the cake.

Issue 19 of the magazine brings us a closing chapter. I am sadly leaving the SSAA team to start a new adventure. I will remain in the shooting industry, so it's not a goodbye, just merely a "see you later." But it does mean this will be my last edition as Editor.

As I reflect on the wonderful five years we have had together, covering stories from around the globe and countless practical pieces, my ultimate hope is that we have simply inspired. Inspired women who already shoot, to better improve their skills. Inspired women who don't yet shoot, to become involved. Inspired many men across this country to introduce their female counterparts to our wonderful sport. And, most of all, I hope we have inspired you all to be better and more inclusive of all shooters, no matter their gender or background.

I sincerely thank everyone who has contributed to AWS. You all know who you are and it has truly been an honour to share this magazine with you.

I also want to introduce you to the new Editor, Rachael Oxborrow, who some of you may recognise as SSAA's Media and Politics Officer. Rachael has grown up shooting rifles and often participates at SSAA rifle ranges across South Australia. I have had the pleasure of working with Rachael for a few years now, and I am pleased to know she is taking the reins.

Lastly a big thank you to our readers, for allowing me the privilege of bringing AWS to your homes and hearts. Keep up the good work and I'll see you all around the traps.

Gemma

FOLLOW US



AWSmag



aws_mag

AUSTRALIAN
**WOMEN'S
SHOOTER**

Editor Gemma Dunn

Production Editor Thomas Cook

Feature Columnist Laetisha Scanlan

Graphic Designer Tammy Michalski

Advertising Representative Karoline Wasiak

Administration Debbie Wing, Trudy Sheffield

Contributors Suzy Balogh, Nicole Jordan

Mail: PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061

Phone: 08 8272 7100 Fax: 08 8272 2945

Web: ssaa.org.au Email: aws@ssaa.org.au

The *Australian Women's Shooter* is owned and published by the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia Inc. Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy of this Association.

No text or photographs within this publication may be republished, either electronically or in print, without the express written permission of the SSAA. Copyright 2023.

The *Australian Women's Shooter* is printed by IVE, Silverwater, NSW.

The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia Inc (SSAA Inc) is subject to the provisions of the National Privacy Act. We collect personal information from members of the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia in the various states and territories. Should you want a copy of the SSAA Inc Privacy Statement or seek further information please write to PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061.



Taking aim

with Laetisha Scanlan

Grateful to be involved with mental health initiative

I love representing my sport and shining a light on the many positive reasons of why clay target shooting is so fantastic to be involved in. So, when the opportunity presented itself for me to be an ambassador for the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) Mental Fitness Program, I was beyond excited and proud to accept this position, to not only represent my sport through this agenda but also give back to the community.

The AIS Mental Fitness Program is part of a community partnership between the Australian Institute of Sport and the Black Dog Institute.

The program is targeted at high school students and involves a 45-minute presentation delivered by an elite athlete. The role allows me to share my sporting journey with

the participants while imparting effective mental fitness techniques to educate and help students understand and learn in a fun and interactive environment. It's about training the brain to deal with daily stresses without feeling overwhelmed, upset or worried, with the aim to improve overall mental fitness.

I have really enjoyed giving back through this set-up because I can see the value in educating students early on about the importance of having the right tools to cope with varying life experiences - good, bad or indifferent. When we teach children practical ways to build their mental strength, flexibility and endurance we then create great habits for healthy coping mechanisms into the future.

Being mentally fit has lots of benefits, like being able to focus on your goals, strengthen your relationships, let go of negativity, push through challenges, be flexible when faced

with obstacles, handle everyday stresses and be ready for whatever life may throw at you with a clearer head and better outlook.

Since presenting this program it has reminded me of the importance of having a healthy mind. One of the techniques that is highly encouraged in the course is the practice of gratitude. Gratitude is about focusing on the good in our life and being thankful for the things we have. It's much more than just saying thank you, it's about shifting your entire perspective.

Gratitude has been found to be beneficially associated with social, emotional and psychological wellbeing. So, in saying that, why not take one minute after reading this to think about what you are grateful for today - you never know, it might just make your day a little bit brighter.

WOMEN'S-ONLY COMPETITION

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

Manfred + Cracco Vega
Watch

Australian Women's Shooter,
PO Box 2520, Unley, SA
5061

or online at
ssaa.org.au/win



Competition closes June 30, 2023

WIN!

MANFRED+CRACCO
VEGA WATCH

RRP - \$295

Kindly donated by SSAA
National
ssaa.org.au



BUILDING YOUR BEST

WITH BERETTA AUSTRALIA

Part 3: The Hunt

Gemma Dunn

It's funny where this world takes you and who you meet along the way. Sitting along the Brisbane River on a balmy late September evening, we were having a meal and a few drinks among colleagues and friends. Mark van den Boogaart and I began talking about the rifles we'd built with Beretta Australia (see Parts one and two of the build in Issues 13 and 14 of AWS) and how they were performing. I had told Mark that I was yet to use mine in a hunting scenario, so this rapidly turned into a brainstorming session about how fitting it would be to wrap up the rifle build series with a hunt, but together this time.

Fast-forward a month or so and we had the plan. We would go just before deer season around February and to somewhere where we can hunt private and public land on the same weekend. So, Mark then introduced me to his mate Joe who had the perfect property in mind and the plan was complete.

We were hunting on private property from Friday through to Sunday morning, where we would then pack up and move onto Pennsylvania State Forest to hunt that Sunday afternoon and Monday morning before heading home.

Off I went for my NSW Restricted Game Hunting Licence (R-Licence) and completed the newly released R-Licence Accreditation Course for Penn. This was a great way for me to learn all things public land hunting in NSW and feel confident I'd be able to do the right thing on public land as a hunter and firearms licence holder.

Multiple Zoom meetings ensued with Joe

and Mark to finalise the last bits and pieces and before we knew it, the weekend was upon us.

Trip goals

The main aim for me on this trip was to see how the rifle performed away from the shooting range, in a hunting situation. Those who have read the previous articles might



Camp set up at the private property.



The AWS rifle performed as expected on a couple of billy goats.



Two goats in two shots for Gemma.



Gemma was happy to be down in the cool by the river for a while.



A G.O.A.T. in its natural habitat.



Who wouldn't want to be out hunting with scenery like this?

SPECIFICATIONS

Rifle: Tikka T3x Varmint

Calibre: .243 WIN

Stock: Boyds At-One adjustable gunstock in nutmeg laminated hardwood

Scope and rings: Burris Signature HD 5-25x50mm with Steiner alloy rings

Bolt: Lumley Arms Tikka T3 titanium and carbon-fibre bolt handle

Overall weight: 4.85kg

Custom work: Barrel and bolt Cerakoting and fluting

remember that the rifle was built with the purpose of it mainly being used on the range, with the odd jaunt out in the field if needed, so I was excited to see how it had all panned out.

In Part two of the build series, I noted that even with the fluting, I still felt it was slightly on the heavier side which I knew could prove interesting when carried in the field. So, this in particular, was something I was extremely interested in determining once we'd moved out there. Alongside that, I was keen to determine whether or not the stock would still

withstand being carried around in the bush and be user-friendly away from the comfort of a bench.

Secondly, I wanted to experience the whole process of going hunting on public land and having my R-Licence. I had only ever been hunting on private property in Australia until this point and knew that the rules for hunting under the R-Licence regime had additional requirements.

Lastly, it's always good to expand your knowledge as much as possible in life so I was eager to go hunting with two extremely



Carrying all your gear in the heat is hard work.

knowledgeable and experienced companions. I just wanted to learn as much as I could from Joe and Mark.

The hunt

Let me just start with this. The forecast for the weekend was hot (37°C Friday, 39°C Saturday and 38°C Sunday), the most scorching weekend in NSW for three years. So that was posing a challenge ahead of the outings. Before I delve into too much detail about the hunt, it's important to mention that Mark has actually written a story giving us a day-by-day breakdown of what happens on the hunt in this month's edition of *Australian Shooter*, which is a great read, so I won't spoil too many of the details. Just make sure you check it out.

We arrived in Bathurst on schedule, grabbed

some last-minute supplies (and extra water) and off we went to the private property. We were there just shy of lunchtime, in the peak of the heat, and decided to set up camp first and wait for the temperature to die down before going on any major walk scouting for game.

After we were settled in at camp, we were off in search of game each morning and afternoon, sitting out the heat of the day to try and keep as cool as possible. Goats, pigs, and if we were lucky, deer were on the agenda at the private property. It was quickly apparent that goats would be the main game as they were prolific. I have never seen so many at once. We were focused on taking deer at Pennsylvania State Forest, where Mark was successful in claiming a fallow.

Over the course of the weekend, I downed a few goats. We saw a pair of fallow deer but

no pigs. I was mostly happy with my shooting. Not all shots will go 100 per cent to plan and I learnt a lot about how to approach situations differently in future, mostly from the sage advice given to me by Mark and Joe.

So, how did the rifle go?

Overall, the rifle performed as expected. I was using Sako Gamehead 90gr ammunition in my Tikka T3x .243 WIN and they functioned exceptionally well, again as expected. When setting up the rifle for that ammo, the groupings were exceptional and I was confident the pairing would be successful.

During the hunt, all shots were clean and there were no issues whatsoever to mention. This gave me all the more confidence in the moments it counted the most. There is something so good about knowing you don't



Mark with his fallow just as the sun was setting.



Mark and Joe teach Gemma how to harvest goat meat effectively.

even have to consider your gear when you're in the moment, about to take the shot.

The main issue I had with the rifle was the weight. As I mentioned earlier, I knew the weight would pose some sort of a challenge, but it was interesting to see how much exactly. Going into the weekend, I was aware there would need to be some considerations in my approach surrounding the weight of the rifle, including what shots were best to take and how it could be carried. This advanced planning aside, nothing will prepare you for how heavy your gear becomes when it's stinking hot and the terrain is so steep in parts. Although I love this rifle, at that moment on the side of a hill with even my hands feeling like they were 20kg each, I wished I had a lighter firearm. I reiterate though, that a lot of this was due to the environment we were in and not the rifle itself.

The other issue I had was again, surrounding the ergonomics of the stock. I really like the concept and the versatility that the At-One stock offers, but I think the edges would do better with being a little more rounded.

The Lumley Arms extended bolt was both a pro and a con on the hunt. It was great because when I reached for the gun in a fast situation, the bolt was always easy to grab onto and smoothly manoeuvre. On the flip side, coupled with the weight of the rifle, sometimes it limited the options I had for carrying the firearm. The extended bolt handle was the prime suspect for an interesting bruise on my hip after carrying it on my left shoulder for a short while to give the right side of my body some reprieve.

Overall, we need to remember that those aspects I had a bit of trouble with on the rifle are all things that make the rifle a great target item, so that's the trade-off here, I guess. It was certainly a motivating journey trying to find a happy medium between a target rifle that could be used when hunting.

As with anything that is designed to be a hybrid, there will be variants for each application. It will never be 100 per cent perfectly set up for both. But the way this rifle was built, coupled with the exceptional performance that Tikka is known for, I think

it's a combo that's as close as you can come to having the perfect hybrid. Well, for me it is anyway.

At the risk of banging my own drum a bit, I realise I'm a fairly solidly built female. I have been shooting for a long time now and know I can handle a fair amount of weight, so I am not sure I'd recommend it for anyone of any smaller stature than I am.

Finally, a huge thanks to Mark and Joe for an awesome trip and all their help. We vowed to try and do it again each year from here on in ●



Gemma field dressing a goat.

Mental imagery a tool towards better shooting

Mind over matter the focus for Commonwealth and Olympic Games gold medallist Suzy Balogh OAM



ISSF Skeet finalists at the Asian Games in Kazakhstan using their hands to promote a mental image of the hold points for their barrels, their eyes, then visualising the target acquisition window, then flight path and finally the lead required for a hit.
Photo courtesy of ISSF

Mental imagery isn't only a tool used to improve performance by elite athletes but by a range of professions like surgeons, musicians and pilots. All shooters and hunters should consider adding the mental imagery tool to their armoury for improved shooting skills. After practising mental imagery, hunters can become more accurate and efficient; target shooters' scores can improve and they can be more prepared to handle the mental stress at crucial moments. Mental imagery helps novice shooters with safety drills and processes, while seeing continual development of shooting performance. It can also assist with settling anxiety... because we all know that being the new shooter at the range is a little daunting at the start.

I recently had a go at pistol shooting for the first time in about seven years. Due to my level of exposure and experience with firearms, people assume I have a level of

competency. This expectation others have of me is a little daunting.

To prepare myself I watched a couple of videos of people proficiently using the model of handgun I was going to use, then I created a picture in my mind of me going through the process of firing that handgun safely. I added to that mental image what I remembered from years ago of how the gun feels in my hands, the recoil, sound, smell and what emotions I would likely have. The basic result I was looking for was to not look like an idiot – result achieved.

I can say I thoroughly enjoyed my reintroduction to handguns, though I now know I very clearly need glasses for precision shooting.

What is mental imagery?

Mental imagery uses all of the senses to create a picture in your mind of what you want to happen or achieve. It activates our cerebellum, the part of the brain responsible

for movement. Our brain doesn't know the difference between an actual physical event and the vivid imagery of the same event. In short, we are tricking our minds into thinking we have experienced something.

Shooting is the perfect technical skill to enhance and rehearse with mental imagery. Some of you know the terms visualisation, motor imagery and mental rehearsal. They are just components of the fuller, more immersive experience of mental imagery which draws on all of the senses, not just vision. It is not just to rehearse an activity or motor skill but can be used to plan, improve and pre-experience an activity as well as add emotion and feeling to it.

When introducing mental imagery to coaching clients they often respond that they have never done it and don't think they will be able to. So, I run through the following scenario to show them that they are very capable of using it.

I actually want you to imagine this as you



Laura Coles using mental imagery during a Tokyo 2020 selection shoot.
Photo Vince Lizzi

read it and answer the questions at the end.

Imagine this scenario – you have just come inside from a run, it is a really hot day outside and you have worked super hard, you are puffed, sweaty and breathing heavy, you can feel your heart beating and lungs grabbing for air. You are oh so thirsty, you just need a drink, your mouth is so dry. Now go into your kitchen, stand before your fridge, exhausted and heavy, your sweaty hand reaches out and grabs the handle, you can hear the fridge's sticky rubber seal sound sucking loudly as you swing the heavy fridge door towards you, reach inside the fridge and grab a drink out. The drink container is cold and smooth as your hand closes around it, it feels so good to your touch. Open the drink and take a big, deep gulp, you feel the instant cool wetness on your lips and tongue, you can taste the refreshing drink and even smell its aroma as it

quenches your thirst. Aaaah what a satisfying, cooling liquid. You feel instantly replenished...

Now answer me: What was the drink you took out of the fridge? And could you hear the fridge's sticky rubber seal sucking sound? You very likely just replayed that sound in your head as I asked you the question too!

The process you just went through is mental imagery. You created a picture in your mind of the action of opening the fridge and having a drink, and you enriched and felt that experience by using your senses – visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory and kinaesthetic.

And before I go on, just so I don't lose anyone, the senses basically are see, hear, touch, smell, taste and kinaesthetic. Kinaesthetic is the awareness of feeling the movement (alignment, posture, muscle tension, gravity, balance, effort) of your body in relation to itself and objects around it – a physical body awareness.

Why to use mental imagery if you are a target shooter or a hunter:

- Performance improvement – basically become a better shot
- Learning of new skills and refining/mastering learnt skills
- Develop competitive plans, strategies and set goals
- Problem solving – running through scenarios and coming up with fixes
- Familiarising yourself with your surroundings
- Knowing what and how you want to execute a skill
- Self-confidence and motivation
- Reducing anxiety
- Directing focus or bringing your focus back to the task at hand
- Prepare for winning moments such as shoot-offs
- Psych up for training or competition or

hunting – getting in the zone – establishing an appropriate level of physical and mental arousal


- Coping with pain or injury
- Learn to cope with new situations before you encounter them
- Combine with relaxation to promote rest and recovery, and removal of physical and mental stress
- Knowing and bringing on how you want to feel during the skill – empowered, in control, confident, fearless, smooth, strong etc
- Reward your brain – know how it feels to win, so that it wants to emulate that feeling again and again
- Imagery can replace physical practice if injured, fatigued, overtrained or unable to train for whatever reason.

Some of our elite Australian competitive shooters and how they have used mental imagery

Laura Coles: ISSF Skeet shooter, 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games Champion and Tokyo 2020 Olympian says “How and when I use mental imagery has changed throughout my career. Initially it was for skill development, then setting goals and more recently helping with nerves during the Tokyo qualification series.”


Annemarie Forder: Air pistol bronze medallist from the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games uses mental imagery “for competition

preparation - everything from waking up on competition day, travelling to the range, signing in, walking to the range, setting my equipment up and seeing my competitors. I also imagine my successes, winning, setting a new world record and seeing myself on top of the podium. Incorporating every single aspect of what I may encounter prepares me.”



An ISSF Skeet shooter from Kazakhstan utilising mental imagery. The hand acts as a guide for where the barrel would be pointing. Using items such as barrels, shooting glasses, even photos can assist in transporting the athlete to a task that they focusing their mental imagery on.

When I asked Annemarie when mental imagery worked successfully for her, she said, “The Sydney Olympics was a successful time it worked for me, especially when I made the final. I had prepared myself for years to be in that situation and moment, naturally all my senses were heightened, and I was able to control myself and achieve because of my mental preparation.”



A representation of a mental image from the internal view or 1st person – looking down the gun at your own barrel and sights.

Penny Smith: ISSF Trap shooter - current World No. 1, world record holder and Tokyo 2020 Olympics finalist uses mental imagery as “a confidence boosting skill” particularly “when I’m shooting on a range that I find challenging, which I might have a bit of self-doubt on. I find it a good way to bring a positive vibe to my mind – sitting somewhere quiet and going through my routine.”

My example of mental imagery

Mental imagery is usually carried out with an internal or an external view. The external view is from the 3rd person, usually a side-on, above or behind view of observing you carrying the task out, eg, from a spectator’s or a coach’s point of view, sometimes like looking at video footage of yourself.

The internal view is seeing yourself carry



This side view image of Penny Smith represents the mental image from the external view seen in the 3rd person.
Photo Mark Zielezna, courtesy of Shooting Australia

the task out through your own eyes, in the 1st person, eg, looking down your barrel, through your sights at your targets.

When I first started developing my mental imagery skills, I began with just the internal view. As I progressed, I could see myself in the 3rd person, from the side and behind and even above and front-on.

I started with the basic general routine of shooting a clay target in the discipline of Trap. I would imagine myself seeing my barrels and my sights aimed at the trap house, myself looking above the trap to where I would first see the target. When settled I'd imagine calling pull, seeing the target leave, read its flight path, move the gun, aim and pull the trigger, resulting in the outcome of breaking the target.

With practice and time, I was able to develop a mental picture and sequence that is extremely close to the real activity, enriching

the image by bringing in all of my senses.

I can transport myself to any range in the world and add in the elements and feel the sense of occasion. **Visually** I can see my surroundings. I factor in distractions such as rain, wind, vehicles, birds, flies, even rubbish moving in the background. I can see the sunlight and shadows created by clouds, the roof of the trap house - its colour and hold points, glare on my barrels, the visual window above the trap house. I adjust my eye focus and settle them ready to acquire the target, see the initial flash of the target leave, visually hone in and fully acquire the target, eyes locking onto it. I see the barrel and sight moving through to where the target will be, triangulate and trigger, see the target break, follow the broken pieces with my eyes and the barrel sight, follow my swing through. I feel the clothes I am wearing, my earmuffs, glasses frame, hat, shooting jacket and shoes.

Tactilely feeling the gun in my hands – the weight, the grip and the chequering of the wood. I feel my finger positioned on the trigger, my palm gripped onto the stock pulling it in snugly, the poundage of the trigger when pulling and the action of the trigger, the depression of the trigger movement, the recoil of the gun into my hands, arms, shoulders and under my cheekbone.

Olfactorily be able to smell the gun, the gun oil, the air around me on the range and once fired smell the gunpowder and smoke.

Gustatorily taste my own salty saliva, knowing this is a grounding technique I use to keep myself present at the task at hand.

Auditorily hear my heart beating, my breath intake, the cartridges being dropped into the gun, the gun action close, the trigger move in, the shot report, the target being hit and the crowd cheering.

Kinaesthetically feel my body moving

from the soles of my feet gripping the ground, the weight transfer forward, the strength in my arms and shoulders supporting the gun, the movement through my ankles, knees and thighs, my abdominals, back under tension, feel the control of my body shifting, the power and strength rotating towards the target, through the break point of the target and rotating smoothly beyond, appreciating how my body reacts, compensates and recovers from the recoil. Feeling the empowerment that being focused and coiled and strong while executing the shot and then feeling the satisfaction that obliterating the target brings.

I can mentally go through different scenarios, allowing me to be placed in different stressful and emotional situations even if I hadn't actually experienced them, so that when the time comes and I am faced with them I have methods and plans for dealing with them.

Mental imagery tips

- First decide on a small part of a skill to

focus on, the routine to carry out that skill and the desired outcome of the skill.

- Use video footage or watch someone carrying out the task correctly.
- Start off trying in a quiet, dark and comfortable place without distractions.
- Introduce yourself to it progressively – start with five minutes. You don't want to overload yourself. Mental imagery is a skill that improves with practice.
- Use all of your senses.
- Try to make the image vivid (environmental details, emotions, thoughts).
- The task should be done in real time at the real pace... if your shot process takes 10 seconds then take 10 seconds when carrying out the imagery. You don't want to be fast forwarding through things as your brain won't be able to go through the emotions properly.
- Control the image – make the experience a positive one – you want to reinforce the correct way of doing something so that you improve that skill and increase the probability of success.

- A combination of physical practice and mental imagery is more effective than either method alone.

A model to utilise and extend your knowledge in this area is PETTLEP (Physical, Environment, Task, Timing, Learning, Emotion and Perspective), developed by Holmes and Collins in 2001, published in the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* and reviewed in 2022 by Scott, Wright, Smith and Holmes in the *Asian Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*.

Ensuring the 7 PETTLEP characteristics of creating a mental image combined with AO (action observation), which is watching someone carry out the task whether in person or by video, helps create the most vivid and controllable mental images, resulting in skill improvement.

So why not give mental imagery a try? Run through your shot routine, it may just make you a better shot! ●



Penny Smith using a visual cue of a cartridge held out above the trap house to gain a mental image and measure of where to focus her vision to acquire the target and its flight path.



Nicole is in her fifth year as licensed shooter and encourages all women to give it a go.

Nicole Jordan reflects on how her shooting life began and where she is today

It all started watching my youngest brother Martin, who is a licensed firearms owner and hunter. His wife Stacey is also a licensed hunter and target shooter. He taught me all I know about firearms, from cleaning them to using them in the thickest of bushes to the hottest mountain climbing experiences I have ever had.

I used to watch Martin clean his firearms and go along with him when he went hunting. I just loved being outdoors. The experience was right up my alley. Watching Martin gave me the necessary drive and when my sister-in-law Stacey asked me to attend my first SSAA Sydney Ladies Shooting Program for a go at shooting, I was keen. It was supporting the Luke Priddis Foundation for autism awareness, and my son Blake has autism. So, I was right on board to back the cause even though I was a tad nervous. It was my first time holding a firearm. But I walked out loving the experience. I was ready.

I felt like I had finally found the one thing that I can call a hobby. I had never really had a hobby. I was keeping busy as a wife and mum.

I appreciated all the assistance provided at the event. The process was so smooth and friendly I lost all of my nerves straight away. I had a great time with the .22 provided for the experience on the day. The Range Officer I was sitting with was super helpful. He said that I should really go for my licence. The

test target came back on point. It was a good grouping. I won a raffle and I chose the gun sling as I knew one day I would be using it.

I then went along and started the procedure of the safety course. From there I was allowed to apply for my firearms licence and as soon as I received the letter of approval,



Nicole at a ladies shooting event at Holroyd.

I went down to Abela's Gunshop and placed an order on my first two rifles and everything else I needed for them. That was an expensive day.

One purchase was a Ruger .22 Muddy Girl in pink camo. This rifle has had many views at SSAA ranges. Lots of women who have attended with their husbands have asked where they can purchase the gun.

Using this rifle, I remember shooting my first wild rabbit. I could have cried, even knowing the creature is vermin. But then from there I went onto skinning the bunnies and collecting meat. That day onwards made me stronger. I realised that this was recreational, but it is also able to stop vermin damaging a property. I often go to a property to help assist with vermin control. It is fun and also rewarding for the meat collected and the experiences had.

The second rifle I own is a Tikka .243 Lite. 'Nic's big boom' my best friend Donna calls it. I just love the sound, the force and the feel of it. The rifle has given me many great hunting experiences. This includes my first deer and pig.

I love night hunting the most and never knowing what will appear in the eye of the scope. Day walks are also enjoyable, especially when deer antlers are found. They are beautiful animals. Watching them in the hills is amazing. I remember seeing my first big red, I was blown away.



Nicole's husband Trent is her biggest support. Here he is joining her on a hunt.



Nicole's first red deer, taken with her brother.

I also remember my pigging experience – the mud pits and smell of the pigs on walks to goats bleating like actual kids in the fields. The sounds and smells of nature are an experience on their own while hunting. Looking for tree rubs for deer is something Martin also taught me.

The Tikka is still my favourite and most

used rifle. It also draws attention at the SSAA range. I have made a few mates along the way. Range Officers like Luke and Matt from SSAA Silverdale are fantastic. Their ongoing support along with Martin and my children, Chloe and Blake, has been tremendous.

Being a target shooter and hunter has been an amazing experience. I have seen many of the events for ladies to try shooting. I still attend even though I am a fully licensed firearms owner. It amazes me viewing so many women who come in and I see their targets following the shoot and they are really good at their initial outing.

This shows anyone can do it if they have a dream to follow. I have many memories from events, hunting trips and target shoots thanks to being a firearms owner. I just love it.

I would recommend anyone to attend an event and try shooting. I never thought I would be doing this today and now I can't think of anything else as rewarding. I know what I am thinking and that is when is the next long weekend? Thanks for listening to my journey. I hope I have encouraged a few people to come along and enjoy the experience just like I have ●

FOLLOW US



AWSmag



aws_mag

“

Hi,

I really enjoyed Gemma Dunn's article in AWS number 18. I was lucky enough to be able to visit the Sako factory whilst visiting Finland for work in the 1990s. At that stage I was President of SSAA Illawarra Branch in NSW and was welcomed by Sako/Tikka for a pre-arranged factory tour. Subsequently I met up in Australia with Marko Nikko, one of Sako's gunsmiths and a World Champion Metallic Silhouette shooter who was competing in Australia. The very well written article brought back great memories of my visit.

Regards,

Barry Wooton

SSAA 50 Year member

”

Read all previous editions of *Australian Women's Shooter* online for free simply by scanning the QR code or visit ssaa.org.au/women

