

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S SHOOTER



How to shoot consistently

Shooting supports strong family

D.I.Y bench rest

First time fallow hunt

Issue 21 • Proudly printed in Australia

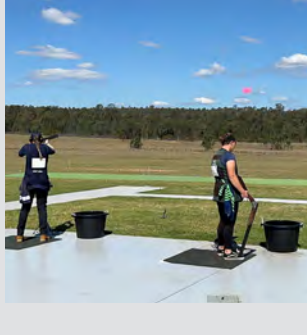
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Contents

- 3 Taking aim with Laetisha Scanlan - Your footwear - friend or foe?

Women's-only competition
- 4 How to shoot consistently - World-class tips
- 8 In the time of test, family and shooting is best
- 10 D.I.Y bench rests - recycle then rejoice at the range
- 14 Igniting the fire - first time fallow hunt



Editorial

Rachael Oxborrow

We've got a real variety in Issue 21, where we talk about equipment and preparation, the social aspect of our sport and recreation and new experiences.

Laetisha Scanlan advises us to take our eye off the target and consider our feet, or at least what we put on our feet before target shooting. When searching for improvements, every small change can count and, in her experience, footwear is king for balance.

Suzy Balogh talks about consistency from her perspective as a world-class competitive shooter and coach and speaks with Olympians Catherine Skinner and Penny Smith about how they prepare to achieve consistency every time they hit the range.

My story looks at how important our shooting family can be to our experiences. Whether this is your immediate family or the people you meet at the SSAA range, the relationships you build while shooting and hunting are the icing on the cake when you're doing something you love.

Kath and Scout Heiman talk us through making their own equipment and show that their custom-made bench rest gear is perfect for their needs and good for the environment.

Finally, we go on Adrienne Warren's first fallow hunt and share in the highs and lows of her trip. Learn and improve with Adrienne as she overcomes nerves and comes home with the goods.

Rachael

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SHOOTER**

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Taking aim

with Laetisha Scanlan

Your footwear - friend or foe?

In a sport that's defined by a simple hit or miss of a target, does footwear matter?

While we prioritise equipment like our eyewear, gun set-up, ammunition brands and the comfort of our shooting jackets, many shooters fail to see the advantage of correct footwear to improve movement.

For years, I chose Nike running shoes to compete in. It wasn't until a couple of years ago that I discovered through video analysis, my feet, when shooting, were significantly rocking and creating lots of instability and imbalance from the ground up. It then started me thinking about the importance of balance and appropriate footwear in this sport.

After all, sneakers designed for running are built for heel-to-toe movement. The higher heel drop provides extra support by naturally pushing your feet in a forward motion and while that is perfect for running enthusiasts, this can be a big problem

for clay target shooters who stand still.

One area where small changes can make a big difference is in our feet. Having the correct weight distribution and pressure in our feet drives hip and trunk movement up the chain of our body. So, when our feet aren't right, this can create a bad chain reaction through our ankles, knees and hips causing significant movement issues and overcompensation in other body parts like our lower back.

By wearing firm, flat-soled shoes our feet become evenly distributed and balanced, giving us a stronger centre of gravity. This even, neutral foot posture then allows our bodies to swing more efficiently and smoothly to targets by allowing our hips, core and arms to work together harmoniously.

For this exact reason, more and more shooters are transitioning to wearing a flatter soled shoe rather than a runner style. For me, when I changed, the feeling was instant.

Although less comfortable than a softer cushioned runner, I now had a better awareness of the pressure distribution in my toes and ball of my foot, which made me feel instantly immediately more stable and in control.

Side by side video comparison confirmed this by showing the significant improvement of smoothness and ease in my gun movement to the line of the clay, especially towards sharper angled targets. If you think your shoes may be impacting your movement or balance, simply film yourself and play it back, as the proof is in the pudding.

At the end of the day, the footwear you decide to wear will not make or break you as a competitive shooter. However, what I have learnt is, improving is all about the one per cent game and your shoe choice may be the key to pushing you one step closer to bridging that gap.

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:

Beretta Australia Prize Pack
Australian Women's Shooter,
PO Box 2520, Unley, SA
5061

or online at
ssaa.org.au/win



Competition closes December 31, 2023

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How to shoot

consistently

Suzy Balogh OAM

shares her extensive knowledge as a world-class competitive shooter and coach

Consistency is the ability to perform with confidence, trust and composure - regardless of the level you are trying to shoot at. It's good to feel comfortable and consistent and meet your own realistic expectations. Whether it's practice, a shot with friends or a major competition we try to leave the range satisfied. No one wants to exit feeling disillusioned.

Most of my coaching clients that are already at a competitive standard of shooting come to see me to help them become more consistent. To do this I work on two things with them: Technical execution of the skill – taking the shot. Doing the preparation in key areas for confident shooting.

One is about actually shooting, the other involves discipline and planning.

To set the scene, I questioned two of the most consistent elite athletes I have ever competed against and had the pleasure of coaching at a few world events. The question I asked was: "What are five things that you personally do to have a consistent performance?"

The athletes were Catherine Skinner (Olympic Gold Medallist Rio 2016 – ISSF Trap) and Penny Smith (Current World No. 1

and Tokyo 2020 Olympic Finalist – ISSF Trap). Both are contesting for the opportunity to compete at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

Catherine Skinner

Holistic lifestyle: *Being in a good place, having a fine sport-work-life balance, even allowing myself to take a break. I need this balance to allow me to want to be at the range and to be in the right emotional space. Being happy helps me get on task.*

Being present: *To perform I need to be in the moment, a flow state. I use a pre-shot routine which has touchstones that bring me to be more present. The touchstones are emotional, tactical, physical and I also use grounding cues. I need to be purely quiet and on task.*

A sustainable routine: *Being flexible and adaptable.*

Recovery – mind and body: *I need a small recovery of the mind to occur after each shot. There also needs to be long-term emotional recovery – a mental decompression after major events or long-term training. Mental and emotional recovery go together with physical recovery.*

Goal setting: *I focus on process over outcome. Progress at times can seem like there are more failures than wins but improvement comes from learning from failures. During training I put an emphasis on qualitative outcomes over quantitative outcomes. Process goals within training are the habits you build.*

Penny Smith

Work-life balance: *Having a good balance allows me to be more consistent with my shooting.*

Gym routine: *Being physically fit not only helps me to compete but also keep me mentally fit.*

Morning routine: *I have a strong morning routine for the range. Just a few things once I get to the range are to go for a walk, carry out some gun mounts and check on my shooting glasses.*

Shooting one target at a time: *My focus comes down to narrowing in on seeing the target come out of the hole.*

Reflection: *I have kept a shooting diary for eight years.*

Ways to be more consistent in your technical execution

Shooting is a series of motor skills. Whether shotgun, rifle or pistol, work out what motor skills you need to be adept in to conduct your shot consistently.

Using clay target shooting as an example, the key technical skills for consistently executing a shot are being present, using quiet eye, being conscious you are ready before calling pull, acquiring the target and then timing of the shot. These are the finer, essential components that make up part of the pre-shot routine.

Being present – requires the shooter to mindfully be focused on the task at hand, not distracted.

Quiet eye – is allowing your eyes and attention to settle with an intense but loose glare at the visual window of space where you will look intently to first see the target. The eyes, like the mind, should not be bouncing around. They should be solely focused on the visual window.

Being consciously ready – the gun should not just be shouldered, and the target called

for straight away and shot at as quickly as possible. It should be that once you have established proper quiet eye, this leads to a moment or even a couple to a few seconds of composure of being consciously aware you are ready to commence the execution of the shot and thus call for the target to be released. If you have not settled your attention, your consistency will be diminished.

Acquiring the target – having practised quiet eye, you will have given your eyes the best chance of finding (acquiring) the target using your peripheral vision. Once the target is out of the trap house, allow your eyes to travel with the target and lock onto it.

Timing – once the target is acquired and your eyes locked on, read the direction of the target. Only when the direction is ascertained then swing the gun, bringing it to a point where the gun, eyes and target converge. Timing is seeing the target, reading the target, and then moving the barrels to where the target is about to be (not where it just was) so that when fired the cluster of shot will collide with the moving target and break it. See it, read it, shoot it.

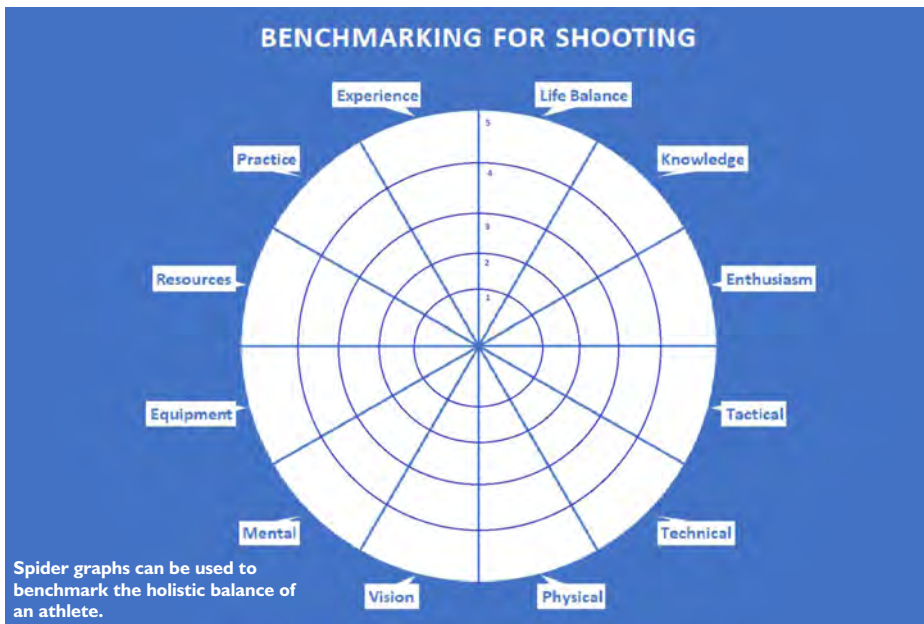
Key areas to prepare in for confident shooting

Set goals

We need to know where we are trying to go and what we are trying to achieve. People who set goals are more likely to achieve their dreams. I like to look at goals in three stages:

Outcome goals – the big dreams eg, winning an Olympic Gold.

Performance goals – the scores, the percentages, the measurable achievements along the way that



get you closer to achieving the outcome goals.

Process goals – the building blocks that need to be ticked off to allow you the best chance of achieving your performance goals. Process goals are fundamental and can take lots of dedication and effort and planning to achieve and at times may seem mundane. For instance, getting the right equipment, learning and then practising using that equipment, working on skills, doing your recovery.

Tip: Instead of just keeping score, focus on one process goal each training session, eg, this session I will keep my cheek down on the gun the whole round or this round I will consistently mount my gun. These small process goals are building blocks which will push you closer to improving your overall consistency.

Evaluate – benchmark and keep a diary. For consistency along with being in a holistically balanced place we need to be self-aware and to reflect and evaluate our progress. We need to know we are being consistent.

Benchmarking is a useful tool for gauging our strengths and weaknesses in our shooting and in our holistic life balance. I get my athletes to periodically benchmark themselves against the key factors that can be required to be an elite shooter. A spider graph is a good representational method for this and the areas where the athletes are lacking are discussed and strategies put in place to improve them. It is hard to shoot well when we are lacking badly in one or more areas of our life. Keep a shooting diary, as they are useful for

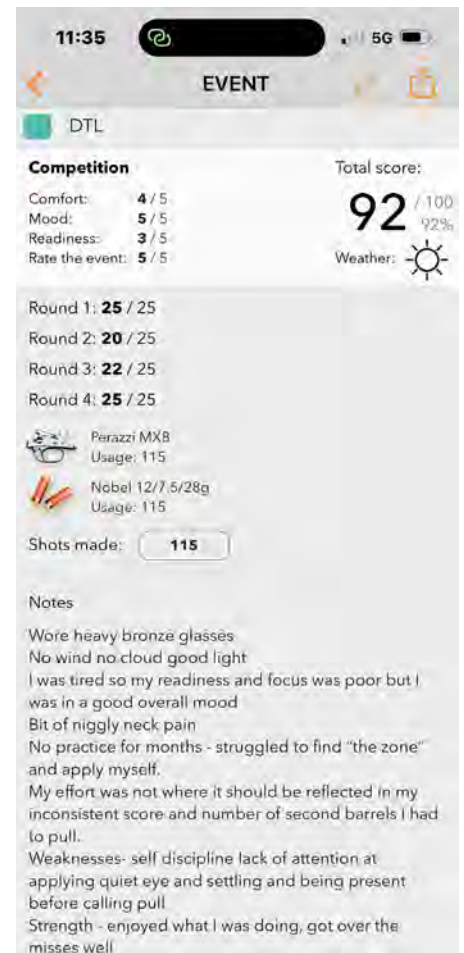
noting scores, weather conditions, injuries, equipment, techniques and also self-awareness. Ask these questions: What was your work ethic like in that session/competition? How effective was your training session? Were there moments of adversity and did you deal with them? Were there breakthroughs and what led to them? Look at your strengths and weaknesses – decide how to build on them or to remedy them. Consider what holds you back and how to face this. Diaries can be notes in a journal, a hard copy form, can be collated digitally or even an App on your phone can be used.

Have focused action plans

Focused action plans (FAPS) allow you to be prepared, they are blueprints to keep you on track and keep you focused.

As an athlete I had several FAPS for various stages of competing: Morning before I get to the range, upon arrival at the range, 15 minutes before I shoot and when I am on the layout after each round.

An example is my plan for the night before competition: After recovery have dinner and hydrate - socialise - go back to my room - check my bag is packed - have quiet reflection time and go over goals for the competition, using mental imagery - check start times and bus timetable - relax (I'd read a trashy novel, have a hot chocolate and relax in a warm bath) - check alarms are set - sleep.



The 'Training Day' App is used to keep a shooting diary.

Have a pre-shot routine

Having a pre-shot routine will assist with consistency. It will help you to shoot one target at a time and not rush ahead of yourself. The pre-shot routine needs to be repeatable but also adaptable to compensate for weather conditions, breaks in play, timing changes, unforeseen circumstances, tactical changes and equipment malfunction.

Stages for a clay shooting pre-shot routine can be stance and hold point, gun mount, breathing, focus (visual and mental), calling, see the target, read the target, move to the target, triggering, follow through and reflection.

Write down the stages and actions you take when shooting, refine it to the essential and then have a plan for any adaptations you may need to make.

Plan your practice

Schedule to practice. Write a plan of your goals for practice - skills to cover during the

practice, how often, how much and level of intensity. Will the training be randomised, bulk or variable? Will you work on skills or shoot full rounds? Will you have a coach over-seeing your practice - what feedback will they provide - will you debrief? Will you do a mock competition? Plan your practice to gain the most out of it. What you want to get out of practice is confidence in your shooting leading to consistency in competition.

Get competition experience

Plan which competitions you will attend. Work out what you want to achieve in each competition and what things you need to work on.

Work on your mental toughness

One of the ways to be mentally tough and ready for competition is to learn to manage the pressure by creating competition scenarios in training. Conduct mock competitions to learn to deal with the pressure, the mental and physical stress and to learn how to recover from missing a target or carrying out a poor shot. I have often shot a mock competition where the stakes were for who buys the next coffee. Even just a little bit of pressure can go a long way to exercising mental toughness.

Be physically fit

Physical fitness aids consistent shooting technique and injury avoidance. Prepare your body for repetitively lifting heavy firearms, holding positions and being balanced, moving smoothly and purposefully to targets and being able to carry heavy gun cases and ammunition around.

Plan for recovery

To be able to back up and shoot consistently again, and again, ensure you plan for recovery. Both mental and physical. Mental recovery techniques can be reading a book, talking with friends, listening to music, watching a movie, playing a video game etc. Physical recovery can be hydration, stretching, massage, ice baths, saunas, swimming, compression clothing etc.

Equipment

Use a quality, well maintained firearm which fits correctly and is adequate for the intended

purpose. Find and trial the ammunition that suits you and your gun the best. Have your eyes checked, know your dominant eye, know if you need prescription glasses. Having proper shooting glasses to assist in seeing targets can be immensely helpful. Work out the best equipment for your needs such as shoes, clothing, hearing protection and even down to things like sunscreen.

Seek expert help and utilise technology

Do seek expert help and use technology when needed. A coach can help you technically, but also in many ways such as planning practice routines and FAPS. A sports psychologist can help with anxiety, lack of focus and also goal setting. See a stockmaker/gunfitter if your firearm does not fit. See the optometrist, have a massage, see a physiotherapist, hire a personal trainer or exercise physiologist, arrange a group of likeminded people around you to train with and discuss things because struggling or doing things wrong or having the lack of knowledge is not going to allow you to be a consistent shooter. Use video analysis, read books, watch YouTube clips, join that coaching course. If you need help, seek it.

Put the effort in

You only get out of something what you put in. If you want to shoot just a few times a year with your mates, then do not expect to be consistent or see great levels of improvement. If you want to win that club shoot, represent your country or just want to win your next coffee from me then you will need to consistently put in effort. The right effort in the right areas in the right way.

I hope that these steps will help you prepare well and to be confident in your shooting so that you can trust in your process and achieve that desired consistency to leave the range having had a good, satisfying shoot. ●



In the time of test, family and shooting is best



The family spotlighting nights were a common occurrence and brought together grandparents, siblings and cousins.



Rachael Oxborrow

I always tell people I was introduced to firearms at 11 years of age when I joined my dad at the local range, but in reality, it was much earlier than that.

Growing up in regional South Australia on a grain and sheep farm exposed me to the realities of pest animal management, animal welfare and hunting for food early in my childhood. Those memories are filled with my grandparents, parents, my brother

and extended family spending quality time outdoors. These activities included camping and going spotlighting, cooking breakfast together and playing table tennis in the daytime while we waited for dusk or loading up onto grandpa's ute to go check the sheep during lambing.

Target shooting became a regular part of the way my dad and I would spend time together. If I wasn't shooting, I was spotting

for him and helping with equipment. My uncles were always involved and my brother joined us as he grew older. Looking back, the bond fostered by spending this time together doing a sport that is for all abilities and ages has proven the test of time and I'm incredibly thankful.

As my target shooting 'career' continued, I have had the pleasure of shooting with my mum, grandmother and several of my aunts



Rachael's grandmother Barbara Andrews and dad Tony Andrews (mother and son) have had the pleasure of shooting alongside each other in a Copper Coast Masters Games event and on the range many times.

as well. Over the years my shooting family of sorts has built up around me. You know the one, the people you see every week at the range who become a part of your lives because you have shared interests. So, whether it is your family that you're shooting alongside, or your shooting family, the sense of community and shared memories exist.

There is extensive research into the benefits that engaging in regular family activities

can have on children and the adults. These themes include:

- Safety, belonging and relationships.
- Skills and responsibility.
- Health and wellbeing.

Spending time with family can reduce stress and build emotional support. The structures being built while participating in a fun activity can then prevent communication breakdowns when phases are tough. The time driving to

and from the SSAA range or a hunting trip allow for that time to talk and know the other person. During my early teenage years where it is traditionally a time that can bring communication issues in a family unit, I was still attending target shooting competitions on a semi-regular basis. Now as a parent I can see how valuable those shared interests with my child would have been for my parents.

My dad and I would spend our weekends



Rachael on the line with her father Tony Andrews (left) and husband John Oxborrow (middle) shooting 3-Position Rimfire at SSAA Moonta.

travelling around South Australia together trying out ranges and shoots and meeting new people. I can vividly recall travelling to the SSAA range at Monarto on many occasions to shoot Metallic Silhouette and overcome tough weather conditions. This range is notorious for tricky wind conditions on an open range where cold weather, rain and frosts were the norm for the State Championships. There were numerous shared meals where everyone brings a dish and the tale of an infamous camel curry experience from one of these occasions still brings a laugh within my family.

The skills and sense of responsibility that come with being a firearm owner and user are mostly universal, but when youths are educated and given the opportunity to use firearms there is often associated behavioural benefits. Indeed, a story I wrote in *Australian Women's Shooter* Issue 13 with Victorian high school teacher Matilda McGoon discussed how the mental clarity and control learned through competition target shooting was giving her students valuable life skills and job opportunities.

Time and time again, Matilda has seen

students grow, adapt and translate their skills to the classroom and display improved coping skills in tough times, emotional control and respect for others. The associated benefits of

regional youth having firearms safety training and understanding also go without saying.

These days I live several hours from the SSAA range I call 'home', but I make an effort



A rare photo of Rachael's dad Tony Andrews using her pink Savage .22 target rifle.

to return there for the bulk of my target shooting participation as it is a real family reunion with my actual family and my shooting family. I still shoot with my dad and recently we've shot together at a Master Games event, where we were amused by the concept that I'm old enough to be in that bracket and he's there with me. My husband has also joined in with target shooting and hunting and it gives us a great outlet together. There's some 'friendly' rivalry involved and continuing to shoot alongside a lot of the people I grew up with always brings with it some healthy banter and chats.

My story is not unique in the firearms community, but it is one that surprises most people I talk to who have no knowledge of what we do. My role with the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia often involves explaining what people use firearms for, the sport of target shooting and the concept of recreational hunting and pest control. This storytelling function also naturally happens in day-to-day life for me and I hope this happens more widely across the Association's state and territory members.

As a parent now myself, I plan to continue the tradition of involving my children in this amazing sport and can only wish for the experiences I've had to translate into their lives. ●



Rachael preparing to shoot Rimfire Metallic Silhouette with her dad Tony Andrews.



Rachael spotting for her husband John Oxborrow while shooting Lever Action Silhouette.

Smiles all round on the mound.



DIY bench rests

Kath Heiman ingeniously makes the most of recycled goods for shooting range precision

The first time I shot at our local SSAA range, I couldn't help noticing the array of expensive-looking front and rear bags used by my fellow shooters.

Some clearly favoured sand-filled canvas and vinyl bags, while others had a range of mechanical contraptions. Whatever they were using, it was all new to me. You see, all my previous Army shooting has been done in a standing, kneeling or prone position. As such, my firearm has been either supported solely by my own biomechanics or alternatively by something conveniently placed in the environment (like a stump or fencepost or firing pit).

Adaptation is a tenet of military effectiveness and so the capacity to acquire a target accurately, regardless of firing conditions, is something that's simply expected in the

Army. And I've accompanied my husband on enough hunting trips to know that it's the same for recreational hunting.

While I look forward to joining him as a hunter in my own right in due course, that won't happen for a while yet. For now, I'm improving my marksmanship skills at the range with unfamiliar bolt-action and single-shot rifles, lever-actions and shotguns.

And, for the rifles, I require rests. So, the question is, do I need to spend hundreds of dollars to achieve that objective? Ultimately, my answer is a resounding 'no'. With a trusty sewing machine and a 'reduce, re-use, recycle' mindset, my daughter Scout and I pulled together a set of rests that will serve us well now and in the future.

The concept was simple. The front rest would comprise four pockets of varying

height and density. This would provide the versatility to adjust the rest's height depending on who's using it and with what firearm. As for the rear rest? Well... read on.

Step 1. Forage

We're lucky that we have access to a local tip shop. Not all towns have them, but those that don't are likely to have a charity store or two. In our case, a quick 10-minute walk through our local 'reusables facility' at the dump, with a \$10 expenditure, and we had the makings of both our front and rear rests.

For fabric, I had some leftover wool from a project that I never quite completed (the legs from a large pair of old denim jeans would do just as well). As for handles, I had some spare cotton bias tape. Webbing tape or a strap from an old bag would be fine too.



A twin pair of front and rear rests were made from these items.



With a few strokes of a knife a swimming aid became a pair of rear rests.



Measure twice - Cut once.



Sewing is child's play.



Adjustable height.



There's plenty of variability 'built' in.

Step 2. Design

The front rest was customised around creating pockets to fit the size of a large (20cm x 20cm) Ziplock sandwich bag. Based on these dimensions, the calculations were simple. For a four-pocket bag, and considering the need for seams, the fabric would have to be 50cm wide and 1m long. In terms of how we'd fill the pockets, we knew we needed to generate a solid base, with subsequent softer pockets to allow the muzzle of the firearm to nestle in.

Based on the material we'd gathered from the tip, we would use the dense foam from a kid's boogie board for the bottom two pockets. This would allow the bag to operate as either a three-tier rest, or a taller four-tier rest, depending on the circumstances.

For the softer layers, we had seen some online D.I.Y options using double-bagged sand. But we were concerned that sand would be too abrasive and eventually rub through. Instead, we'd fill the second pocket with foam from a baby-change mat. For the top pocket, the micro-polystyrene balls from the travel pillow would evidently mould to the muzzle shape. Provided these horrid bits of plastic didn't escape as we tried to pour them into the sandwich bags, they'd be fine - securely double wrapped in two zipped bags with the edges folded and taped.

As for the rear rest, the answer presented

itself in the form of a foam aquatic pull buoy. Snapped in half and with a notch cut in each to support a rifle butt. Simple.

Now for the sewing bit.

Step 3. Construct

Fold the fabric (right side out) along the long edge. Place the sandwich bags on the fabric and measure out three 1.5cm width double-seams between each bag (this will help the pockets to fold on top of each other once finished). Leave the top and bottom seams open. Sew the double-seams, stopping 2cm from the long edge.

Push the ends of the handles into the open

seams at the top and bottom of the fabric. Fold in the seams and sew closed, stopping 2cm from the long edge.

Fill the pockets with the repurposed supplies and fold-in a 1cm seam along the long edge. Ensure the sandwich bags are pushed in far enough that they don't risk being punctured when the seam is sewn. Sew closed.

Job done. Testing our homemade rests on the range, they worked a treat. And while we're unlikely to enter competition shooting with them, they provide the support we need at the bench while reinforcing an adaptive mindset. Which is exactly the mental attitude we will need when we go out on the hunt. ●



Mother and daughter testing their new creations.



Igniting the fire

Adrienne Warren reflects on her first fallow hunt as she yearns for the upcoming roar

A new year, a new gun and a new challenge. After finally organising myself with a firearms licence, my partner Harry and I headed to our local outdoor shop in Canberra to feel out a few rifles.

I wasn't expecting to buy one, but after seeing and holding the Tikka T3x Strata in .270 with its beautiful stock, lightweight feel and fluted Cerakote barrel... I fell in love. When I know, I just know - no sleeping on it, no research. It's this one. Unbeknown to me, Harry had already singled this gun out prior to our visit and so he was firmly on board. I sorted myself out with a Zeiss scope, then we headed to the SSAA range to sight it in and were ready to go.

I grew up in Dubbo and regularly went out

hunting foxes with my grandfather Bruce, who taught me how to shoot from a young age. My marksmanship was also consolidated during my 14 years in the Army where I took every opportunity to go to the range.

Finally, together with Harry, his family and friends, we headed to the mountains south-east of Canberra with a brief stop to pick up some goodies for the property owner. Harry and his family have been hunting on this friendly farmer's property for years, so we always call in to catch up and deliver his favourite treats and fresh produce for his wife.

I felt honoured and grateful to be joining them this year as I know the rut is a sought-after time. Unfortunately, we were a little early for the rut this time which presented some challenges but also benefits. Not

having the bucks in full 'rut fever', they were harder to locate and still cautious as they were not yet distracted by the does in heat.

However, this offered an opportunity to hone our stalking skills and gave us first pickings of the resident bucks as they had not experienced a lot of hunting pressure over the previous months. Harry also believes that another bonus is that the meat harvested from bucks before the rut is much better than after the rut.

We spent what was left of the first day bedded into the side of a creek where Harry had seen a lot of activity the previous year. Yet all we spotted was what seemed like a kangaroo fight night taking place in a clearing that carried on into dusk, so we headed back to camp.

The next morning, we crossed that same creek and hunted high up on the opposite mountain side. At times it was frustrating and hard going through thick patches of tea tree. We were forced to our bellies and the crunchy leaves were like hunting over cornflakes. However, things looked better as we neared the summit where we started to see more and more does with their young, but still no bucks in sight.

It was now mid-morning, the sun was high, the scrub was thick, and our morale was waning, but we pushed on to the summit. Just as we were about to give up on seeing any more deer, I glassed a pair of antlers sticking out from behind a fallen tree only 20m ahead.

Talk about buck fever. My eyes were wide, my heart rate rapid, my legs felt weak, and I started to shake with adrenalin and excitement. Harry, who was behind me, propped behind a tree and gestured for me to go low and take a position. After finding what little cover I could, I looked up again to see that he had three does and a fawn with him. Caught in full sun with only a small tree as cover, I was trying to evade detection against five of them when I heard a noise to our right - a small mob of roos were grazing only 15m away, threatening to give us up.

As I tried to compose myself and formulate a plan, a sentry doe continued to graze closer. Now less than 10m away, time was running out.

Still battling with the adrenalin and panic, I managed to not conjure up a single useful idea until that doe was no more than 3m away from me. Sure enough she spotted me and bolted out of there in a flash with the others in tow. I had missed my first chance at a buck. We stood in silence for a moment, full of mixed feelings before heading back down the hillside knowing that any further pursuit was pointless. This experience was priceless for me as I now knew the importance of patience, vigilance and maintaining composure.

Later that afternoon we opted for a less arduous hunt and took our positions on the same creek we had the previous day, but 1km downstream. After a short while, I saw a mob of feral pigs rooting along the other side. I watched them for a moment before picking my target (an old boar) and landing a tidy headshot which dropped him on the spot. My first pig! This helped bolster our spirits



The pig shot digging up the creek was Adrienne's first porker.

after the morning's misfortune.

We took some photos and opened him up to help the carrion take care of the rest as we decided not to harvest any meat. We gathered our gear and headed back for a good old-fashioned boil up and shared some drinks while we recounted our stories by the campfire.

We continued to hunt the next few days with varying levels of success until the morning of the fourth day. By this time Harry and I had identified a smaller mountain to the east and decided to hunt it separately by each stalking up spurs on different sides. It was a cool and misty morning and we had renewed optimism. As I approached each small crest on my way up the hill, I stopped every so often to glass the area ahead as it came into my line of sight. That's when I saw what every hunter wants to spot in their binoculars - a pair of antlers. Poking out of the grass on the other side of the crest, it was grazing, oblivious to my presence.

I dropped down and slowly crept to the base of a large gum. My heart was racing but I managed to keep my head screwed on this time. Not overcome by excitement, I was



Adrienne carrying out the 75kg buck.



The buck as he lay.

able to control my breathing, remember my marksmanship and settle the reticle over my target.

Calmly, I took a breath, felt the trigger under my fingertip and applied steady pressure while focusing my aim over his chest as he was quartering towards me.

The shot rang out and he dropped in the scrub. I stood in silence for a moment catching my breath before I cautiously approached him and saw a handsome, dark-faced buck lying in the tall grass. I thanked him.

Shortly after, Harry had made his way over and with his tuition and help, helped me dress the buck as it was my first proper harvest. We split the load and carted him to camp to skin him before hanging the carcass in the famer's meat fridge.

I loved and appreciated every moment, to know that I had meat in the freezer, my own beautiful wall mount and rug for my floor. I was grateful for the whole experience and had a fire in my belly for more. ●

Hanging the buck back at camp ready for skinning and preparation before taking it to hang in the fridge.



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