

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S SHOOTER



Women are born to hunt

M6 Scout Survival rifle

How to sharpen knives

Zerofit activewear

Issue 22 • Proudly printed in Australia

An official publication of the Sporting
Shooters' Association of Australia



Contents

- 3 Taking aim with Laetisha Scanlan - Gender equality
Women's-only competition
- 4 Keeping it sharp - How Montse Jaime retains a clean knife edge at home and in the field
- 8 A winning combination - Kath Heiman rejoices in her connection with Springfield Armory's M6 Scout Survival rifle
- 12 Women - born to hunt - Suzy Balogh OAM looks at the world of the huntress
- 15 On the go with Zerofit - Rachael Oxborrow keeps warm and active at the shooting range and outdoors



Editorial

Rachael Oxborrow

For most female shooters there has been, or likely will be, a time when a gender imbalance stares them in the face. Whether it is on the range, out hunting or in day-to-day life, it unfortunately happens. Columnist Laetisha Scanlan marks International Women's Day by highlighting gender equality in shooting and how this is changing, as she expresses the importance of showcasing this to encourage younger females to join our sport.

Continuing on that topic, Suzy Balogh OAM highlights some interesting research into females as hunters and what we have to offer in the field that might be an advantage over our male counterparts. Montse Jaime's practical insight into knife sharpening highlights why she has developed her own skills in this area to complement her hunting expertise. Also in this edition, I discuss the Zerofit thermal clothing and how this has been a welcome addition to my range attire. The clothing options have helped me be comfortable in the field and on the SSAA range, while also ensuring I have free movement for shooting and more.

Finally, Kath Heiman's thorough enjoyment of the Springfield Armory's M6 Scout Survival rifle might have you scouring SSAA Gun Sales online for your own needs. The 'over-under' combination break-action rifle, with a .22LR upper barrel and .410 lower shotgun barrel, is an intriguing design and one Kath is enjoying putting through its paces.

Rachael

FOLLOW US



AWSmag



aws_mag

AUSTRALIAN
WOMEN'S
SHOOTER

Editor Rachael Oxborrow
Production Editor Thomas Cook
Feature Columnist Laetisha Scanlan
Graphic Designer Tammy Michalski
Advertising Representative Karoline Wasiak
Administration Debbie Wing
Contributors: Suzy Balogh OAM, Kath Heiman, Montse Jaime

Mail: PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061
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 2024.

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

Gender equality

As we celebrate International Women’s Day on March 8th, let’s take a moment to reflect on the remarkable transformation of women’s sport over the past decade and its ongoing evolution. Within the world of sports, achieving gender equality has been a persistent goal, striving to ensure fair opportunities irrespective of gender. Clay target shooting emerges as a prime driver of this endeavour, providing a stage where women can thrive, defy stereotypes, and contribute to the sport’s landscape with diversity and growth.

When examining the history of Clay Target Shooting in the Olympic Games, we see that initially, there was once an open category without gender division. However, over time, this evolved into segregated events, with women allotted fewer targets and competition days compared to men. Throughout the

years, efforts have been made to promote equality by removing certain disciplines and adding mixed gender events. Nowadays, although competitions are still categorised by gender, women are now on an equal, comparable playing field, being allotted the same number of targets and days as their male counterparts.

The Olympic Movement has made significant progress in advancing gender equality in recent years. For example, the upcoming Paris 2024 Olympics will mark an historic milestone as the first Games in history to achieve numerical gender parity on the field of play. It will feature an equal number of female and male athletes participating in the world’s largest sporting event.

So why is promoting equality in clay target shooting so important?

By advocating for gender equality in sport we serve as a driving force for positive

change. The aim is to demolish gender stereotypes and confront antiquated beliefs regarding what women can and can’t do. Through demonstrating their talent alongside male peers, women in this sport dismiss the notion that shooting is exclusively a male activity. This promotes inclusivity and highlights the idea that sporting ability transcends gender constraints. This not only encourages young, upcoming female athletes to pursue shooting without hesitation but also paves the way to enhance the sport’s diversity and competitiveness.

I firmly believe that highlighting the significance of equality and showcasing how clay target shooting embodies this is vital to maintaining its relevance and driving the growth of the sport, ensuring its continued significance in the modern-day sporting arena.

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:

Mansfield Hunting & Fishing Prize
Australian Women’s Shooter
PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061

or online at
ssaa.org.au/win



Competition closes March 31, 2024

WIN!



Mansfield Hunting & Fishing Store Voucher (can be used in store or online)
Kindly donated by Mansfield Hunting & Fishing
mansfieldhuntingandfishing.com.au

Keeping it SHARP



Aim to have the blade at about 20-degrees to the stone. For practice, a knife with a wide blade provides more support for your fingers.

How **Montse Jaime** retains a clean knife edge at home and in the field

Knives were not a big thing for me when I was growing up. Keeping them sharp, even less. My dad hunted and had a stag handle knife that I don't recall ever seeing out of its sheath. My grandmother, who kept a variety of animals on the property to feed the family, had a big rusty blade with a wooden grip that was worn smooth. Once or twice a year, I would hear the menacing sound of it being sharpened on a spinning grindstone by my grandfather. Fast forward 20 years, when I met my husband. Early on, he gifted me a folding knife, which I at first left at home but eventually started to carry with me. A few times a year, he would ask for it and sharpen it for me.

Much later, he also gave me a set of kitchen knives, which he showed me how to sharpen. As I cut meat and vegetables

with these knives, I started to realise that a sharp knife really is important. Besides cutting better and with less effort, it is also safer because you exert less force and in the case of a small mishap, will have a clean cut that will heal quickly.

One thing has led to another and these days I much prefer to have my knives razor sharp. Although I am fortunate to have a partner who will sharpen them for me, both of us often spend prolonged periods of time away from home, so I learnt how to sharpen them myself. While I am by no means an expert, I have become quite proficient at doing so and generally manage to keep my kitchen knives, pocket knife and hunting blades sharp.

One of the biggest 'tricks' is to regularly touch up a knife that sees a significant amount of use. It is much easier to touch up an edge that retains some sharpness

Sharpening stones and honing steels come in many sizes and colours, as do supports to prevent them from slipping.



Hold the honing steel perpendicular to your work surface and slowly draw the knife down, maintaining a 20-degree angle between the blade and the steel.

than it is to sharpen a very dull knife. To keep things simple, I will not delve into how you remove 'shoulders' or flatten bevels once a knife has not been sharpened for a long time. However, it is worth looking into this as shoulders will also form once a knife is touched up repeatedly. My main ways of sharpening knives are either with the use of Japanese (or other) waterstones or with a ceramic honing steel. The former, I use for my hunting and folding knives and sometimes to finish off the edges on my kitchen knives. The latter I generally use to touch up kitchen and meat processing knives. To get off to a good start, it's important to get the right sharpening stone for the job. Sharpening stones come in all sizes, shapes, forms and very importantly, grits. Many brands offer two-sided stones that have two different grits. The stones I use range all the way from very course 240-grit stones to remove shoulders and re-bevel knives, all the way up to 10,000-grit stones I sometimes use to polish edges. To touch up knives, I generally like to use something around a 1000-grit, however, this assumes the knife still retains a decent edge. If it is very dull, you will want to go coarser. For finishing off an edge, or polishing if you will, finer grits will polish finer but I generally use 3000-6000-grit for my hunting knives. The aforementioned two-sided stones offer a good way into sharpening stones.

Having tried several different ones, I find that in general you get what you pay for, so do not skimp on a stone. A brand that works well are Naniwa stones. They are synthetic stones, but are of good quality and last a long time. Their 'multi stones' offer combinations of different grits on either side. Ideally, you find a stone that is not too small or narrow as larger stones are easier to work on. If you use the stone a lot, you will want a 'flattening stone' or a flat piece of glass with some fine grit sandpaper, to occasionally flatten the surface that is in contact with your blade. Prior to getting to it, you may need to soak it for a few minutes (see the instructions that come with it). Next, you will want to place the stone on a flat surface and secure it so it does not move while in use. Many stones come with rubber frames to place them in but a small rubber mat you use to open jars will also do the trick. The general process is to start on the aforementioned coarser stone, which when touching up, for me, is a 1000-grit. You now proceed to sharpen the edge on one side until you have a uniform burr along the entire opposite length of the blade. This is the tiny folded edge of metal; you can feel it with your nail. Once you have achieved this, flip over the knife and repeat the process until you have a burr on the opposite side. Once done, you make

a few long uniform strokes along the full length of the edge on either side. This is almost as easy as it sounds, but there are a few tips and tricks to make life even easier. First off, once completing the above process, you need to determine whether the edge is truly sharp. People like to see if the knife slices through paper as a test. I personally prefer to put the tip of my finger on the table with my nail at an angle. Next, I gently rest the knife on my nail. If it's sharp, it will 'bite' and stay in place. Warning - do not apply pressure or cut! Just rest the edge on your nail, it will not slide down if sharp. Whichever test you use, if the knife is not sharp yet, do not go to a finer grit stone to sharpen it. Repeat the process on the 1000-grit stone or if that consistently fails to restore the edge consider going to a coarser stone. Finer grits do not so much sharpen the edge but rather polish it. It's also important to keep in mind that the typical knife edge is set at 20-degrees. Over time, you will develop muscle memory, but getting a consistent angle while you sharpen the knife can be a bit of a challenge at first. There are two main tricks that work well. First off, you can find devices that you clip onto the spine of the knife to ensure they have a consistent angle. While they work, I don't use them. Another trick is to use a black marker to colour the edge. By



Many stones are sold with rubber bases that securely keep them in place.

slowly sharpening and inspecting where the ink has gone, you fairly quickly develop a feeling for the right angle. You know you have hit the right angle when the edge is uniformly shiny and free of ink. If part of the edge is still black you need to adjust your angle.

The amount of pressure needed is a bit of a debatable topic. While it's true that coarser stones will remove more material with less pressure, it's not true that applying excessive force will make a finer grit do the same. While there are guidelines to the amount of pressure required, recommendations vary from anywhere between 2-8 pounds. You can whip out a scale and pressure test but, what works well is applying light pressure, without any discomfort, close to the edge of the blade with your three middle fingers.

When it comes to the ceramic honing steel, I really only have two tips. First off, do NOT try to imitate those TV chefs who in rapid succession whip a knife along a whetting steel a dozen or so times. This looks professional but gives little or no control over the edge between the steel and the blade edge, nor does it help you control the amount of material removed from the edge. It is more likely to ruin your knife than touch it up.

This leads me to my second tip. Go for a more controlled approach. Put a towel or rubber mat on your countertop, hold

the honing steel at a perpendicular angle to the surface and press down gently to prevent it from slipping. Now hold your knife at a 20-degree angle and gently slide it down while pulling it towards you to evenly remove material along the full edge of the blade. Do this a few times on each side and you should be good to go.

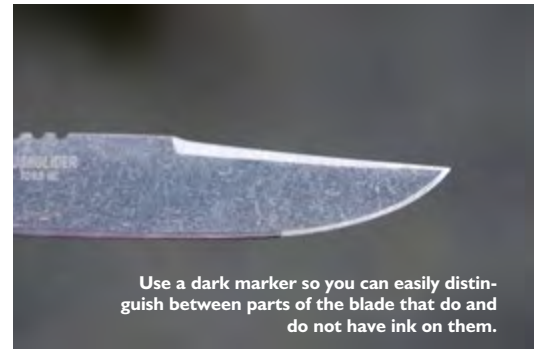
Of course, there are many other ways to sharpen a knife, ranging from manual tools to automatic sharpeners, strops and old-fashioned grinding stones. My advice is to start with a cheap or old knife for practice and go from there.

Something to keep in mind when it comes to hunting knives is that these days, there is a tendency to go for 'super steel' blades that are incredibly hard and have great edge retention. However, they are generally also more prone to chipping and harder to sharpen. Interestingly, now I have learned to properly sharpen my own knives, I prefer slightly softer steel in my hunting knives. It makes them tougher when working around bones and easy to touch up.

While it may seem daunting at first, properly sharpening a knife is really not that hard and is a worthwhile skill for just about anyone who spends time in the field or the kitchen. I just wish I had learned to do it earlier in life. ●



Marking the edge of your blade is easiest using a marker with a flat wide point.



Use a dark marker so you can easily distinguish between parts of the blade that do and do not have ink on them.



Correct angle on the stone on the straight part of the blade has evenly removed the ink from the edge.



Angle too small. This will leave the ink on the edge of the blade and remove it above the edge.



Angle too large. The ink gets removed from the extreme edge instead of from the entire edge.

A WINNING *combination*

Kath Heiman rejoices in her connection with Springfield Armory's M6 Scout Survival rifle

In the early 1980s, my father-in-law, Jim, acquired a brand new M6 Scout manufactured by Springfield Armory, the self-proclaimed 'oldest name in American firearms'. It was gifted to him by a hunting buddy to satisfy a few outstanding debts (in the days before firearm regulations) and was very welcome indeed.

As an 'over-under' combination break-action rifle, the M6 Scout combines a .22LR upper barrel with a .410 lower shotgun barrel. Jim subsequently fitted a telescopic sight and has spent many happy days despatching small game.

Some 35 years later, it remains in Jim's inventory of 'go-to' firearms for hunting trips. Which is why he had it with him on a family hunt at Tenterfield some time ago. And from the moment I saw it, I was intrigued.

The evident utilitarianism of the M6 Scout immediately appealed to me. I've never been one for flashy equipment. I own an English longbow because I like the challenge of pitting my skills against my quarry, unaided by technology. It demands a disciplined stalk to get close enough for a clean despatch.

In a similar vein, my first car was a 1970 VW Beetle. Rather than opting for a modern Japanese automatic, I enjoyed mastering the quirks of the dak-dak's snatchy clutch. I know that driving this vehicle within the limits of its acceleration and braking power made me a better driver. Motorcycle ownership did the same.

These days, I own a 6x6 ex-military Land Rover 110 Perentie. Those in the know understand its idiosyncrasies. Within this context, the M6 Scout presented itself as the

most 'back to basics' firearm I'd ever seen. With no 'furniture' on the buttstock or forestock, and with lots of stamped and forged parkerized steel to look at, it seemed to be as bare as firearms come.

And if this wasn't enough to interest me, being an army officer married to an infantryman, the

military credentials of the M6 Scout resonated in a way that other firearms hadn't.

You see, the M6 Scout has its origins firmly in the aftermath of World War Two and the Cold War era. Officially known as the 'Rifle-Shotgun, Survival Cal .22/.410, M6', it was included in the survival kit of US airmen operating over the wilds of the Arctic and across other remote operating areas. Notably, it was not intended to be used in combat. Instead, its purpose was to enable downed pilots to forage for wild game and to protect against potentially hostile wildlife.

Using stamped steel production methods common in firearms like the AK-47, the M6 Scout could be mass produced. And the break-action design offered additional military benefits. For one, it was a remarkably compact so could be stowed away in ejection seats and life rafts. It was light enough for someone fatigued and starving to carry and operate, and ambidextrous for use by both left and right-handed airmen. The trigger squeeze-bar meant that it could be fired using gloves when operating in cold Northern Hemisphere conditions, or if injured. Further, the ability to visually inspect the chamber easily was an added safety feature for users who may have been great aviators but novice marksmen.

The only trouble was that, when I first saw Jim's M6 Scout, I didn't have a firearms licence. So, I was relegated to observing how it performed in the field, despatching bunnies



Breechblock bling – Made in the U.S.A.



Kath getting her eye in with the M6 Scout at 25m and 50m.





Note the hammer and the knob which is used to select the barrel.



The increased visibility of the break-action increases safety.

in short order to furnish rabbit pie for the extended family. My interest was firmly piqued – and my husband Scott noticed.

So, I was delighted when, five years ago, Scott acquired an M6 Scout of his own, purchased secondhand for \$1500 with a red dot sight. The original owner bought it new – probably around the same time that Jim was gifted his. He'd told Scott that he acquired the firearm for a bit of hunting during a lap of Australia. As it turned out, ultimately, he'd only sent about a dozen rounds downrange with it.

It's worth observing that the Springfield Armory M6 Scout differs from earlier military variants. The original M4 was manufactured by the Harrington & Richardson Arms Company. Based on their bolt-action M265 sporting rifle, the wooden stock was replaced with a telescoping wire stock and the frame was made of sheet metal. The firearm had a 14" detachable barrel chambered for .22 Hornet ammunition with a 4-round detachable box magazine.

In 1952, Ithaca Gun Company began producing a replacement, the 'M6 Aircrew Survival Weapon'. This was an under-over combination comprising the .22 Hornet with a .410-bore shotgun beneath. The trigger was replaced by a squeeze-bar for use by a gloved or injured hand, and due to it now being break-action the magazine was replaced by a storage compartment in the buttstock to hold both types of ammunition.

Due to the short barrel length, the M6 was not authorised for civilian use and, when the military phased out the firearm in the 1970s, Springfield Armory set about generating its own version for the commercial market.

Imported from the Czech Republic, the barrel length was increased to 18" to make it

legal outside of the military, and the trigger bar was encircled with a trigger guard. Because the trigger guard now prevented the firearm from folding neatly in two, a removable hinge pin was added to allow some disassembly for storage.

When Scott first showed me his newly acquired M6 Scout, it was still stored in its manufacturer's compact 530x300mm plastic moulded case. Its disassembled parts fitted neatly into their purpose shaped niches, with the operator's manual tucked inside the lid.

And it was about this point that I could readily see myself shadowing Scott on his bowhunts. The 2kg firearm strung easily over my shoulder, ready to despatch an animal if his aim was not true, or if we met a particularly angry looking ridgeback at close quarters.

Now as an authorised Class A and B firearms licence holder, I'm starting to bring this vision to reality. And I have to say that the M6 Scout is proving to be a remarkably amenable training partner.

There are several features of the M6 Scout that make it suitable for a novice shooter, as it was for downed pilots. As a single-shot, break-action rifle, it's simple to operate and safer to use.

The straightforward design means there are fewer moving parts than in many other firearms, which reduces the likelihood of stoppages. While common mechanical failures may be easy to rectify, like a magazine mis-feed for example, such stoppages do nothing to build confidence in unfamiliar hands.



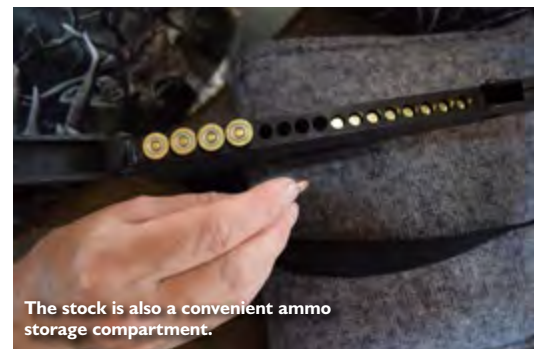
The variety of ammo choice for this combination is near endless.



Simply remove the hinge pin to break it down



Kath's first ever game were taken with the M6 Scout.



The stock is also a convenient ammo storage compartment.

Relatedly, preparing the M6 Scout to fire is a clear, deliberate process with little room for error. On top of the straightforward unloading and loading with the M6 Scout, it is easy to visually inspect both barrels to ensure there are no obstructions or live rounds present. This significantly reduces the risk of accidental discharge.

On the SSAA range, I've been using open sights to build my competence. The operator's manual recommends use of the round aperture (peep sight) for rifle shooting and the V-notch for shotgun. As a member of the Australian Army, I am more comfortable using the peep sight. It more closely approximates the round sight picture I am accustomed to using with the 1.5x ring sight fitted to the F88 Steyr. But I'm growing used to the V-notch and it's all just a matter of practice. For heightened accuracy, the Picatinny rail, fitted by the previous owner, allows a wide range of sights and scopes to be fitted.

Switching between the two barrels is easy. The firing pin selector is a simple rotating knob fitted on top of the hammer. By rotating the knob clockwise, it disengages, locks and raises the selector to choose the rifle barrel. Simply lower the knob to select the lower shotgun barrel. The over-under combination means that both barrels can be loaded simultaneously, allowing for easy selection of a suitable round or a quick follow-up shot.

And being as simply constructed as it is, the M6 Scout boasts reliability, even in adverse

weather conditions. Despite the lack of furniture, the ergonomics of the M6 Scout work well for me. There is no rubber butt or cheekrest, but with little recoil, I have felt no need for any extra padding. The narrow stock fits neatly into my shoulder.

Aircrew were originally instructed to wrap the barrels with parachute cord as a field expedient forestock. However, the barrel nestles comfortably into my relatively small hands, enabling a firm hold. That's not to rule out adding para-cord in the future when I'm spending more time in the field and less at the range.

Truth be known, while range days are currently helping to improve my firearms competence, even now it's not all about bench rests and paper targets. With the red-dot sight mounted, the first time I took the M6 Scout into the field, I had little difficulty despatching a couple of rabbits from 35m.

The M6 Scout is a highly versatile firearm for small to medium game hunting, which is its intended purpose. The nine .22LR rounds and four .410 shotgun shells stored in the stock offer a whole range of ammunition choices. The .22 calibre options range from bird/ratshot to hollow point slugs. And, having an open choke, the .410 barrel can be loaded with shot sizes all the way up to a rifled slug. This configuration means that I can hunt anything from starlings to wild boar.

Wanting a little extra power, Jim has always regretted that his gifted M6 Scout is not a .22 Hornet/.410 combo, because this configura-

tion is also available on the market (along with the .22 Magnum/.410 combo). However, I'll be surprised if I come to share his concerns.

In all, I am delighted with the opportunity to learn the ropes using the M6 Scout. Just as is the case when I have previously chosen a 'back to basics' option over something more sophisticated, I am confident that I will be a better hunter for having started my marksmanship journey with this firearm.

Equally, I don't expect the M6 Scout to become redundant anytime soon. The features that make it light, simple, reliable, safe and versatile will not change as my proficiency increases. I'll simply become more efficient in the way that I use it. And that all sounds like a recipe for home-harvested tasty game dinners for years to come.

Keep an eye out on ssaagunsales.com for an M6 Scout or another combination firearm that looks just as appealing. ●

Specifications

- Manufacturer:** Springfield Armory, USA
- Chamberings:** .22LR, .22 Magnum or .22 Hornet over .410 bore
- Action:** Break-action
- Barrel length:** 46.4cm / 18.25"
- O/A length:** 81cm / 32"
- Folded length:** 46.4cm / 18.25"
- Weight:** 2.1kg (4.7 pounds)
- Feed:** (Dual) single-shot

Suzy loved duck hunting with her grandfather, father and brother when growing up.



Women – born to hunt!

Suzy Balogh OAM looks at the world of the huntress

My article in Issue 20 of AWS looked at the advantages female competitive shooters have compared to male competitive shooters. I recently read some peer reviewed scientific articles that look at archaeological evidence debunking the theory that men were the hunters and women the gatherers. So, this got me thinking about modern-day female hunters and if we have any advantages when it comes to hunting.

Some interesting findings

A May 2023 study titled *The Myth of Man the Hunter: Women's contribution to the hunt across ethnographic contexts* states that 200,000 years ago men may have been the hunters. However, for the past 9000 years (since we've had farming practices), women are just as involved in hunting as men.

Researchers Abigail Anderson et al. focused on South America's remaining foraging (hunting and gathering) societies, with findings that

women hunt as much as men. They found that women are both strategic and opportunistic hunters of smaller game such as rabbits and lizards, with 30-50 per cent of larger, dangerous game hunting also conducted by women. These South American huntresses make and maintain their own specifically sized hunting tools to customise the skill of hunting to each of them.

Men were considered the hunters from the past 200 years of scientific observation. During those two centuries, it was male researchers observing and questioning male hunters in these foraging communities. Now, with a gender balance in researchers, female hunters are being observed and interviewed also. This observation by female researchers of female hunters is bringing to light that there is no significant difference between genders when it comes to who puts the protein on the table.

A November 2023 study titled *The Theory That Men Evolved to Hunt and Women Evolved to Gather Is Wrong* is written by anthropol-

ogists Cara Ocobck and Sara Lacy. They specialise in physiological requirements for human survival. The pair state that in Neanderthal fossil records, men and women had the same hunting injury and wear patterns on their skeletons, concluding that both genders hunted and gathered.

During the Pleistocene era, women were buried with their own personal weapons designed for hunting big game. The authors note that women are metabolically better placed to hunt. Females have the hormones estrogen and adiponectin (fat and glucose modulators), which provide the upper hand in endurance, hence better for running animals to exhaustion to then go in for the kill.

They also talk about women having a wider hip structure, allowing for better hip rotation to lengthen strides – even though women have shorter legs we use what we have to the max. Wider hips also help us to carry heavy centred loads – again comparative to body size.

What makes a good hunter?

A good hunter possesses a combination of skills, knowledge and characteristics including:

- 1. Patience:** Waiting for the right moment is crucial in hunting.
- 2. Knowledge of the environment:** Understanding the terrain, weather patterns and animal behaviour enhances success.
- 3. Skill with weapons:** Proficiency with firearms, bows or other hunting tools is essential.
- 4. Ethical hunting practices:** Respecting regulations, hunting seasons and the environment is paramount.
- 5. Physical fitness:** Endurance and agility are important for tracking and pursuing prey.
- 6. Persistence:** Being willing to adapt strategies and persevere through challenges.
- 7. Observational skills:** Noticing subtle clues like tracks, droppings and animal behaviour.
- 8. Safety consciousness:** Prioritising safety for oneself and others during the hunt.
- 9. Respect for nature and wildlife:** Understanding the ecosystem and the importance of conservation.
- 10. Ability to process and utilise harvested game:** Properly handling and utilising game meat and other resources.

There is not one thing on that list that, with education, training, tailored equipment and experience, would make one gender a better hunter over the other. There are a few gender differences in hearing, smell and vision abilities that are helpful in sign detection and observation skills.

When it comes to hearing, females have stronger and faster acting middle-ear muscles. Due to this, ageing women maintain sharper hearing for longer than men.

Research supports that females have a better sense of smell than males, particularly detecting, discriminating and identifying smells.

Women have wider peripheral vision, effective up to almost 180-degrees, and are better at discerning colour, while men have better detail at distance, depth perception and tracking of fast-moving objects.

Men have more fast twitch muscles, better for explosive bursts of strength. Women have more slow twitch muscles related to stamina.

Staying mentally sharp is important when hunting for not only accuracy of shot but also negotiating difficult terrain and staying safe. The better our cardio fitness, the less likely

Outside is where Melanie feels most grounded. Here she is hunting feral pigs in New Zealand.



to lose mental sharpness due to exhaustion. As outlined in the research, women have the ability to draw on deeper energy reserves for greater endurance.

When it comes to fitness for hunting, these factors should be worked on and enhanced: balance, agility, reaction time, flexibility (for stealth and supporting better blood flow), strength, range of motion and cardio fitness (stamina and endurance). Endurance is performing low intensity activities for extended periods (walking) and stamina is performing high intensity activities for a short duration (lifting weights).

Interview with a renowned huntress

I grew up hunting with my family and spent 12 years managing pest species for the NSW Department of Primary Industries and the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre. However, it has been about five years since I have hunted large game, so I spoke with Melanie Kirley. She is a remarkable woman who hunts game for both food and environmental conservation.

I first got to know Melanie when she was a junior in the Australian shotgun team competing at the Olympic discipline World Championships in Cyprus. These days Melanie works in the family gunshop, Mansfield Hunting & Fishing, in rural Victoria. She is renowned as a particularly skilled hunter and fisher.

I wanted to hear about Melanie's experience of being a modern-day huntress and examine some of the differences she might experience when compared with her male counterparts.

Have you noticed any differences physically when hunting compared to the men you hunt with? Melanie is pretty fit, saying the main difference is stride length:

"Keeping up with their pace can be a challenge but slow and steady wins the race." She says that a person's physical ability and strength affects things such as hauling out of meat and added this advice: *"Girls, work those glutes!"*

Given the right training and practice, do you find yourself as competent as men in butchering, tracking, identifying sign and navigating?

"I find myself competent now, but I did have to learn all these skills. Butchering was definitely something I needed to do firsthand to get my head around it. It's all just time in the bush doing it. The only way you are going to get better at these skills is practice. I wouldn't say men are better at it, they are probably just taught these skills earlier than women. However, all these skills you can learn later in life. There are so many education courses available for all of the above."

Mel's advice for female hunters regarding getting fit, getting strong, learning skills, seeking knowledge and getting the right equipment is:

Melanie geared up from Mansfield Hunting & Fishing as she packs out a deer in mountainous New Zealand.

"If you are truly passionate about it. Just do it! You literally have nothing to lose. Ask all the questions you think are stupid because I can guarantee someone else is waiting for the answer. Reach out to people online, there are so many people in the hunting community that are willing to lend a helping hand. Watch YouTube, there are some great videos online - Australian and American based. There is nothing to be afraid of.

"I think it is important to choose the right place to start so you have a good experience for your first time hunting. Hunting clubs are a great place to start for newcomers. They are groups that focus on a family friendly aspect, knowing well that the future of hunting involves everyone. If you spent your life worrying about what other people think, you'd never do anything!"

Studies conclude that women are more agreeable... hence make better traveling companions. Others talk about the 'shield maiden' effect, where a tribe/team of women (hunters/warriors/sport) are more effective than a group of men for various tasks, akin to lionesses working as a team. Do you like to hunt with women or prefer not to?

"I have a couple of girlfriends I have introduced to hunting and have taken them out a couple of times. It was great. I would do it more often, however lining up times that suit everyone doesn't always work. Alone or with someone it's just great to be out in nature and enjoy what my backyard has to offer."

Are there any negative or positive differences between male and female hunters?

"I think men are probably a bit more forthcoming and confident when it comes to taking up hunting. This is likely because women are worried about criticism or being too manly. There is equal opportunity for men and women to be hunters. It's just knowing where to start."

How do you feel about hunting big game over smaller game?

"I prefer hunting big game. I grew up doing a lot of varmint shooting, so I guess that is where the passion for hunting began. I have a few dream hunts on the cards internationally for big game. Hopefully I can drop the hammer on them over the next couple of years."

What do you love about being a female hunter?

"My favourite thing about being a female hunter is I get to inspire other women to do something they can enjoy for the rest of their lives."

Well, Melanie has just inspired me to go on a hunting trip up north again soon to help a friend clear some feral pigs out of her crops. As with target shooting, with equitable education, training, experience and equipment there should be no gap between males and females when it comes to being a good hunter. Check out ssaa.org.au/cwm for a great all-inclusive hunting, bushcrafting and outdoor skills program.

Ladies remember, that we too were born to hunt! ●

The elusive sambar deer is Melanie's favourite species to hunt. Bushcrafting, fitness and strength all contribute to her prowess as a hunter.



Wearing the Zerofit Ultimate adds warmth for comfortable shooting on a cold day without being hindered by bulky layers.



On the go with Zerofit

Rachael Oxborrow keeps warm and active at the shooting range and outdoors

Getting that really chilled-to-the-bone feeling is something we actively try and avoid, but it can prove challenging while having an outdoor lifestyle in colder climates and conditions.

Struggling with the cold on the SSAA range does nothing for shooting scores and waiting patiently on the sidelines of your loved ones' football games takes a special kind of commitment.

Zerofit was created in 2005 by Koji Higashi, owner and founder of Eon Sports of Kobe, Japan. A fitness fanatic, single figure golfer and the owner of a premium Japanese golf brand, Mr Higashi was constantly feeling cold while playing golf or doing active sports such as running.

Looking to make the most of my time outdoors, I turned to the Zerofit Baselayer products to see how they stack up for every-day needs along with when shooting.

The Heatrub Ultimate, a thicker baselayer

option, was a perfect choice for some outings where I was needing to be outside but not being overly active. I wasn't sure how 'warm' the top would actually be and didn't want to overheat while target shooting. The material uses your own body's movement to create heat using extra-long fibres that gently rub on your skin to create frictional heat.

The Ultimate worked really well for me and my needs, with the thicker material being comfortable and soft against my skin without irritation. It kept me warm when not moving too much, but as I became more active the Ultimate kept my temperature moderated without becoming overheated.

The Heatrub Move was the go-to for a day on the range shooting Metallic Silhouette where I remained still while shooting but moved around the range to stand up my targets. It has a cooling two-layer construction that moves moisture away from the body to the outer shell fabric where it dries quickly. It



The thinner material of the Zerofit Heatrub Move uses two layers to move moisture away from the body while maintaining warmth.

is made to give you warmth with less weight and allow you to be more active.

This was definitely the right choice. I was able to wear less clothing in the middle of winter and remain warm. Shooting with less bulk meant I was more comfortable in holding my position.

I am super keen to try the Move style while 3-Positional shooting where I could retain my free movement and warmth in all conditions.

The Ultimate retails for \$129.95 and the Heatrub Move for \$109.95. They come in a range of sizes and colours and are stocked by numerous retail outlets across the southern states of Australia. Find out more and shop online at zerofit.com.au ●



Australia's most comprehensive firearms and accessories trading website

The numbers don't lie!

2250+

items listed at
any one time

36,175+

active users

29,485+

sold items

2.37 million

page views per month

Buy and sell new and used

- Firearms, parts and optics
- Reloading components
- Knives and hunting products
- Camping gear, vehicles, boats and property

“Thanks for your help! Ad went through today without a hitch. It was so straight forward! I am 82 y.o. and not the full bottle on I.T. Thanks again. - Ken”



Take a look now! ssaagunsales.com



JOIN THE MEMBERS ENJOYING THESE GREAT MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS.

For only \$35 get \$25,000 worth of SSAA Members Firearms Protection.

Over 80,000 members have their firearms and fixed accessories covered against loss, theft and damage at home and away within the policy conditions.

Call : (02) 8805 3900*
Email: megan@ssaains.com.au



MEMBERS FIREARMS PROTECTION

[See website for more details-www.ssaib.com.au](http://www.ssaib.com.au)

*Office Hours | Any commentary provided in this advertisement which is general advice does not take account your individual situation and you should consider SSAA Mutual's Financial Services Guide and Product Disclosure Statement (www.ssaib.com.au) before deciding to become a member and to purchase and hold discretionary protection is sued by SSAA Mutual Limited

Before you renew any of your Insurance Policies talk to Megan at SSAA Insurance Brokers for an obligation FREE quote.



Megan can arrange coverage from Australia's leading insurance companies. She will give you professional advice, manage your claims and take care of all the details. So before you renew any policy talk to Megan, a trusted SSAA member working for you.

Call : (08) 8332 0281*
Email: megan@ssaains.com.au



SSAA
General
Insurance
Brokers

A SSAA member advantage

*Office Hours | SSAA Insurance Brokers Pty Ltd | CAR 315403 | ABN 86 077 822 970 is a Corporate Authorised Representative of PSC Connect Pty Ltd | ABN 23 141 574 914 / AFSL 344648

[See website for more details-www.ssaib.com.au](http://www.ssaib.com.au)