

THE AUSTRALIAN JUNIOR

SHOOTER

AN INTRODUCTION FOR JUNIOR SHOOTERS & HUNTERS

Issue 30

she
shoots,
she
scores!

BRIDGING
THE GEN-
ERATION
GAP

SARAH SHELLEY KEEPS
THE FAMILY TRADITION ALIVE



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Contribute to Australian Junior Shooter

If you are a young shooter or hunter and would like to share your experiences with others, consider writing an article for *The Australian Junior Shooter*. Send an outline of your proposed article to edit@ssaa.org.au and we'll be sure to get in touch.

Editorial

We know shooting's a sport for all ages and abilities and one where lifelong friendships are forged. But in many instances it's also a family affair and that's underlined in this issue's cover story which profiles young Sarah Shelley, a third-generation shooter following in the footsteps of her father and grandfather.

Sarah's introduction to the sport was initially a low-key affair which began one Saturday afternoon with a visit to the local SSAA range with her dad. It didn't take long for the shooting bug to bite her and she soon became a regular visitor and subsequently a junior member of the SSAA. Says Sarah: "I love it because it's fun and exciting, challenging myself to do better and spending time with dad."

South Australia was host state for the 2023 Single Action National Championships towards the end of last year and Peg

Hobson was there to document the progress of a handful of youngsters who look destined for good things ahead. It's a challenging and multi-faceted discipline which requires skill and concentration in equal measure and this young quintet really got into the spirit of things and acquitted themselves admirably.

And if it's hunting you're interested in then have a look at Leon Wright's article where he tutors his grandson on the art of deer hunting. Leon's a seasoned campaigner when it comes to stalking those often-elusive targets and his hard-won knowledge was vital when it came to 14-year-old Justin learning the ropes during a sambar culling session for a farmer friend.

So welcome aboard the 30th edition of *Australian Junior Shooter*. We hope you'll enjoy reading the content as much as we did putting it together.

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THE NEW HUNTERS

Leon Wright tutors his grandson on the subtle art of deer hunting

The gusting wind was straight off the snow-covered mountains in the distance and was chilling to the bone. We were hunkered down in our camouflaged blind in front of a small clump of dogwood, my brother Greg, grandson Justin and myself. With an hour to go before the winter solstice shortened the day, we were set up for some night-vision culling on sambar deer for our farmer friend.



- 1 | New SSAA junior and Leon's grandson William with the spoils from a duck hunt.
- 2 | Camp was set up on the lee side of the hill for protection from the elements.



Earlier that day after setting up camp a short distance away, I'd taken Justin for a walk through the paddock in search of deer sign and, going by the amount we encountered, there was no shortage of them feeding throughout. Justin, at almost 14 years of age, was the latest of my grandsons to join as a junior member of the SSAA while another grandson William, already 14, had signed up just before the opening of duck season.

Both are keen to start their journey along the hunting path and as Justin and I sauntered through the paddock I pointed out various deer tracks and explained how to distinguish the difference between a stag and a hind, then how fresh the tracks are simply by observing any grass in them. If the grass, especially small clover, is starting to stand up again in the tracks, the sign is old but if it's still flat, they're relatively fresh.

Kangaroo tracks, while obviously shaped differently, leave a flat impression with a visible toe point but a deer, especially a stag, will flick up parts of dirt or mud with each step and, depending on weather conditions of the day, can be a good indicator of when the deer entered the paddock from the bush line behind. All fairly basic yet still part of the learning curve for a new hunter. The questions were coming thick and fast, as was to be expected, and while I answered them to the best of my ability it would be unrealistic to expect all responses to sink in.

The questions were still coming as we settled into the blind. "When will we see a deer, Pa?" asked Justin. "You don't usually see them roaming around during the day as they are mainly nocturnal." Sure enough, 10 minutes later, a whisper from Justin: "Here comes one now." Yes that would be right I thought, make a fool of myself from the word go.

The spiker that caught Justin's eye was making its way across our bow, about 25m up into the bush line but clearly visible. It looked as though

he wouldn't come down into the paddock near us but further along, so on telling Justin to wait in the blind with Greg, I snuck out the back and closed the gap across the open paddock, keeping a large downed tree between the deer and me.

When I finally reached the log, I cautiously slid the rifle over the top but instead of standing directly in front of me, the big spiker kept moving and was slowly feeding his way up the hill about 75m away. I waited patiently until he moved clear of the dogwood, lined up and fired. At the sound of the shot the deer bolted back to the gully floor then collapsed before he could make his way up the opposite side. I watched for a few minutes to make certain he was finished.

Happy with that early success we settled down in the blind, anticipating a lengthy wait before any more deer entered the paddock. The farmer's wife had told me they were expecting 35mm of rain in the next 24 hours, due to start at about 7pm along with gusty winds and, true to predictions, light misty rain started falling on our blind shortly before 6.30. Not long after, Greg whispered to me he'd picked up several sambar entering the paddock from the bush line thanks to his handheld night vision, one directly in front of the blind about 75m out with others further back.

On my earlier scouting mission I'd estimated the number of sambar feeding in this paddock to be around 10, going by the size of the tracks and droppings, so I wasn't surprised when Greg said he'd picked up a number of them coming out the bush line. A couple of game trails had been worked up heavily, so we'd placed our blind between the two trails which proved a smart move.

I took the shooting sticks from Justin, positioned the rifle and switched on the night vision, a Sytong HT-66 attached to the ocular lens of the scope, which makes it sit back a bit though still easily managed

once you're used to it. My rifle, a .300 Win Magnum with a bit of recoil, had a muzzle brake fitted to avoid unnecessary Weatherby eyebrow. All in all I'm happy with this set-up and have taken sambar up to 250m away, not that I go out my way for such a shot as the closer, the better.

I slid a 180-grain round quietly into the rifle as I searched for deer through the night vision and located one pretty swiftly. It was looking straight at me as they're quick to pick up the tiny IR indicator though it never seems to alert them to danger. Hit behind the shoulder, the spiker ran a few metres then dropped as I quickly reloaded and identified another target about 150m out. It too collapsed at the sound of the shot and that was enough for the rest of the herd which quickly bolted back into the bush.

"Don't let our results fool you," I said to Justin, "as stalking sambar is an entirely different game when it comes to big stags - that soon sorts out novices from veterans. Through necessity we're taking a few shortcuts as I've had stags make a fool of me many times when stalking them." With three on the ground and rain setting in, we chose to leave retrieval of the deer until the following morning when we could use the quadbike to make things easier. In these freezing conditions there was no chance the meat would spoil overnight.

Our camp was set up about 300m from the blind and, being on the lee side of the hill, gave us a bit of shelter from the elements though it was still bitterly cold so we kept the fire stoked up. As conditions deteriorated we moved closer to the heat, clutching cups of tea and as I gazed into the flames it occurred to me things don't change much for hunters - we've sought the solitude of the bush and warmth of a campfire for generations.

Justin asking me if we were going to check the other paddock before we went to bed brought me back into the moment. "If there's a break in this weather we'll wander down and

the walk will do us good." As luck would have it the heavy rain eased to a dismal mist so we grabbed our gear and set off.

The other paddock is situated at the far end of the property, butted on to the bush and always a good spot to pick up deer. On our previous trip, Greg and I had snuck into the paddock under cover of darkness and after a quick scan with the night vision, spotted half a dozen deer feeding merrily away. All were hinds except a big stag so that's the one I brought the rifle to bear on. At the sound of the shot the hinds bolted for the bush, taking the stag with them. I knew the shot was good and although it took a while, we found him less than 100m away.

So three weeks later here we were entering the paddock once again under cover of darkness with high expectations, until the finicky breeze changed direction and I felt it on the back of my neck, so that was that. Justin voiced his disappointment until I told him: "That's hunting - you'll come to learn it doesn't always go to plan."

Back at camp Greg and I were ready for bed but not so Justin. "Can we try for another deer in the first paddock, Pa?" "No mate we've enough and what's more, I'll tell you what I told William last week when we were duck hunting. If I ever hear of you shooting an animal for the fun of it, your hunting days with me are over. You make damn sure you've a good reason for shooting something and don't waste it." Then with a smile I added: "But there's nothing stopping us from having a look for deer with a torch." And with that we were off again. ●

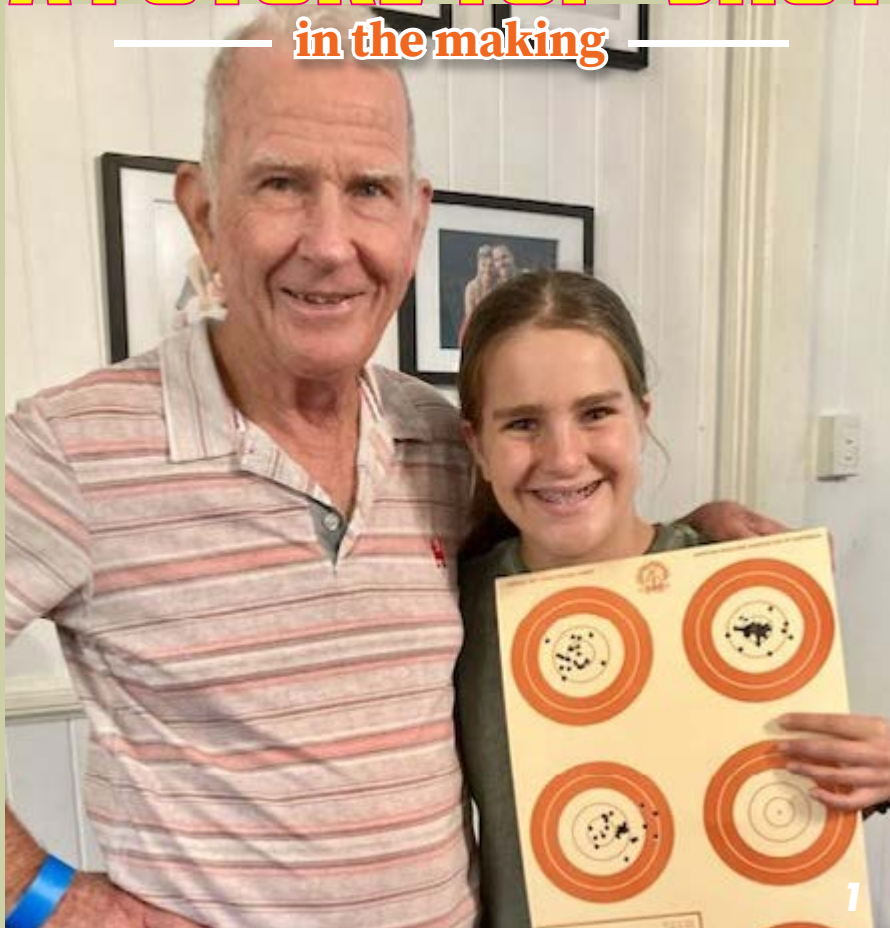


At the sound of the shot the deer bolted back to the gully floor then collapsed before he could make his way up the opposite side. I watched for a few minutes to make certain he was finished.

- 3 | The Sytong HT-66 attached to the scope.
- 4 | Leon favours 180-gran Federal ammunition for sambar hunting.
- 5 | Justin after the sambar culling exercise.

A FUTURE TOP-SHOT

in the making



My granddaughter Gen is 13 and after being subjected to my numerous stories of shooting and hunting has had her interest piqued. I offered to teach her how to shoot and set about doing things properly and legally from the outset. I took her to SSAA Belmont in Brisbane for a session where she picked up a rifle for the first time.

We were in the vicinity of shooters using some big calibres so there was a fair bit of noise. At first this had Gen flinching so I encouraged her to tune out and just concentrate on the target and her trigger control. I fired a couple of shots to check the rifle was

still on target then Gen took over and I supervised. When a big rifle boomed she only blinked, no other movement.

She shot three targets at 50 yards with my Model 5 Brno and the third was with some very old high-velocity HP which were spraying a bit but she still did well - I doubt if I could've done any better. I've decided to cut the stock on an old Voere single-shot so she can try shooting off-hand as the Brno is still a bit big for her.

Greg Kent, Qld

1 | Greg with Gen and that remarkable first target.



- 1 | The rifleman: Bounty Hunter makes ready for the stage.
- 2 | On the run: Bounty Hunter prepares to swing into action.
- 3 | Trophy time: Bounty Hunter, Tom Sawyer, Phantom, Mucho Malo and Miss Daisy Rose.



YOUNG GUNS

bang on target

Peg Hobson

Five junior shooters took part in the 2023 SSAA Single Action National Championships hosted by Frontier Shooting Club at Virginia, SA in October. They made up only a tiny part of the 125 competitors from all over Australia, yet by the end of the week-long event were well recognised among the cowboys and cowgirls.

As a fourth generation cowboy, Mucho Malo has been attending shoots his whole life. His family have been involved in Single Action shooting for almost 30 years through mum and dad Violet Rose and Coyote, grandparents Miss Fire and Lobo, Montana Lily and Marshall JW and great-grandfather Ruff Diamond, all of whom have shot Single Action. Mucho has been keen to shoot the discipline for a long time but had to wait until he was old enough under South Australian rules.

One of the things he most appreciates about cowboys is the camaraderie. "It's important for other shooters to

be kind and friendly to juniors," said Mucho. His dad Coyote says it's not unusual to find his son having a chat with people from the club, some of whom are 80 years his senior. "Being able to socialise and get along with people is important to anyone's personal development," he said. "Being able to communicate and connect with people of different ages is something he's going to need when he starts a job and in his everyday life. He can learn that here."

Coyote believes the skills Mucho learns at the range will benefit every aspect of his life. "When he's around guns he's expected to be focused and disciplined, then

off the range he can be a kid. They learn that different behaviour is appropriate in different circumstances and again, that's hugely relevant to life in general."

Miss Daisy Rose is a local Frontier Shooting Club junior and chose her alias to be in keeping with a family name, as her mother is Miss Lilly Rose and her sister Summer Rose. Both Daisy's parents shoot Single Action with her dad, Lucky Strike, having participated for 12 years and Lilly Rose for about 10. Both shot Air Pistol previously and encouraged Daisy to start shooting, as Single Action is a big part of their lives. "We enjoy the sport, costumes and the shooting family we've met along the way," said Lilly. "We wanted to share our passion with her and believe it teaches respect, control and discipline."

Lilly says Frontier Shooting Club supports its juniors like any new members with advice and guidance around firearms, shooting stances, transitions and so on. They make sure to spend extra time with youngsters and are careful not to push them too hard or too fast and take each of their physical abilities into consideration. Daisy's favourite part of Single Action is the costumes and dressing up and she hopes to shoot a rabbit one day.

"I want to beat my dad," was Phantom's reply when asked what he likes best about the discipline. The 13-year-old has been watching his dad shoot for a few years and enjoys some good-natured stirring up. "Dad doesn't run so it's not really a sport," he said, yet since taking up Single Action himself, he's decided it actually is hard work but definitely worth the effort.

Phantom's lucky to have the State Junior Coordinator at his home club in New South Wales. "Our club's pretty big but quite weighted towards Air Pistol and Olympic-style stuff," said Drop Bear. "Having said that, it's very supportive of Phantom and they gifted him a couple of bricks of ammo to come to SA and shoot

this competition, which is much appreciated."

Phantom is grateful to be sponsored by the NSW Amateur Pistol Association as the highest-ranked junior in the state. "They've covered his nomination and a few other things and to be honest, I don't know if we could've come here without that help," added Drop Bear. The ability to have competitors shoot .22 calibre in the Buckaroo category was a big plus for Phantom's family. "Pistols and rifles which don't cost so much to initially buy, but also to feed, is a big thing.

"This discipline is different to many others. A lot of the other ones shot in Australia can be very repetitive with the same set course of fire each time. You can get good and hone it but I love the variety in Single Action. You're standing there with the book and looking at the stage, presented with a different problem to solve each time. In other disciplines you come and shoot for the day, they all leave the range and often don't talk to each other, whereas a Single Action match is like family."

With parents who own Southern Cross Militaria in Queensland, Bounty Hunter has the pick of the firearms. His dad, Southern Gun, says 14-year-old Bounty Hunter started with his mum's old Marlin .357 but quickly became too fast for it. "We had to upgrade him to a Uberti Brush Popper which has all the works and jerks," said Southern Gun.

Bounty Hunter's Ruger Blackhawks have a sentimental story, being previously owned by a shooter who passed away from cancer. His wife put all his firearms up for sale and Bounty Hunter was lucky to snap them up, the owner's wife happy in the knowledge his guns have gone to an enthusiastic young shooter.

Ultimately Bounty Hunter's plans for Single Action include travelling to the US to compete. He listed the Nationals as the best competition he's taken part in so far, saying the realistic facades really added to the

4



- 4 | Put it there: Phantom congratulates Mucho Malo as Tom Sawyer looks on.
- 5 | Family affair: Miss Daisy Rose with parents Lucky Strike and Miss Lilly Rose.

atmosphere and the stages were simple, making it easy to shoot at speed. Southern Gun has previously competed for Australia in IPSC and said he and Bounty Hunter got into Single Action at the same time.

Members of Dalby Pioneers invited them to a Cowboy shoot a couple of years ago and that's where it all started, though the biggest hurdle the family is currently facing is travel and its associated costs. "Juniors can't go by themselves so by the time you've paid for flights, accommodation for parent and child, hire car, it all adds up," said Southern Gun. "Sponsorship would go a long way towards getting these juniors to more shoots."

Victorian Tom Sawyer, 13, has been shooting for less than a year yet appears an extremely calm character on the firing line. "He's very focused but also relaxed and never in a hurry,"



5

“We wanted to share our passion with her and believe it teaches respect, control and discipline.”

says his dad, Trip Hazzard. An avid reader, Tom chose the alias himself after reading *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, though says he wasn't initially interested to shoot Cowboys but after participating in a few club-level matches got into the swing of things.

Dad Trip has been shooting for 10 years and admits: “I've largely given my kids all the opportunities to shoot but try not to push them into it. I just make sure they know enough to make an informed decision.” Trip says the relationships built through Cowboy shooting add a lot of value to the sport. “Especially for youngsters travelling to shoots and being part of a big event like this,” he said. Tom added: “I like meeting kids my own age and everyone else really, the exhilaration of being on the firing line and seeing yourself improving at a new skill.”

During a big event like the National Championships there are a variety of jobs to be done on the range, so juniors took turns to pick up brass, spot and assist in range resetting during the match. There was also the chance to try their hand at some side matches including a .22 carnival shoot, speed events, Mexican standoff, long-range rifle, the Hickok-Tutt shootout, Texas Star and a very demanding Annie Oakley mirror shoot. And after all that excitement there was a themed dinner each night and plenty of time to relax with their new-found mates.

• *Selected results from the 2023 Australian Single Action Shooting National Championships: First Junior: Bounty Hunter; Buckaroo: 1 Phantom, 2 Mucho Malo, 3 Tom Sawyer; First Buckarettte: Miss Daisy Rose.* •

Young guns bang on target

IT'S ALL IN THE FAMILY

Sarah's a third generation shooter

The reason people get into shooting varies and for Sarah Shelley it was a matter of like father (Colin), like daughter. In fact it goes a further step back to grandfather Jack, making Sarah the third generation of this family to pick up a rifle as a junior.





1

Jack Shelley started his junior shooting experience with his father back in the 1950s and 10 years later would be writing articles for various shooting magazines. By the time Jack was 40 he was heavily involved in the SSAA at a national level.

Regularly shooting at Tynong before moving to Little River, he enjoyed the many opportunities offered by SSAA facilities and staff. With his shooting career extending right through to the mid-1980s, in 1978 he eventually made it into the Benchrest Hall of Fame at number four, the first Victorian to do so and an achievement which goes to show that from a junior level, great success can be achieved.

Heading out the door before the sun was up and with Jack at the wheel, driving to the range at Little River or walking the fields rabbit hunting became an exciting and regular weekend routine for his young son Colin, who joined the SSAA as a junior in 1983 aged 12. That same year he went on to receive a SSAA Silver Medal after shooting a .480” group from a 6mm PPC and, keeping the family involved, the projectile was made by Jack and named the ‘Shelley 70’.

Spending time shooting with family brings parents and children closer together, creating memories which can last a lifetime, not to mention the many friends and colleagues made along the way. So fast-forward to 2022 and young Sarah was the latest member of the Shelley family to be introduced to the shooting sports. Following a couple of Covid-enforced indoor years she felt a need to be more involved in outdoor activities and, now aged 13, has started her shooting adventure in earnest.

It began one Saturday afternoon with a visit to a

SSAA range with dad Colin, Sarah understandably apprehensive as her normal pastime is ballet, so this really was something different. Upon arrival, people were very welcoming and the task of registering was a seamless one. Next step was the safety briefing which also went smoothly and led to her obtaining a .22LR firearm and heading for the mats, under cover and facing the 50m range.

With a green light on, the range was closed to shooting so off went Sarah with target in hand to walk the 50 metres of grass and affix it to a frame. With instructions provided, lights, painted yellow lines and loudspeakers, it was a very clear and safe environment and for newcomers aged 12 and over, this is an ideal introduction to shooting. For parents it’s reassuring to know the SSAA has the facilities and staff to offer a sport which can involve the whole family.

The light changed to red and the range was now open. Lying prone, the process was to load her five-shot magazine and install it in the rifle, look through the scope to sight the target, remove a yellow safety flag from the action, push the bolt forward and engage the first round. It wasn’t long before that process felt comfortable and somewhat familiar to Sarah who, after shooting for more than an hour and firing in excess of 50 rounds, produced some great initial groups of less than an inch.

With the same enthusiasm her dad felt in those early days going with his father to hunt rabbits or shoot targets, Sarah has returned to the range multiple times and continues to improve. Getting into a comfortable position, feeling the breeze on your cheek and adjusting that squeeze of the trigger are just a few of the small things which can help make your shooting skills and experience all the more enjoyable.

Using those skills passed down

2

- 1 | One of Sarah’s targets with a .22 rifle at 50m.
- 2 | At SSAA Springvale range collecting a .22 rifle.



from Jack to Colin and now to Sarah as a junior, she says: “If you can see a blade of grass through the scope near the target, watch and wait for the wind to drop and use this as a guide. I love it because it’s fun and exciting, challenging myself to do better and spending time with dad. Pa used to enjoy shooting so it’s nice to continue.”

Now hooked on the shooting sports and upholding a family tradition of 70 years, Sarah has obtained her junior shooter’s licence and is also a junior member of the SSAA, which itself celebrated its 75th anniversary last year.

In the ongoing quest for accuracy any shooter new to the sport is going to want their own rifle, which can be a daunting task given the amount of choice out there, not to mention the endless online information. For Sarah, with help from her dad and drawing on advice and expertise at the local gun shop, they found a rifle she can use with confidence in a recently introduced CZ457 .22LR fitted with a Meopta 4-20x44 scope. This combination is comfortable and easy to use, the rifle a mid-priced and well-known brand with an equally reliable scope.

For a junior, using a firearm also provides the opportunity to accept responsibility. Looking after such an investment, handling it correctly, cleaning and storage are all lessons to be learned and, for many junior shooters, a firearm will be the first

valuable item they’ve had to care for (under adult supervision of course). Now storing this investment safely to meet legal requirements is something to consider and for Sarah and her dad, they chose the easy option of hiring a safe at their local SSAA range. Given most of their shooting will take place there, it means no need to transport the firearm in a vehicle and it’s there when they need it.

For youngsters new to shooting, the SSAA offers a youth training scheme and this is something Sarah, who now visits the range more and more, has been involved in from her first day. Each time she visits, she checks in with training officials who take her through a safety demonstration to ensure she knows exactly what to expect on any given day. Coaches have recently introduced her to three-positional shooting which she’s enjoying as a new challenge and has embraced it as a substantial learning curve.

So third-generation shooter Sarah has already produced some impressive targets and maybe 10 years of ballet have given her a heightened sense of balance and concentration. It seems certain she’ll carry on this family’s tradition and shooting legacy and hopefully pass it on for generations to come. ●





- 3 | Sarah's late grandfather Jack out in the field.
- 4 | Granddad Jack during his hunting days.
- 5 | Sarah's dad Colin rabbit hunting aged 16.
- 6 | Learning the ropes at the Springvale youth training scheme.
- 7 | Sarah in her ballet costume.
- 8 | Expert tuition at the SSAA Springvale range.
- 9 | The seated round of the three-positional discipline.

COMPETITION

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