

The Australian Junior SHOOTER

An introduction for Junior Shooters

Issue 28

SISTER ACT

Siblings spread the shooting message

Win!

Winchester
Prize Pack

FIT FOR PURPOSE

Advice on why gun
comfort is crucial

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Editorial

As family activities go, shooting is up there with the best of them and our cover story is proof-positive that this great sport is one which can be enjoyed by every member of the household. Sisters Nicolene and Talita from Western Australia are still in their early teens but have been shooting with their parents for years and are keen to spread the message of what a great bonding exercise it is.

Nicolene told us: "Shooting teaches you a whole new tool set you don't see in more mainstream sports and the great thing is you don't need to be strong or athletic to enjoy this sport." Both girls enjoy range time with their parents and also benefit from the experience of older shooters at their Perth club.

And talking of learning from experienced shooters, our National Coaching and Membership Development Manager Gemma Dunn has contributed a highly useful article about the importance of 'gun fit'. Shooting to the best of your ability makes the sport all the more enjoyable and Gemma offers a handful of useful tips on how to make your rifle or shotgun an extension of your body to achieve maximum accuracy.

The eldest son of regular contributor Mark van den Boogaart is in the process of making the transition from being an interested onlooker to a fully hands-on hunter and Mark has outlined how the pair took their first fallow deer together during a hunt in a Tamworth forest. The youngster has accompanied his dad on more than a few hunts but this time round was right in thick of the action as a couple of deer were taken for the freezer during a long weekend away.

While we're on the subject of hunting, take a look at the exploits of 12-year-old Daniel Stewart who has also been hunting with his dad and put paid to a feral goat on a rural property near St George in Queensland. Not only that, the young sharpshooter also accounted for a couple of rabbits during a productive night's spotlighting. Well done Daniel!

So welcome to *Australian Junior Shooter* Issue 28. Please enjoy and, as ever, if you have anything shooting-related which would appeal to our younger readers then drop us an email at edit@ssaa.org.au

Contribute to *Australian Junior Shooter*

If you or someone you know has a junior related story to tell or would like us to tell it for them, email us at edit@ssaa.org.au and let's put the wheels in motion.

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Talita and Nicolene with trophies and medals from last year's WA Practical Hunting Rifle State Championships. Nicolene won all three junior divisions with her sister runner-up.

Trigger sisters!

Shooting siblings spreading the message, writes **Todd Hutchison**

Shooting is a unique sport in which youngsters can visit SSAA clubs to compete with people of all ages in a safe and supportive environment. Junior shooters often start with an air rifle or rimfire rifle and progress to larger calibre firearms over time and this was the exact pathway taken by sisters Nicolene (15) and Talita (13), both medallists and members of Perth Rifle Metallic Silhouette Club (PRMSC) in Western Australia.

The sisters were introduced to the shooting sports by their parents, Tobie and Riki, and started shooting balloons using an air rifle before progressing to a 22LR rimfire. Using balloons made their introduction to firearms a fun, memorable and enjoyable experience due to the immediate gratification associated with a well-aimed shot and both have fond recollections of seeing how many balloons they could pop. Today they use a .223 Remington rifle for club competitions in the discipline of Practical Hunting Rifle. Said Nicolene:

“Shooting teaches you a whole new tool set you don’t see in more mainstream sports and the great thing is you don’t need to be strong or athletic to enjoy this sport.”

Starting your shooting journey with air or rimfire rifles before progressing to centrefire rifles will avoid picking up bad habits like the dreaded ‘trigger flinch’ due to the gun’s recoil, ensuring the young shooter has first learned how to handle the firearm confidently, safely and securely before any significant movement is experienced.

The girls also say their father’s mentorship helped them become more comfortable with firearms, particularly as parents are a trusted adult figure, Talita also acknowledging the benefits of having an older sister involved. She said: “I’m sure a lot more girls would get into this sport if there were more female role models. I really enjoy it because it’s outdoors and isn’t physically demanding but is still exciting and a lot of fun.”

Trigger sisters

Tobie and Riki grew up in South Africa where firearms are far more commonplace and were surprised with their limited exposure for children in Australia. Mum Riki has taken a conscious step back from attending club competition days to enhance that special father and daughter time for the girls. Watching the sisters on the range, the benefits of mentoring from Tobie builds that father-daughter bond, reinforces the safety principles and helps them develop good technique through direct feedback. Tobie is a champion himself and even had rifle supports built at home to mimic those used in the Practical Hunting Rifle discipline so his girls can learn how to shoot with stability from standing, kneeling and prone positions.

The shooting sports are a rare breed in that competitions can feature multiple generations with grandparents and grandchildren competing together for the complete family experience. It has no gender or age limits and is ideal for parents and children to bond with each other, having fun while still enjoying that competitive element.

Shooting refines focus and concentration capabilities, improves hand-eye coordination, teaches discipline and responsibility, introduces rules and governance and can boost self-esteem and confidence. It introduces young people to the idea of being able to challenge themselves to improve their scores, receive immediate feedback on results and all while learning how to compete with others.

Exposure to firearms most commonly comes via family members although the Australian Defence Cadet

organisations allow youths aged 13 and upwards to enjoy their first taste of shooting. SSAA clubs also provide various options to access different types of firearms with trained Range Officers, who are licensed and experienced shooters themselves, reinforcing safe practices.

As a mainly outdoor sport it encourages teenagers to take a break from social media and enjoy nature without the need to be physically strong or athletic. Basically it allows all ages, genders, abilities and people of diverse cultures and backgrounds to come together and compete. Nicolene and Talita know the sport would benefit from an increase in the number of junior shooters who can become role models to others and both are grateful for the strong friendships they've forged since entering the shooting arena. Said Talita: "To become a better shot you have to take advice from more experienced shooters. I'd suggest going to a club and finding someone to mentor you."

At their Perth club other shooters enjoy having the girls involved and take an active part in their supplementary coaching, both acknowledging the benefit of taking advice from experienced shooters which builds on their father's mentoring. Having their parents involved in the sport makes it easy to participate in competitions and the sisters enjoy promoting club days for other youngsters to come along and try their hand.

They understand how shooting has helped them in their everyday lives and allowed them to develop wider skills including how to adapt to different situations, critical



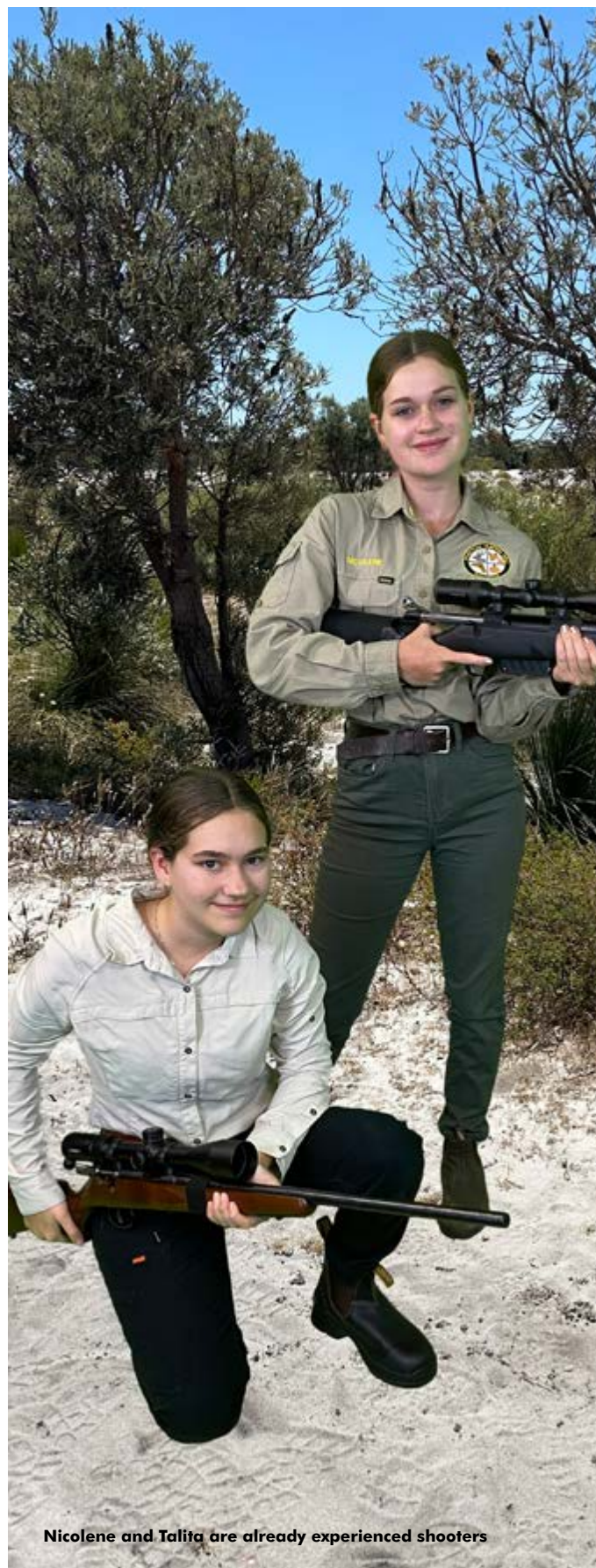


The girls help out at the range by timing.

thinking, applying what they've learned to improve and compete with themselves and others, which has been a driver behind the girls' efforts to challenge each other's scores and aspire to dad's results. This has led to them winning junior medals and being recognised for their skills which presented the opportunity to take part in state championships. When it comes to competing at club level the sisters more than hold their own which reaffirms the fact that shooting skills can come at any age.

Yet young lives need balance and shooting is only one of the activities the girls are involved in. Nicolene was recently promoted to the rank of sergeant in the Australian Army Cadets and has aspirations to become a Cadet Under Officer and perhaps pursue an adult career as an officer in the Australian Army, all of which has given her exposure to military-type firearms. She said: "Cadets is a great way for young people to gain safe exposure to firearms." Talita plans to follow in her sisters footsteps though longer-term hopes to forge a career in medicine and sees shooting as a likely ongoing sporting activity.

So as we can see, the shooting sports provide youngsters with a great way to develop and improve their communication skills as they compete and converse with adults and other juniors. Why not encourage someone you know to accompany you to your local SSAA club and find a shooting disciple which interests them. It will open up many opportunities for growth and could just be a life-changing experience. ●



Nicolene and Talita are already experienced shooters



Hands-on Hunter

Mark van den Boogaart's son makes the transition from onlooker

If my eldest son's affection for Kiwi-made camo is anything to go by he's going to be a hunter. Apart from the clothing, our annual father and son winter fallow hunt is a constant topic of dinnertime conversation, having assumed the mantle of family tradition. All this talk even pricked the curiosity of my youngest, whose earlier refusal to join us is slowly changing. Since 2019 our winter hunt has taken place on a private block full of fallow deer and feral pigs and also sports a comfortable cabin. But circumstances change so we needed a new option.

It was decided we'd try a forest hunt about an hour east of Tamworth for both a new location and amenity with a fresh approach needed. As we'd be camping in winter and the forecast was for the chance of snow, we had to be prepared and luckily along for the ride was the adult crew of Tim, Darcy and Simon. We've been hunting together for more

than 12 years, sharing countless good times and after a couple of phone calls had all the necessary gear sorted and split across three vehicles.

The six-hour drive from Brisbane was uneventful and filling up at Walcha we grabbed 60 extra litres of diesel as a shared reserve. An hour later we hit the forest boundary and travelled along the forestry roads to our campsite and while we'd noticed the temperature drop on our way south, the forest still seemed cold and was also wet from heavy fog and drizzle.

With our tents up and protected by a secondary tarp we made the kitchen area ready, again using tarps to create a shared dry area. My son was fully kitted in cold weather gear, including some well-designed hunting gumboots from Spika, those Bruzer boots so good he wore them the entire five days. He also sported a blaze orange vest and beanie

Thickening fog rolls in.



so was safe, warm and visible. While the new location represented a shift from previous experiences, so did our approach as this would be the first year my son carried his own pack containing food, water, Pokémon cards and a *Dog Man* book. He also had his own binoculars (Aldi specials). Hunting is a learning process and for my son this time I was helping him begin the transition from just being there to being part of things. The first afternoon gave us some understanding of our location and while we didn't see any game, sign was ever-present.

Up at 6am next day it was dark. Joining my son and I was Simon and we'd planned to walk a few tracks to the east on the forestry road. It was cold and muddy so we took care parking the truck, hardly wanting to be bogged down before we started. Moving on, Simon took the lead while we followed, leaving the track and cutting across an open paddock



where again the sign was everywhere but game had yet to present.

We eventually contoured down into what looked like a piggie valley with a dam, wallows and lots of flat ground. We glassed it for a while before slowly heading back to our starting point. Along the way Simon went down heavily in slippery conditions and on regaining his feet checked the rifle and saw the barrel of his .450 Bushmaster had sucked up a lot of red clay mud. He was out of action until we returned to camp.

About 11am thick fog rolled in, visibility dropped to about 30m and if there was game about it was going to be hard to spot. Slowly the fog began to ebb and flow like a strange mountain tide, sometimes clear, sometimes closed out and on cutting through some pines our luck changed as a young fallow deer broke cover. With Simon sidelined I shouldered

Hands-on hunter

and watched the deer pull up at about 50m, a perfect meat animal which I dropped on the spot. As a smaller specimen it was an easy carry out and, since we were close to the truck, we took the lot with the intention of processing it closer to camp. It was a great way to end our first day and driving back my son retold the shot over and over while Simon contemplated how best to clean that barrel.

I awoke before dawn to a drier, clearer, colder sky and with the rest of the camp asleep took the opportunity to do a little unarmed scouting with a thermal scope. I wanted to check out a recently cleared area to see if it was drawing game. All around me in the dark were kangaroos, wallabies and a timid rabbit and after 30 minutes I headed back to camp, deciding that for the morning it was going to be a father and son only hunt. With that we left the others to their plans and headed to another part of the forest.

To gain access we had to firstly go beyond the existing boundary along greasy farm roads. It was safe though slow going and arriving at our new location we pulled out the map, as when hunting with my son I look for contours, the wider the better. That doesn't always translate into the best game country but does mean we can enjoy our time together without pushing too hard. What followed was a two-hour walk through scrub, along some tracks and game

trails where we spotted plenty of native animals.

We circled back to the truck and about 200m out I noticed movement through the trees. As I pulled level with my son I spotted a small deer acting as if it wanted a lift. I grabbed my son's shoulder, turned and mouthed "deer", pointed it out and told him to put on his hearing protection and stay put. I moved slowly down the track, the deer so close I caught glimpses of it through the window as I approached from the driver's side. Nearing the rear of the vehicle I sensed rather than saw the deer. I was ready and stepped out as it bolted away from the truck and at about 20m started to bounce as they sometimes do. It continued before turning broadside and stopping at about 70m. Boom - second deer down.

I explained to my son where I thought the deer had fallen, told him to keep an eye out and after making the rifle safe I called him up. It was our first game animal together so I quietly savoured the moment. The deer had landed in a position I could drive to so I backed the vehicle in, lowered the tailgate and lifting my son on to the gate we loaded another deer. Two for two - not a bad hunt so far.

The next day dawned pitch black and cold for our last day's hunting and my son and I were heading out with Tim. We returned to the same forest as the previous day though pretty soon it was obvious my son had reached his



An indication of pigs in the vicinity.

endurance limit. I let Tim know we were heading back to the truck and would pick him up at a pre-arranged point.

With the heater on and more food in his belly the youngster found some energy though I suspected it was only momentary. So while the others spent the day in search of game we stayed close to camp and after a midday nap headed out for a short walk where we tracked, though never got close enough to a good-sized pig. That last walk was enough to bring back the sleepy eyes so after an early dinner I sent him to bed.

Next day we hit the road about 8am and arriving back at Walcha, changed into some clean clothes, fuelled up and were on our way. We learned the rain we'd managed to avoid had caused significant flooding further south and also discovered that home had experienced one of its coldest days on record. My boy had experienced his first hands-on hunt and we look forward to continuing the transition. ●



The camp put together by our hunting party.

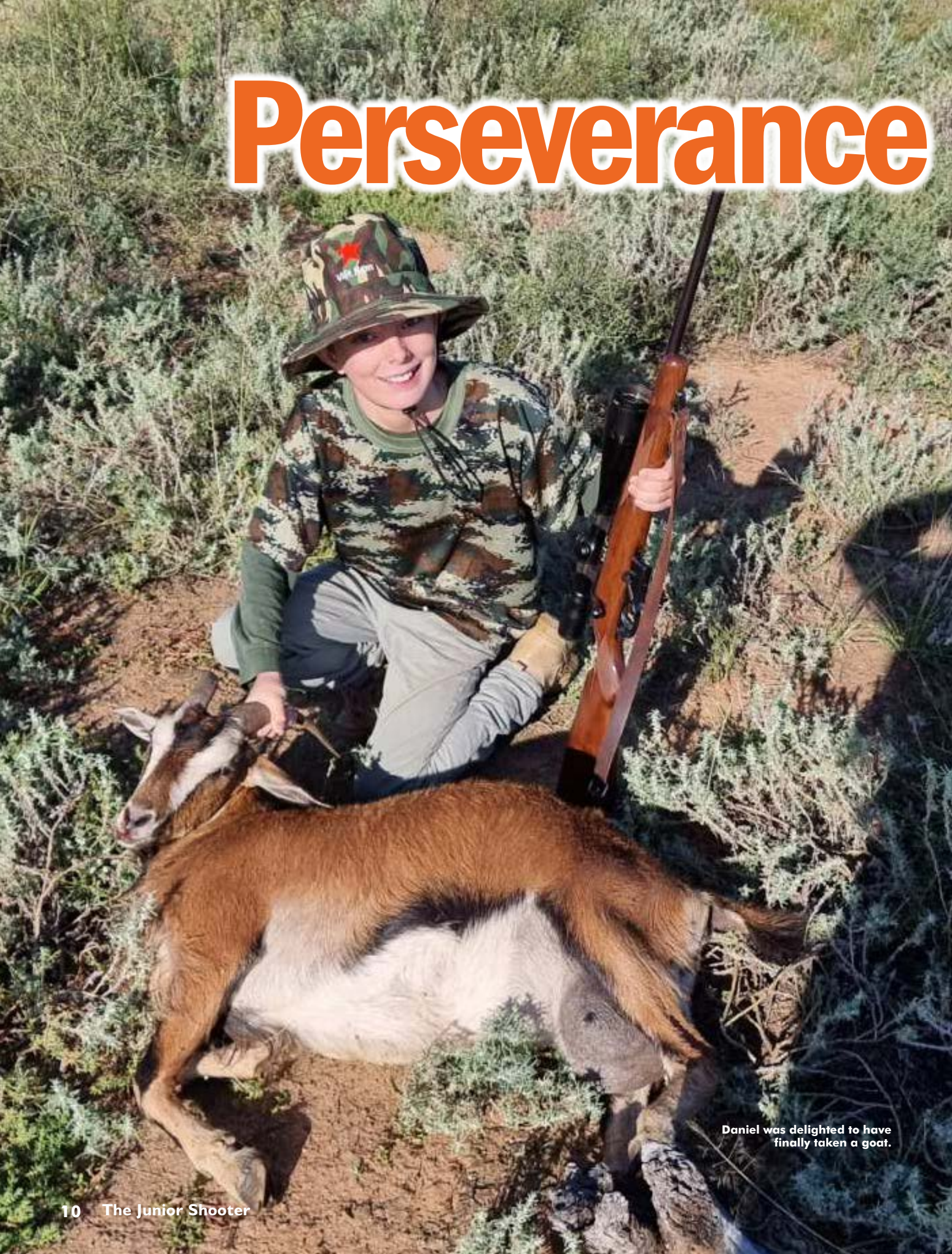


You're now entering wombat territory



In search of wombats.

Perseverance



Daniel was delighted to have finally taken a goat.

pays off

Daniel Stewart (age 12)

A couple of years ago my father and I visited a property near St George in Queensland for what turned out to be a thrilling experience, so when the owner invited us back we jumped at the chance. It was a 5½-hour journey and on arrival we were greeted by the farm dogs which had all grown since the last time we saw them. We settled in then went for a ride on the owner's new boat when I spotted a fox in broad daylight and on returning to base we set out on a scouting mission on the bikes. We didn't see much of interest but did identify a few good places to try later in the day and the following morning.

We were up early next day and headed off in the ute, checking out some silos and the old shearers' quarters for any sign of animals. There was plenty of birdlife around the silos and dad reckoned we should check later for foxes or feral cats. When we got back we jumped on the quad bikes and went to one of the scouted paddocks from the day before, me with dad's CZ .222 and him with his .44 Magnum Marlin lever-action and on the way out saw a pile of feathers on the ground which confirmed our suspicions of foxes and cats being active on the property.

After dinner we decided to try our luck at spotlighting and before too long saw two rabbits so we closed in on them until I had a perfect shot with my .22LR. I took up position on the window rest and on firing the bunny flopped backwards - success! One of the reasons I was hunting was actually to replace a rabbit's foot my dog had eaten. We kept driving and on heading up the next hill spotted a pair of green eyes - cat's eyes - just a glimpse but by the time we moved closer the predator had gone. Passing the spot where I'd taken the rabbit, his buddy had reappeared and while the shot was a bit trickier than the first I still managed to drop him.



A first rabbit taken during a spotlighting hunt.

Perseverance pays off

As dawn broke on the third day we decided not to try our luck in the morning and instead focus our energy on bagging a goat to take home. Again using the bikes we headed for the paddock where the farmer reckoned they'd be and, sure enough, there they were in the middle of the field just watching us. I unbuckled the .222 and moved closer but as I took the shot the goat I was aiming at sped off along with his mates - you can't win them all.

On our last day I had only one mission and that was to shoot a goat which the farmer had given us permission to do, but only one. During breakfast I gave myself a pep-talk to convince myself I was going to succeed this time, then dad and I returned to the paddock where they'd been the previous day. The funny thing about hunting is that when you're not looking for a specific animal it will often present itself yet when you're actively searching for, in my case a goat, they're nowhere to be seen.

We scanned the entire paddock and saw nothing but swamp and the occasional quail until we turned to head for home when I spotted something ahead of us. I asked dad on the radio: "What's that at 10 o'clock?" He stood up to check then signalled me to cut the engine. Those were goats and this time I was going to take one. We had to reposition a few times to line up a decent shot and then we had it, a tree with a fork and a good broadside of a mature nanny. This was my chance.

The only problem was the tree was a box thorn and I had to move as close as possible but I was determined this time and squeezed off a shot. The goat was hit, I knew that much, and only made another couple of metres before succumbing. We did a quick field butchering before loading it on the quad and heading for home where mum was delighted I brought some tasty goat meat for the freezer. ●



Two rabbits in one night was a pleasant surprise.



Make it your own

Never underestimate the importance of proper gun fit, advises **Gemma Dunn**

Since I first tried out this great sport of shooting I've gone on to represent Australia at Junior and Senior World Cups, enjoy many different disciplines of shotgun and rifle and ensuring correct gun fit was one of the most crucial elements to improving and enjoying my time on the range. My dad and I shared his first shotgun to compete with but, after speaking with a former Olympian on the range one day, we realised it wasn't going to work for long - he was much larger and stronger than I was and the gun didn't fit me at all.

So we bought a much lighter shotgun for me, a Beretta Silver Pigeon, I visited a stock-maker to have it fitted properly and went on to win my first National Championship. Gun fit is important for young shooters, the main reason being it allows you to be the best shot you can and enables you to do it comfortably and effortlessly.

Unlike men most 'off the shelf' guns don't suit the build of

a youngster or woman, meaning a potentially expensive visit to a stock-maker to have it properly 'fitted'. Stock-makers are craftsmen who can alter all the 'touch-points' listed on a gun to suit an individual shooter. Overall there's no magical formula - we're all built differently, meaning our guns must be built differently too. Before continuing I'll explain some of the critical measurements, why they're so important for proper gun fit and how to modify them.

Length of pull: This is the distance from the trigger to the centre of a gun's butt/recoil pad (if a gun has two triggers it's measured from the front one). LOP will affect gun mount and how you shoot. Ideally for a shotgun your nose should be between 1¼" to 2" from where your thumb knuckle meets your trigger finger hand.

If shooting a rifle with a mounted scope you do have a little room to move if your scope is mounted correctly but

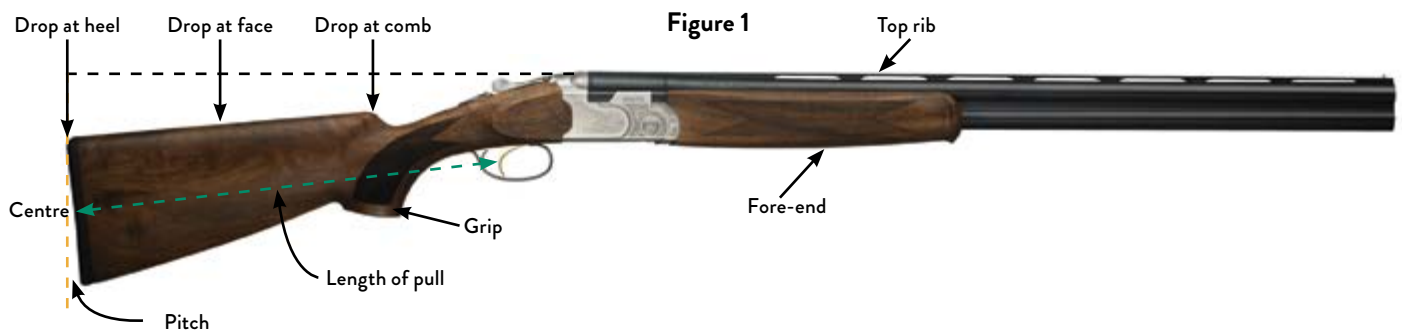
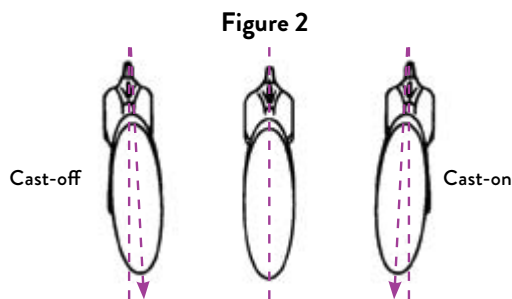
Make it your own

make sure there's enough space between face and scope (known as eye-relief) particularly for rifles with a fair bit of recoil. This is so you have full use of your scope and it won't hit you in the face when the gun 'kicks'.

Pitch: This is the angle of the butt/recoil pad in relation to the barrels and when shooting, you want to connect with as much surface of the butt as possible to be comfortable and avoid the gun 'jumping' with recoil. The angle of the butt will affect how high or low the gun shoots as well as the amount of recoil felt, especially at the face.

Pitch and cast (see below) work together here as with the proper combination you'll have a far more comfortable stance which helps combat things such as canting the barrels, inconsistent gun mount and excessive cheek-slap.

Cast: This is when a stock is bent slightly left or right of the barrel-line. Cast lets the gun sit into the shoulder pocket while allowing the shooter's eye to align with the sights (Figure 2). Many guns are 'cast-off', meaning they bend slightly to the right and while you can order guns with a left-handed cast (cast-on), it's more common for them to be cast-off to cater to the wider right-handed market. Changing the cast on a gun can be difficult so it's important to know when buying a firearm it's right for you.



Drop at comb: This is the distance between the front of the stock's comb and top 'rib' of the gun's barrel(s). Off-the-shelf guns generally have combs too low for young female shooters (Figure 1) as they tend to have longer necks and higher cheekbones than the average male, resulting in many lifting their head off the gun to acquire the target and this won't help your shooting performance. There are a few ways to fix this without visiting a stock-maker though a more suitable alternative might be to have an adjustable comb fitted.

Grip: The size, angle and type of grip on a gun will affect LOP and angle of a shooter's wrist. The average junior's smaller hand stipulates the grip be narrower for better comfort and control. For shotgun and rifle shooters, this not only applies to grip on the stock but on the fore-end too. There are many types of grip to choose from and the one on my shotgun is made exactly to fit my hand, something which is becoming more popular. A grip choice is personal and the best is the one which puts your trigger finger in proper correlation to the trigger.

All these touch points can be changed by seeing a professional stock-maker to ensure your gun fits you correctly. Yet these points aren't the entirety of a correctly fitted gun as weight and balance also play an important role, something a coach, friend or stock-maker can give suggestions on. Perfection comes from a shooter's desire to be adept with their gun and this only comes from consistency. Your gun must become an extension of your body and positioning it correctly each time has to be muscle memory and only a correctly fitting gun allows that.

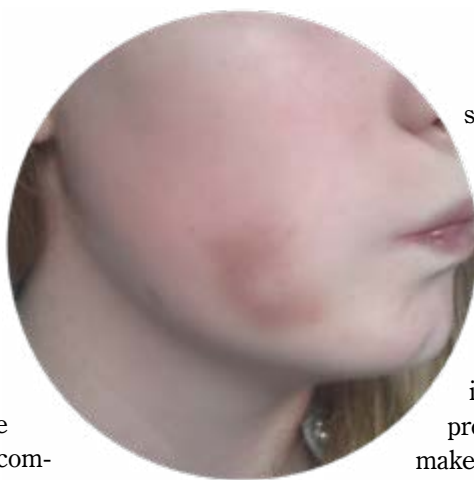
I have an EvoComp stock on my shotgun, a fully modular one which allows me to make alterations quickly without having to cut the wooden stock it came with. This was ideal for me as I was competing regularly during my teenage years when body changes occur on an ongoing basis.



The fully modular EvoComp stock.

But be aware they're very pricy though this is just another example of how important gun fit is.

And don't think you only have to consider gun fit once and never look at it again. It's something you should check on after every major change in your physicality or an extended break from shooting. This was brought home to me when I picked up my shotgun for the first time in 18 months to shoot in a state competition. After just 25 targets I began to develop a



soreness in my cheek and by the end of the first day I'd a swollen face and was developing a nasty bruise.

With two more days and another 125 targets to go this was far from ideal and it became clear my gun didn't fit me properly any more. All it took to correct the issue was changing the pitch by just 2mm which again proves even the smallest difference can make the biggest impact and it's all about the fit. ●

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Gemma in demand!

Hi Gemma, I just read your Top 10 tips for young shooters and while I'm not so young any more I found them so helpful. I shot Field and Game on a regular basis 10 years ago then for some reason I stopped but fast-forward to now and I've just started SSAA shooting again with my dear dad and brother and am truly loving it.

Not surprisingly I lost a lot of skills during 10 years of not shooting but this sport has always been my passion as I grew up surrounded by shooters. So thank you from an old girl who's getting back into it again and if you could send me your template to record my progression that would be great. Thanks again for a truly helpful article.

Belinda Baker, via email

• I wanted to get in touch with Gemma Dunn regarding some 22LR Benchrest shooting lessons. I read her 'Master the Basics' article in *Australian Junior Shooter* Issue 27 and that's exactly what I'd love to do. I'm actually a tennis coach but don't know where to get started in shooting. Any help appreciated.

Michael Kwong, via email

• These are just a couple of numerous emails we received after Gemma's article in our last edition. If you'd like a copy of her journal template, email her at aws@ssaa.org.au and she'll send it on. Gemma Dunn is the SSAA National Coaching and Membership Development Manager.

Juniors-only competition

Only junior SSAA members are eligible to enter. One entry per member. To enter, simply write your name, address and membership number on a piece of paper and mail it to us at:

April 2023 Junior competition
SSAA National
PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061

or enter online at ssaa.org.au/win

Competition closes April 30th 2023



Winchester Prize Pack.

- Winchester W Hoodie Small
- Decibullz Custom Molded Earplugs Green
- Winchester Sports Bag Black / Grey
- Winchester Lunch Bag
- White Flyer Flat Brim Flex Fit Trucker M

Valued at
\$259.75

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Sign up a JUNIOR

SSAA National's 'Sign up a Junior' campaign was launched to help introduce youngsters to recreational shooting. Juniors are essential to the ongoing strength and vitality of the SSAA and we are seeking your support to protect and ensure the future of the shooting sports in Australia.

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