

The Australian Junior **SHOOTER**

An introduction for Junior and Youth Hunters

Issue 29

CALL OF THE WILD

One young hunter's
season to remember

Win!

Winchester
Prize Pack

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TOP GUN!

Queensland teen a
star in the making

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Editorial

The vitality and determination of youth is something to be admired and that's exactly what our cover story is all about this time round. Young Carl Redlich loves his outdoor pursuits though unfortunately, with all contact sports comes the risk of doing some damage. The Queensland teenager suffered a major blow during his rugby club's Grand Final last year when, with only 45 seconds on the clock, he was carried off with a serious knee injury.

That meant a spell in hospital followed by the rehab which inevitably comes with such a setback but, undeterred, he pushed on through the pain barrier and before too long was back pursuing his other passion of hunting with his dad and proving that determination will always triumph in the end.

Carl's patience paid off as he regained his fitness and took to the outdoors again during this year's red deer 'roar' and, as can be seen from the photographs which accompany the article, has lost none of his hunting expertise. All of which goes to show that with determination and a positive mindset you can overcome adversity no matter what life throws at you.

Elsewhere in this edition, Thomas Tabor has turned his attention to a firearm which will prove ideal for youngsters starting out in this great sport. The Ruger American 8331

chambered in 22LR is a fine rimfire option particularly suited to junior shooters and Thomas reckons as an entry-level rifle this one's hard to beat.

Benchrest shooting at the highest level is one of the toughest skills to master yet at just 17 years of age, Josh Russell from Queensland is well on his way to joining Australia's elite after proving he has what it takes to become one of the discipline's stars of the future.

We know shooting is an all-inclusive sport, yet visiting a firing range for the first time can be a daunting experience so it's important to know what to expect. To that end, we have called on the experienced Gemma Dunn to outline what's what at the range and how you can best prepare for that initial visit.

And when it comes to pursuing deer, 14-year-old Ryder Creeke has set the benchmark pretty high for the rest of his hunting career with an impressive fallow stag at the first time of asking. Ryder, as part of a hunting party which included dad Brett, took the big stag during the Snowy Mountains rut and will be hard pushed to find a better one anywhere else.

So thanks for joining us in *Australian Junior Shooter* Issue 29. Please enjoy and, as ever, if you have anything shooting-related which would appeal to our younger readers, get in touch via 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.

Staff: Editor Allan Blane, Assistant Editor Dave Rose, Art Director Mike Barr, Production Coordinator & Graphic Designer Alex Heptinstall, Advertising Representative Karoline Wasiak, Communications Officer Rachael Oxborrow, Administration Debbie Wing, Trudy Sheffield.

Contributors: Chris Redlich, Thomas Tabor, Brendan Atkinson, Gemma Dunn.

Mail: PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061

Web: www.ssaa.org.au


Email: edit@ssaa.org.au

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Carl checks a recent tree rub.

Field of dreams

Chris Redlich documents a junior's season to remember

Their Grand Final had kicked off and 45 seconds later my son Carl's footy season was over as he took the second carry for his team and was met by a brick wall of defence. At first he appeared to have suffered a 'cork' but after numerous attempts by first-aid officers to have him back on the field, we realised this was more than a bump to the thigh. A large swelling on his right knee indicated something more sinister - more than a sideline repair - and subsequent scans confirmed this after a trip to Brisbane to see a surgeon.

After starting the year well in February with a finals win in the AV Cup at Charleville, his U16s team had what it took to go all the way for the rest of the regular season, finishing on top and ultimately clinching their second Premiership

in a row. Yet for Carl, his footy campaign ended with mixed emotions as recovery from the knee injury would see him laid up for almost four months and, importantly, another season on the horizon was our annual red deer roar. Carl had accompanied me on numerous trips in his younger days but this time dad would take a back seat and observe.

Back on the same patch as last year's roar, we quietly absorbed the sunrise as it filtered through a canopy of trees. A cool mountain breeze was in our favour and we knew it was an ideal day to be deer hunting and a great day to be back in the bush. Guided by knowledge drawn from our previous years' experience and boosted by fresh wallow activity, we descended from the tops to an area which has yielded previous successes.



Upon reflection, when my passion for red stag hunting was born almost two decades ago I'd always heeded the advice given to me by a seasoned deer hunter: "Stick to the top third of the hill during the roar and there you'll find 'em." I passed this knowledge on to Carl and he has also used it wisely. Our hunting property is mountainous with limited open country, so it sets the scene for a physical challenge and one he's familiar with and keen to embrace. Every metre dropping closer to sea level felt as if the temperature increased by half a degree but as the thermals rose, with them came the intermittent 'waft' of rutting red stags.

Distant love-stricken stag roars could be heard and Carl closed in on their calls, though oddly the area we'd descended to was almost devoid of deer activity as a blinding headache forced Carl to make the decision to climb back to the top. After a rest break and a bite to eat, a roar from where we'd just come from caught his attention, reigniting his enthusiasm as that headache disappeared.

Back towards the roar we descended as the appearance of a young stag took us by surprise and the hinds in close



proximity threatened our position. Needless to say Carl's interest was fired up now though he didn't take the shot - and just as well! Not far behind the commotion came a stag of greater status, roaring and chasing a hind as his dark hide blended beautifully with the surroundings. Now at 50m with another roar and one step closer, Carl raised his Sauer rifle in 6.5 Creedmoor and fired at the stag's shoulder. A resounding thud and

leap indicated a solid hit as the big fella tumbled down one of the steepest gullies on the block and thankfully came to rest against a tree. Any further and all 180kg of mature stag would've been lost to the prickly lantana.

A proud young hunter eagerly clambered down to his prize. That split-second decision to pull the trigger showed a heightened maturity and judgment by the 16-year-old resulting in an impressive bush stag lying at his feet, a glance in my direction met with a big grin which translated to 'proud dad'. The low pedicles and large coronets indicated the stag's seniority and a broken bez showed he'd fought hard for his territory.

High-fives and hugs sealed the deal and we sat momentarily to enjoy the peace before our obligatory photo session. The bush stag's antlers seem worlds away from a 19th century aristocrat's mount, but for a youngster who'd just successfully harnessed all his junior knowledge, the old monarch was a trophy worthy of regal status and one which received the utmost respect.

The day was warming and we'd a lot of work to do before breakfast, so we began the difficult job of skinning and removing the head for a shoulder mount. If anyone would be carrying out the trophy it wasn't going to be me as Carl tested himself in a painstaking 45-minute hike to the top. His pre-season fitness training had paid off both on the pitch and out field-hunting. The ute was a welcome sight and, now loaded with our hard-won cargo, we inched our way in low gear back to camp.

Without the luxury of a cold room it's important not to waste time in removing the cape skin from the deer. After years of observation, Carl was keen to test his knife skills and with my assistance we made each meticulous cut. As with any stag, removing the skin from the coronets can be tricky but with the aid of a flat-blade screwdriver and hammer, we tapped and parted free the skin from bone. The scarred cape showed signs of fighting but, left in its original



The old bush stag where it came to rest.



form, would add to the character of the old fella after taxidermy. The cape was chilled and packed into our fridge for preservation before a welcome rest.

Another couple of hunts over the next 24 hours saw my wife Sue-Ann, Carl and myself explore different parts of the property and while unsuccessful, we enjoyed our time in the bush. Unaware it would be our last for the trip, an afternoon hunt to a higher part of the block was planned while Sue-Ann stayed in camp. As we ascended from the valley floor in a different direction to our earlier hunt, it was evident deer had been active as fresh stag and hind pellets littered the ground.

As we gained elevation, phone reception kicked in and gave us a chance to check the weather report as the sky darkened. Our hunting patch consists of steep access tracks and even an inch of rain could see us camp-stricken for days. Not a bad alternative if it wasn't for the busy work schedule beckoning, so armed with sound advice we packed up under light rain and headed for home. As disappointing as it was at the time, the heavens soon opened and had we stayed we'd have needed a lifeboat!

Carl's hunt had been a success and as proud parents we'd shared in the moment. With a little help from his mates he cleaned the skull and antlers in preparation for the trip to

Down Under Taxidermy. Although a bit more expensive, he wanted his trophy presented with an open-mouth roar as he felt it would best immortalise that old bush stag from a junior's season to remember. I'm happy to say Carl's knee made a full recovery and his 2023 hunting and footy campaigns are off to a good start. ●



Preparing the skull for taxidermy.

Entry-level best



Tom's granddaughter Isabella enjoys shooting the Muddy Girl on his range.

Thomas Tabor puts the case for the Ruger American .22LR

Unfortunately rifles are all too often sized and accessorised specifically for the needs of adults and overlook the kind of things which are important to young shooters, though not everyone is oblivious to the needs of youth. The engineers at Sturm, Ruger & Co. have given a great deal of thought to correcting this oversight and today, those amended measures can be clearly seen in the company's popular Ruger American series of rifles.

Initially the objective behind the Ruger American was to offer customers a serviceable and reliable rifle at a reasonable price. Over the years this series has grown exponentially to include a wide variety of different style rifles and calibres, while maintaining their original objectives of quality and affordability.

These great rifles are chambered for both rimfire and centrefire cartridges, with the focus of this article being on one fine rimfire rifle particularly suited to junior shooters. That rifle is the model Ruger earmarks as their 8331 and chambered in .22LR. At first sight this Ruger American really caught the eye of my granddaughters, particularly as its stock came wildly coloured in what Ruger calls their 'Muddy Girl Camouflage' pattern, a unique look consisting of a combination of bright pink and grey.

But aside from being attractive and eye-catching, this rifle has plenty of other attributes which help towards good and accurate shooting. Like all the rimfire American series rifles it's equipped with Ruger's trademark 10-shot BX-1 rotary magazine, an extremely reliable design. Having fired many thousands of rounds of .22LR cartridges through these magazines I've never experienced a single malfunction.

The alloy steel of the rifle comes in a satin blued finish which seems the perfect match to its Muddy Girl Camouflage stock. The gun is also equipped with an adjustable rear sight and a highly visible Williams green fibre optic front sight. Precise shot placement using these sights is considerably easier when compared to the more traditional iron sights due to the high visibility of that front sight. And when it comes to long days afield, a sling can be attached to the swivel studs on the stock.

Many shooters prefer to use a riflescope for obvious reasons and in this case you can mount your favourite optic quite easily in a couple of different ways, with the bolt having a 60-degree throw arc which provides ample clearance for a scope. The receiver has been pre-drilled and tapped to accommodate Weaver #12 bases. To allow for the differences in sighting heights between the iron sights and a scope, Ruger has included two interchangeable

Entry-level best

standard-length modules to change the stock comb height. The Ruger American barrel is cold hammer-forged to provide a high degree of longevity and its right hand one-in-16" twist rate six-groove rifling is well suited to stabilising the little .22LR calibre bullet.

Safety features

Of all of the great features one thing I really like about this rifle is its Ruger Marksman adjustable trigger which appears quite similar to Savage Arms' trademark AccuTrigger. In order for the rifle to be fired the tiny release lever directly in front of the trigger has to be compressed, something naturally accomplished as the shooter begins to squeeze off their shot.

In most cases the shooter doesn't even realise the release is being compressed as they take aim and fire the rifle and the benefits of this design are twofold. Firstly it discourages an accidental discharge if the firearm is dropped or heavily bumped, and secondly it allows the trigger to be adjusted to a light pull weight while still remaining safe for field use. Many shooters prefer a light trigger pull, believing it assists with better accuracy, yet when a more traditional-style trigger is adjusted for a light pull it can open the door to an unintentional discharge, where dropping or bumping the rifle could result in the gun firing.

However, this trigger lessens the likelihood or even eliminates that scenario. Essentially it provides you with the best of both worlds - a light trigger pull to encourage better accuracy and considerably greater protection from an unintentional discharge. Ruger states this particular trigger is adjustable from a 3lb (1.3kg) to 5lb (2.2kg) pull weight so, using my own gauge, I checked the weight of pull as it came from the factory and found the five-pull average to be 3lb 7oz and pulls extremely consistent, varying by a mere 8oz.

On the range

Everyone was keen to see how the Ruger American would perform on the range and, as a result, the rifle was passed from hand to hand between my two granddaughters and grandson. In each case the gun functioned superbly, fed cartridges effortlessly, ejected empty cases cleanly and accuracy was excellent, even in the hands of the youngest shooter.

A rifle chambered in .22LR is a great choice for beginners and experienced shooters alike. It's also a wonderful tool for teaching firearms safety and shooting basics in general, before moving on to those more powerful centrefire rifles. And possibly best of all the ammunition is cheap compared to other calibres, so you can do a great deal of shooting without having to ask dad for more ammo-buying dollars. Yet a .22 isn't just for youngsters as many adults enjoy plinking with their rimfire .22s just as much and, as such, it makes for a great family bonding exercise.

The way I see it

The .22LR is one of the best-balanced cartridges ever developed. I received my first .22, a single-shot Remington bolt-action, as a hand-me-down from my older brother and haven't been without one since. Even at my age, well removed from the younger generation, I love hunting and shooting with my .22s and when it comes to small game and varmints, or even informal plinking, they're a great deal of fun. When I head to the Outback, a .22 is seldom far away.

I'm not sure how many .22s now take up residency in my gun safe but it would be at least half a dozen, none of which are adorned with a bright pink Muddy Girl Camo stock, but don't hold that against me. For now, that honour goes to my granddaughter Isabella though who knows, maybe one day I'll muster up enough courage to own one simply because they're so darn pretty! As an entry-level rifle for any aspiring young shooter out there, the Ruger American in .22LR would be hard to beat. ●

Specifications

Manufacturer: Sturm, Ruger & Co.

Model: Ruger American - Muddy Girl Camo

Calibre: .22LR

Weight: 2.7kg (6lb)

Sights: Adjustable notched rear sight and Williams fibre optic green front sight

Action: Bolt

Barrel: 59cm (22")

Overall length: 104cm (41")

Length of pull: 35cm (13.75")

Stock: Synthetic 'Muddy Girl' camo

Magazine: Rotary 10-shot



Young Camden enjoyed shooting his sister's 22.

Isabella checks on her results.



Ryder was impressed
by the stag's antlers.

Easy



A magnificent
specimen to
launch your
career.



Young Ryder was
happy to carry out
the trophy himself.



Ryder!

As **Dave Rose** discovered, this teenager has a promising hunting career

Fourteen-year-old Ryder Creeke has launched his deer hunting career in spectacular fashion. Accompanying his dad Brett and a hunting party on a trek through the mountains, Ryder took an impressive fallow stag to open his account in style. His proud father, who runs an air-conditioning business, was in raptures as his son proved he has the skills to take his hunting potential to the next level, with Ryder even more delighted after seizing his opportunity in the middle of the 'roar'.

Brett is a SSAA member and Ryder, along with 12-year-old Isaac, a relative of Brett's wife, were under expert hunting supervision during their adventure. The party sent out calls in a bid to locate nearby stags and, on receiving a positive response, made haste in their direction. They held station in open territory overlooking a high gully and were surprised by the speed at which events unfolded.

"It felt like it was all over in no time," said Brett, "and with the wind in our favour we just let things happen. The big stag was totally unaware of our presence and presented a nice broadside shot from around 50 metres."

In the end they narrowed the gap even further and the decision was taken to let Ryder have his big chance, as it was felt there would be other opportunities for the rest of the party along the way. "The big guy went down instantly," said Brett. "This was Ryder's first-ever stag and I reckon it's going to be a tough one to beat regardless of how much hunting he does. He was absolutely pumped and ecstatic about how things went." And understandably so.

Ryder's first taste of hunting came a couple of years ago, accompanying his dad on outings in search of rabbits and foxes and now, under Brett's expert eye, he's old enough to experience the real thing. The trip proved a fruitful exercise for the group with a total of four deer taken for the table, including one for young Isaac who also benefitted with advice from the experienced hunters, so the future certainly looks bright for these two young enthusiasts. ●



Awesome foursome: Simon, Ryder, Brett and Paul.



Young Isaac proved he also has what it takes.

Know the ropes

Gemma Dunn offers some shooting range tips for newcomers

As with many new experiences, going to the shooting range for the first time can be intimidating and even a bit scary but if you're prepared and know what to expect, it's a great place to enjoy the shooting sports and meet new people. I know many of you will have already experienced the range for the first time and are wondering what's the point of this article. Well, it's important to know these things for when you invite a friend or family member to try shooting for the first time, so they feel as comfortable as possible and have the best chance of enjoying their time there as much as you do.

The shooting sports weren't part of my family growing up. I'd never seen a firearm as a youngster, let alone held one or used one until my mid-teens, and my first interaction was at a 'come and try' day in Newcastle, NSW. It's safe to say that if my first visit to a shooting range hadn't been as welcoming as it was, I probably wouldn't have pursued shooting as a sport. First impressions really count and every range has their responsibilities for this, as does every visitor.

Friendly advice is always available at the range.

So from experience, I've compiled a list of top tips to help anyone planning their first visit to the range to enjoy their day to the maximum. These tips are in no particular order and are all equally as important.

1. Know the rules

Every range (whether rifle, shotgun or pistol) is slightly different when it comes to rules and commands, so it's a good idea to check out their website or contact them direct and ask for a copy of these prior to your visit. If you don't have the chance to do this, each range will have its rules on display, so make sure you read and understand them before you head out for the fun part.

2. Know the fundamentals of safe gun handling

Every gun is slightly different but there common fundamentals in the safe handling of firearms and it's beneficial to know these before going to the range.

- Treat all firearms as loaded unless you see a chamber flag or have checked yourself.



- Always keep the gun pointed in a safe direction. Downrange is always safest but when carrying your gun around the range it's best to check the rules on whether to point the muzzle down or up. Never point the muzzle forward until you're on the firing line. Once the firearm is loaded you must always point it downrange, never directly at the ground or above you.

- Keep your finger well away from the trigger until you have the target in your gun's sights, the area around the target is clear and you're ready to shoot.

- Be aware of the target you're shooting at and what lies beyond it. Generally when you visit a range, each shooter/bay has a target to themselves so make sure you've identified the correct target before you start shooting.

3. Know who's in charge and who to ask for help

All SSAA ranges have Range Officers (RO) managing the range. Sometimes these are paid staff though most are volunteers who just love shooting and lending a helping hand. Either way, all Range Officers are the commanding personnel and are not only responsible for the safety of all shooters present, they also ensure the range adheres to the law according to their state or territory rules and regulations. If you're unsure of anything the RO is your 'go-to' person and they'll be more than happy to assist if you're having difficulties. If it's your first visit it's always a good idea to introduce yourself to the Range Officer and explain the situation.

4. What to bring

- A firearm: If you have your own, make sure you have the correct travel case for it, ensuring the case meets local state firearms laws. Always have the firearm unloaded before entering the range.

- Ammunition: Bring enough for the session. Some ranges have a store where you can buy more but it's best to bring your own. Check your ammunition type is allowed to be shot at that range and this should be covered in the range rules.

- Safety glasses and hearing protection (PPE): Again, check the range rules for what's required. Often you can buy these on location but I recommend having your own glasses and hearing protection, even though disposable earplugs will do the trick. It's best to source good-quality Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for your own wellbeing and most Range Officers won't let you to shoot without PPE.

- Comfortable clothing: Most ranges will stipulate clothing requirements for your own safety. Make sure you wear items which aren't restrictive or 'bulky'. Ideally you'll have the maximum movement possible as you might be shooting standing, sitting, lying down, moving between stations etc. It's also important to note that while camouflage clothing is helpful when hunting, it has no extra benefit at the range and most don't allow camo gear for safety reasons. And always wear enclosed and substantial shoes.

If you have long hair, tie it back if it's long enough to be in the way as you don't want it blocking your line of sight to the target. Lastly, wear a shirt which doesn't expose too much skin as you may have hot cases ejected from the firearm coming back at you.

5. Clean up

It's important to leave the range the way you found it which means after you're finished cleaning your firearm, clear the shooting bench of all targets, spent brass, used ammo boxes and return benchrests or other range equipment. This is basic etiquette and the RO and shooter who uses the bench or station after you will appreciate it. Lastly, thoroughly wash your face and hands after shooting as this will help remove traces of lead and gunpowder residue. ●



Range Officers are on hand to answer any questions.



Josh prepares for another relay at the Australia Day match in Canberra.

Josh Russell a champion in the making, writes **Brendan Atkinson**

There's something to be said for growing up in a rural setting and being taught to use firearms responsibly at a young age. And if there's a plentiful supply of rabbits and other pests which need despatched that's an added bonus. Josh Russell from central Queensland learned to shoot while hunting with his dad around the farm, developing a keen interest and a steady eye which eventually led him to the SSAA Springsure range.

Now the 17-year-old is making a name for himself in the world of competitive benchrest shooting and that's not surprising as the Springsure region has produced three Benchrest Hall of Fame members . . . and Josh is related to two of them! Having identified the youngster's undeniable potential a state-of-the-art benchrest rifle was bought, chambered in 6mm PPC with a BAT DS action, Krieger barrel and March 40x scope, so Josh now had the equipment to compete at national level.

Gavin Marshall has been instrumental in improving and honing Josh's skills and many hours were spent on his station property, learning how to operate the equipment and fine-tune the rifle through careful handloading. Said Josh: "Gavin has been a terrific mentor and absolutely invaluable during this learning curve."

Josh entered the 2019 National Hunter Class Championships at Springsure, gaining valuable experience in wind reading and handloading under match conditions. And those lessons were clearly well learned as at last year's event he placed sixth outright against a field of top quality shooters.

Also last year he competed at the Queensland State Championships and in the Heavy Rifle category won the 100-yard aggregate and placed second overall. However his best result came at this year's Australia Day matches in Canberra where, competing against many of Australia's

Benchrest chairman John Babic presents Josh with the Light Rifle winner's shield in Canberra.



best benchrest shooters, Josh won the Light Gun event and placed second outright in the Overall 2-Gun, an outstanding achievement.

In preparing for a for a big match Josh believes it pays to check everything then check it again. He said: "I leave nothing to chance so that when I go to a shoot I can concentrate on just the actual competition. The hardest part is trying to read what the wind is doing between muzzle and target and that's a skill which can take years to master."

Having shot mainly at Springsure, Josh admits going to new ranges will present a fresh set of challenges. He recently competed in the National Benchrest Championships at Coffs Harbour, gaining more valuable experience at this four-day shoot and picking up a medal as Top Junior in the process.

His ambition in the discipline is similar to many shooters - to do as well as possible in every competition and



Josh receives the Top Junior award at the National Championships from Rod Madeley.

hopefully one day amass enough points to enter the coveted Benchrest Hall of Fame. Another goal is to qualify for the Australian team to compete at the World Championships and from what we've seen so far that could be very much on the agenda. ●

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:

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

or enter online at ssaa.org.au/win

Competition closes October 31st 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.

ssaa.org.au