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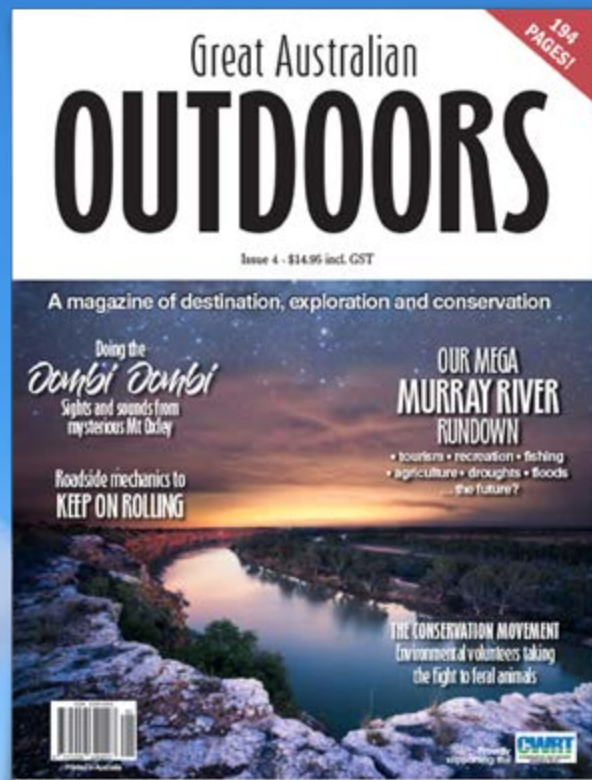
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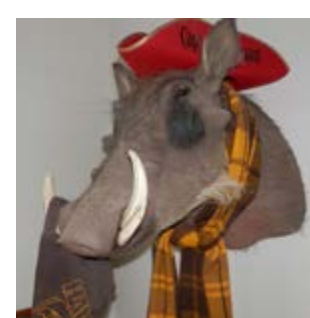
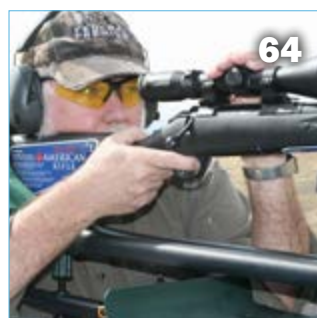
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Element Optics' range of riflescopes features a few different variants and next month Daniel O'Dea turns the spotlight on their Titan 5-25x56 offering which he says "appears to be good value at its price point in an otherwise crowded market".

The Howa M1500 range of rifles have been an ongoing success story in Australia, and their Carbon Elevate in selected short and long action calibres makes for a superb lightweight hunting or long-range outfit, ideal for larger game species.

Our Hunter's Mancave series continues as Brad Allen looks back at some of the spectacular trophies which have adorned his 'Safari Room' down the years, including this South African warthog (now a Hawthorn fan) taken by his son Macen.



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Email: membership@ssaa.org.au

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EDITORIAL

MANAGING EDITOR..... Allan Blane
ASSOCIATE EDITOR..... Thomas Cook
ASSISTANT EDITOR..... Dave Rose
CHIEF OF STAFF..... Jennifer Martens
ART DIRECTOR..... Mike Barr
GRAPHIC DESIGNER..... Alex Heptinstall
GRAPHIC DESIGNER..... Tammy Michalski
WEBMASTER..... Mark Fieldhouse
ADVERTISING & PROMOTIONS..... Karoline Wasiak
MEDIA AND POLITICS OFFICER..... Rachael Oxborrow
ADMINISTRATION..... Debbie Wing
..... Trudy Sheffield
SENIOR CORRESPONDENT..... John Dunn
SENIOR CORRESPONDENT..... Rod Pascoe

CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE

Russell Mark, Lionel Swift, Scott Heiman, Penny Hutchinson, Joe Norris, Chris Redlich, Mark van den Boogaart, Con Kapralos, Derek Nugent, Thomas Tabor, Barry Johnstone, Douglas Riach.

STATE CONTACT INFORMATION

For SSAA inquiries please contact your state office

NSW	02 7900 1555	WA	08 9497 7919
QLD	07 3281 3447	SA	0419 849 452
VIC	03 8892 2777	ACT	0423 043 663
TAS	0418 734 008	NT	0402 013 918

NATIONAL CONTACT INFORMATION

SSAA National Chief Executive Officer
and Chief Editor Tim Bannister
Wildlife Programs Matthew Godson
PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061

SSAA National Accounts Office
PO Box 282, Plumpton, NSW 2761
Phone: 02 8805 3900
Email: accounts@ssaa.org.au

SSAA General Insurance Brokers
Unit 1, 212 Glen Osmond Rd,
Fullarton, SA 5063
Phone: 08 8332 0281
Freecall: 1800 808 608
Fax: 08 8332 0303
Email: insurance@ssaaains.com.au

Please mail all correspondence for the SSAA National Executive to
SSAA, PO Box 282, Plumpton, NSW 2761
Email: ssaa@ssaa.org.au



Taking our cause to people in power

SSAA's state and territory branches have been making great strides in efforts to build relationships with political representatives recently. The new South Australian Police Minister, Joe Szakacs, visited the SSAA (SA) Para Range and was given a tour of the facilities and hands-on experience with several rifles and handguns, Association representatives happy to give Minister Szakacs insight into the various SSAA disciplines and the firearms used. In Western Australia a group from the Young Liberals wing and WA Federal Member for Moore, Ian Goodenough, were hosted at the SSAA (WA) Perth Rifle Metallic Silhouette Club at Wanneroo Shooting Complex.

Relationship building and giving people who've often never handled a firearm an insight into firearms, safety and the shooting sports is a very effective way of advocating for ourselves. Whether people go away keen to join our ranks or with a well-rounded insight into what we do, a value cannot be put on how much these experiences are worth to our cause. Congratulations to

everyone behind these events where SSAA National representatives were able to attend, participate and meet elected members.



South Australian Police Minister Joe Szakacs with SSAA (SA) Para Range Officer Tony Noble.



WA Federal Member for Moore, Ian Goodenough, and a group of WA Young Liberal members enjoyed their shooting experience in Perth.

Wear logo with pride to mark 75 years

To celebrate the Diamond Anniversary of the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia this year, an exclusive range of merchandise is now available to members with commemorative 75-year pins and cloth badges to mark the prestigious milestone. The cloth patch features our striking SSAA logo and year of significance and is the perfect addition to your shooting attire. Meanwhile, the 75th Anniversary pins are a brooch to treasure with each individually numbered and sure to become a collectors' item.

The SSAA has come a long way since its humble beginnings in 1948 when around 100 shooters gathered to create what is now Australia's premier sports shooting and recreational hunting organisation, so don't miss this chance to show your SSAA pride and own one or both of these unique milestone

markers. Visit onlineshop.ssaa.org.au to order yours today. Once again we thank you for being an important part of the 212,000-strong membership of the state and territory branches which make up our Association. Happy birthday SSAA!



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Balancing act

I ENJOYED GEMMA Dunn's article (and associated project) in Issue 14 of *Australian Women's Shooter* on the custom-made rifle, a great read as was the previous article. I hope all readers of *Australian Shooter* also read AWS. I'd like additional insight on the decision to use a varmint barrel then 'trade-off' the weight by fluting. I don't know much about heavyweight barrels but assume they give greater accuracy due to the stability provided by additional weight, yet going to the added complexity (and risks Gemma identified) to reduce the critical feature of this addition by removing weight seems a delicate balancing act.

Damien Donavan, via email

- Thanks for writing on our AWS and Beretta rifle build series. Choosing a varmint barrel then having it fluted involved a couple of main factors, the first being the rifle was built as a 'hybrid' between a good one for target shooting while not being too heavy for field use. We know a varmint barrel for range shooting is ideal as it can withstand the heat from multiple shots before POI (point of impact) is affected. As you say, this reduction in weight from fluting is quite a balancing act as if not done correctly it can lead to the barrel not heating and cooling uniformly, resulting in hot and cold spots and even a slight danger of warping.

The second reason I chose to flute the barrel is Beretta Australia offer multiple in-house gunsmithing services and I wanted to test them in fluting a varmint barrel. It takes a lot of knowledge and skill to pull off something like that - especially on Tikka rifles which are known for five-shot 1MOA at 100m - and there's no better way to evaluate a gunsmith's skills.

Gemma

A true Aussie classic

AS AN AVID collector of more than 60 years of knives, cutlasses, bayonets and swords from around the world, I've always been on the lookout for a quintessentially Australian knife and I think Leon Wright's 'The Loma' qualifies as one (*Shooter*, October 2022). The shape, size and simple construction makes it eminently suitable for gutting and skinning small game, including birds, and the provenance Leon has provided should confirm its status as a true Australian classic. I have only two others, being a military issue Bolo-style machete and a machete bayonet.

The original Loma reconditioned by Knifeworks Australia also shows the quality of work we can produce right here when we put our minds to it and are not driven purely by price for sub-standard products. If I may suggest, Knifeworks could offer two grades of knives, one a Standard made from 1025 carbon steel with an Australian hard-

wood handle and a Deluxe made from D2 steel with a deer antler handle and stitched cowhide sheath. I'll be in touch with Ron Ross to support a locally-made product and thank Leon for recording the provenance in the pages of *Australian Shooter*.

Jogesh Dhanda, via email



- I've just read the article about Leon Wright's Aunt Loma. She sounds like a wonderful woman, a true pioneer and she did it all without the internet - amazing! The article took me back to some of the people I've encountered down the years though to my regret I don't think I took full advantage of knowing them and all they could've taught me. I have an old knife which looks very similar to Leon's original 'Green River' and the story has inspired me to pursue its origins. Great article Leon, obviously written from the heart so thank you for sharing Aunt Loma with us.

Jim Ridgwell, WA

Insurance SSAA GENERAL INSURANCE BROKERS



Introducing SSAA Insurance Brokers' account manager Ali Mulla

Ali began working for SSAA General Insurance Brokers (SSAIB) almost five years ago and in that time has worked across the eastern states with both individuals and SSAA clubs to deliver their insurance needs. He entered the insurance industry 12 years ago after working in the commercial and business loans space with the Commonwealth Bank. Ali believes his exposure to business banking and finance highlighted the importance of relationships to him as a person and this focus made the

move to insurance brokering an easy one.

"I had the business mindset and enjoyed getting to know the people I was working with to learn what their business needs really were," he said. "I value building relationships and learning what motivates and drives people in general and in business, as this allows me to work out the best way to assist them in protecting their business and their assets."

Ali has developed a strong specialised knowledge of firearms and the industry



during the past five years and believes this puts him and SSAIB in the best place to provide informed advice on a wide range of insurance needs. Outside of work Ali enjoys being active and playing basketball and cricket.



Duck hunters caught in government cross-hairs

I don't normally write about the same subject twice in a row but I have to make an exception this month. My colleagues from SSAA Victoria, like many in that state, are more than frustrated and angry with the modified conditions the state government set for the 2023 duck season, and have released the following statement: "The Victorian Government's announcement [yesterday] of a delayed and shortened game duck season for Victoria in 2023 runs contrary to the independent expert advice the government itself commissioned and received.

"The decision is illogical, indefensible and purely political. There doesn't appear to be any legal or administrative grounds to have the decision overturned, however SSAA Victoria will work co-operatively with our colleagues in other organisations to continue to explore options and hold the government publicly to account. SSAA Victoria will also focus on the upcoming inquiry into duck hunting and do everything in the Association's power to ensure a positive outcome for the state's hunting community.

"We understand and share the anger and disappointment of the hunting community at this appalling decision. Meetings have been arranged with senior government and Opposition figures for the coming days and the Association will keep members informed and updated as appropriate. In the meantime, hunters and shooters are urged to express their disappointment in a respectful and measured way: we are better than the people who oppose us and now, more than ever, the community needs to see that."

Not only have Victorian hunters been dealt an outrageously limited season they also have to contend with a review as do their fellow hunters in South Australia. This is an unprecedented assault on our pastime and way of life across two fronts and almost looks like a coordinated attack by two green-ing state Labor Governments.

The Interim Harvest Model (IHM) was supposed to spit out a bag number without the need to modify season length, leaving politics out of the calculations. Although the proposed outputs of the IHM are quite conservative, many felt it was a step in the right direction prior to implementation of a full Adaptive Harvest Model (AHM).

But in the Game Management Authority's season arrangement information it was suggested outputs have been modified due to a number of reasons, including hunter behaviour. What's peculiar about this is that on June 16 last year, the GMA's duck season compliance summary indicated "Most hunters we spoke to were complying with the law and enjoying their time on the wetlands".

So how the hell can there be a poor behaviour problem big enough to sanction every hunter in Victoria when those very hunters were given a glowing report at the end of last season? Something's not right here! GMA has not released its findings on wounding so this space is open to wild speculation and exaggeration by anti-groups.

There's no need for the precautionary approach to apply when harvest levels are set so low in the first place. There's no regard for extra ducks entering the population after breeding, something taken into

account in AHMs overseas and we've also entered a breeding event not seen for many years. There are troubled waters ahead for Australian duck hunters. I only hope our collective duck punts can stay afloat and push through to the big waves heading our way.

2023 duck hunting season arrangements

24/02/2023

The Game Management Authority has today announced the arrangements for the 2023 duck season including changes to the start times, daily bag limit and game duck species that can be hunted.

The 2023 season will start at 8:00 am and will close 30 minutes after sunset each day from Wednesday 26 April 2023 to Tuesday 30 May 2023 (inclusive). The bag limit is four (4) birds per day.

It is prohibited to hunt Blue-winged Shoveler and Hardhead across Victoria as both species were recently listed as threatened under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988.

While the interim harvest model has been run to inform the settings for the 2023 duck season, the outputs of this model have been modified to provide a more precautionary approach to concerns regarding the rates of wounding of ducks, poor behaviour by some hunters, and the fact that waterbird abundance, breeding and habitat availability, all show long-term declines.

AA

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7MM-08 REMINGTON	140	2612 fps
7MM REMINGTON MAG.	140	3100 fps

See and be seen (or not)

Why are things seen? It's an important thing to know because as hunters the answer makes us more effective at detecting our prey before that prey detects us. It can also assist in an emergency when we're trying to raise the attention of rescue assets so when it comes down to it, things are seen because they have one or more of the following characteristics.

Shape: Nature is full of irregular shapes as clearly defined lines stand out. Think of your Akubra-style hat which makes your head look like a roofing nail though to an animal presents as a big, round, shady disc. For this reason, during the Kokoda campaign of 1942 the University of Sydney's zoological department suggested a method to improve our troops' camouflage and presented the army with a slouch hat, modified by cutting out leaf shapes from around the brim which were then sewn into the hat's crown.

A key purpose was to disguise the distinctive hat and head shape and furthermore the dappling effect, caused when

sunlight struck the irregular hat design, helped conceal the wearer's facial features, affecting the enemies' depth perception while simultaneously mirroring the variegated light that characterised the surrounding jungle.

Silhouette: 'Sky-lining' yourself by walking over a ridge or across open paddocks makes you visible for miles. We know this. Consider the analogy of the 'starfish man' known in search and rescue circles. In this case a bloke was lost at sea after his vessel sunk and although bobbing up and down in the waves the search plane flew past several times but failed to spot him. Resigned to death by drowning he stopped waving and lay back to save energy and that's when his luck changed. Floating with his arms and legs outstretched like a starfish, the rescue team saw him because his light clothing and skin colour contrasted with the dark and murky waters of the deep blue sea. He was a distinctive shape and was silhouetted.

Shine: Sometimes referred to as surface, shine is what our faces do when the glint of sweat and oils make them stand out. It's a similar situation with stainless steel barrels as shiny objects alert prey to your presence and should be avoided when hunting. By contrast, in an emergency situation shiny things are your friend as they can reflect the sun's rays omni-directionally. Many everyday items you can find in your pockets, backpack or in and around your car have shiny outsides or insides (consider a chip packet) so if you become lost or separated, stay where you are and tie those shiny things in obvious places like tree branches to act as signal mirrors.

Shadow: Sitting under a tree in the shade can help conceal you better from your prey but shade can also obscure you from rescue teams. Yet it doesn't have to be this way as you can use shadow to your advantage when creating a ground-to-air passive signal like SOS or 'V' (the international signal for help). Dig letters into the ground in six metre-long symbols, placing the shadows cast along the letters' walls creates colour contrast and makes them easier to see. Can't dig? Use bleached logs.

Spacing: Just like 'there are no straight lines in nature', regular spacing and patterns aren't typical either (picture a pine plantation versus natural woodland). Patterns draw our attention towards a particular area so it's little wonder an internationally agreed rescue symbol is three smoke signals (in daylight) or three fires (at night) configured in an equilateral triangle 50m apart.

Movement: Nothing catches our eye more than movement as like all animals we're drawn to it which means sometimes it's better to just sit at a dam or near a salt lick and wait for animals to come to you as the movement will alert you to their presence, not vice-versa. And when the time comes to attract someone's attention, wave your arms about (if you can spare the energy) or tie-up items that'll sway in the breeze, whether that's the shiny stuff we covered above or a pair of bright-coloured undies. In future columns we'll explore these characteristics in more detail but until then stay safe.



Scott's own take on the modified Akubra.

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Q I've come back to clay target shooting after an absence of many years and have a dilemma.

About 45 years ago I bought a Beretta S58 Skeet with 28" barrels and a set of 30" barrels choked half and full. Skeet was my preferred discipline along with a lot of field shooting (I never really concentrated on Down The Line because of the gun's configuration). At the time an S58 was considered a very 'lively' shotgun.

I've contemplated a new Beretta DT10 or DT11 with adjustable stock or the alternative is to have an adjustable stock made for the S58, which to date has probably had about 200,000 rounds through it and never malfunctioned. Do the newer guns shoot significantly better than older ones, in particular with less apparent recoil and has gun technology improved much in the past 45 years? A lot of people have told me 'no' and if my S58 still works then keep using it.

Col Howkins, Qld

A All of 45 years ago you probably owned an XC Ford Falcon or VB Holden Commodore, both great cars, more than fast enough and certainly reliable. Almost five decades on, today's cars don't really get you from A to B any quicker but are arguably far more comfortable, safer and of course offer many extra features. Some of these extras you certainly don't need but once you've experienced them they're hard to give up.

Let's compare a Beretta S58 with the DT11. The former was a notoriously light shotgun and as you correctly point out is 'lively' because of that. It will also recoil more, not in perceived terms but in actual recoil simply because it's half a kilogram

lighter. The S58 has a standard 18.4mm (or even 18.3mm) bore-size barrel while the DT11 has a much larger 'over-bored' tube which will help make perceived recoil feel much softer.

The DT11 offers a 'drop-out' mechanism, adjustable trigger positioning, leaf trigger springs, custom weighting and a few other added features the S58 won't have such as the quality of the barrels (steel quality has come a long way in the past few decades). In saying all of that will the DT11 shoot any straighter than the S58? No it won't. Will it feel better to use? Provided it fits you then yes it will.

My wife drives an Audi Q8 and I a Ford Ranger. Both deliver us to where we need to go but on a five-hour trip she'll arrive far more relaxed than I will and it's the same with your S58. If I was shooting in a 100-target competition and could choose between those two shotguns, I'd pick the DT11 every day of the week, again on the assumption it was correctly fitted to me.

Obviously 200,000 rounds is a lot of shooting and to not have a misfire in that time is testament to your gun and of course the ammunition you've been using, but to be honest there would be a multitude of shotguns in the Trap world that've fired far more shells than that. High-grade shotguns like the DT11 are made to last and will need tightening up in time, but the way these guns are made that's a fairly simple job. What I'm saying is I doubt you'll be able to 'wear out' a DT11.

The bottom line here is cost. If you want a replacement for your S58 with two sets of barrels, a new DT11 with a dual pair of tubes would require a special custom order, close to a one-year wait and a price tag

around the \$15,000 mark, give or take a grand or so. Alternatively, simply upgrading the stock on your S58 with an adjustable comb could cost as little as \$200. I suggest you don't discuss this with your partner as if they don't understand shotgun shooting you'll have your work cut out convincing them the DT11 is putting you on a plane to represent Australia at the next Olympics.

So my advice is this: Tell your partner you're thinking of buying a new shotgun. They might be angry on hearing this but buy the gun anyway. No doubt they'll still be angry but at least you'll have a new shotgun and there's no point in you both being angry! Good luck with your choice.



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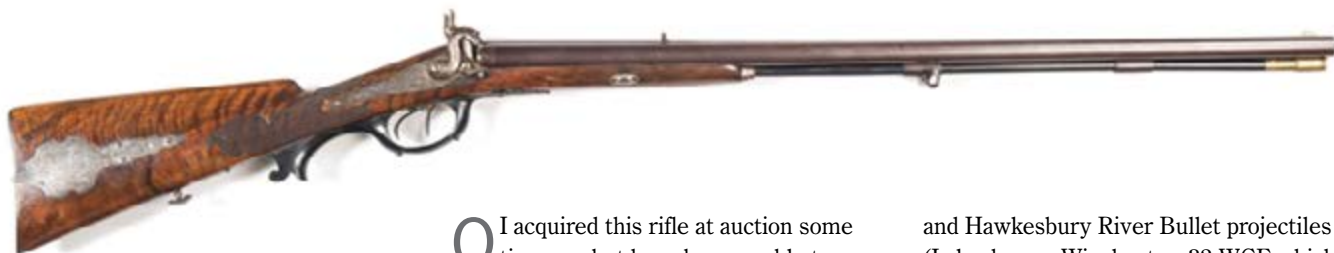
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Q I acquired this rifle at auction some time ago but have been unable to determine maker details. Having one rifle barrel and one shotgun barrel puts it in the Cape Gun category but there doesn't appear to be any maker's mark, except presumably the owner's name. Can you help please?

Darryl Hicks, via email

A Your percussion Cape Gun is certainly a beautiful piece Darryl. The lack of proof marks means it was made prior to 1892 when the newly unified Germany adopted proof marks, although the design suggests much earlier (perhaps 1850s). The two stamps on the barrel, a scripted 'G' and another indecipherable small stamp don't mean anything to me. The name 'I. Rosenthal, Waren' inlaid in gold is most likely the name and location of the maker, based on information from *Alte Scheibenwaffen - German Target Arms* (edited by Tom Rowe, Maynardville, Tennessee, 1999).

The town of Waren in Mecklenburg was then in the western part of Prussia. These guns were described in German as 'Büchseflinte' (double-barrelled, side-by-side rifle-shotgun) and although the term Cape Gun suggests big game in Africa, by all accounts they were popular in Europe for hunting waterfowl, small game and deer. A 16-gauge gun of similar configuration by Carl Weidhammer sold at auction in the US recently for \$US1495.

Geoff Smith

Q I'm hoping you can advise me on using ADI 2207 powder. After the COVID shutdown and powder supply shortages then being badly hit by last year's floods in the Lismore region, my only competition shooting is done with a .310 Cadet

and Hawkesbury River Bullet projectiles (I also have a Winchester .32 WCF which I've been unable to use). With my supply of 2205 about to run out and it would seem none to be had for a long time, the ability to compete and keep my licence is at risk.

Other shooters at the range advise that 2207 (which I can source) is fine to use yet all the reloading books I have don't list it and online searches have some people using it but with unburnt powder left in the .32 WCF but still okay. What are your thoughts on the .310 - is it a dangerous thing to consider? Like everyone else I'm running down every rabbit hole searching for work-arounds. Lack of accuracy and soot to clean is not a concern.

William Atkinson, NSW

A Like you William I've been unable to find any info regarding the use of 2207 powder in either the .310 Cadet or .32 WCF cartridges. For safety reasons when a manufacturer, in this case ADI, doesn't recommend using one of its powders in a particular cartridge (or cartridges) it's best to heed their advice and not use them. Unfortunately the availability of many powders has become critical and I fear the situation will persist for some time. Like shooters nationwide we're all in the same boat here.

Barry Wilmot

Q I was recently shown a No.3 Ruger single-shot rifle in .22 Hornet calibre and hadn't seen one before so was wondering if you could tell me a little bit more about them. It looks very plain compared to the more familiar No.1 rifles. Are they very common and if so, what sort of price could I expect to pay if I can find one?

Steve Adams, via email



A No.3 Ruger rifles were introduced in 1973. Designated the No.3 carbine in period advertising it was described as “a modern rifle in the classic style . . . the same strong, rugged action as the Ruger No.1 rifle with an American-style lever”. While the No.1 was (and is) an elegant rifle, the No.3 was club ugly with a plain walnut stock and no trimmings, though by the time production ceased in 1986 more than 30,000 had been made.

Calibres include .45/70, .22 Hornet (discontinued 1982), .30/40 Krag (discontinued 1978), .223 Remington (1978-85), .375 Winchester (1978-80) and .44 Magnum (1981-86). In Australia the two most common calibres found are .22 Hornet and .45/70.

The No.3 action has been well used as the basis for custom rifles and for many years I had a .35 Whelen built on this action and with stocks being interchangeable, quite a few No.3 rifles ended up wearing No.1 woodwork. I recently saw a No.3 in .22 Hornet advertised at \$1500 and that seems a reasonable price to me as these handy little rifles appear to be getting harder and harder to find.

John Dunn

Q Is the recoil of a rifle or shotgun made greater or smaller by increasing or decreasing the weight of the firearm? I’m wording my question like this so as to not give away my opinion which differs from several of my shooting mates. Can your Top Shots shed some light on this and hopefully win me a slab of beer?

Mitchell G, WA

A For any given load fired in a rifle or shotgun you’ll feel a certain amount of recoil which some call felt recoil and others measured recoil or recoil energy. Depending on the potency of the shotgun gauge and load or rifle cartridge used this can become quite extreme. Magnum shotshell loads in 12-gauge have recoil at a level beyond the average shooter’s tolerance for many rounds fired, as do bigger centrefire rifle

cartridges from about the .308 Winchester upwards. There are various ways of reducing this recoil effect but you’ll win those beers if you say that increasing the weight of the firearm reduces recoil for the same load. This being so you’ll increase recoil by reducing the weight of the firearm.

We see this in both rifles and shotguns. Ways to reduce recoil for any given load include muzzle brakes and barrel porting on rifles as well as increasing a shotgun barrel’s internal bore size within legal limits and reducing the forcing cones which lowers pressure slightly and adds to the other modifications mentioned. The addition of a quality Sorbothane-style recoil pad for both rifles and shotguns certainly helps reduce recoil.

There’s a practical limit to how heavy a firearm can be especially if carrying it on hunting trips. We often see mountain rifles advertised weighing about 6.5lb including a quality lightweight scope in serious compact cartridges like the 308W. This is an amazingly versatile round but in a lightweight rifle like that you’ll know when you’ve pulled the trigger. With a rifle a couple of pounds heavier that same load will seem so much milder in felt recoil and that’s simply a function of increased weight.

Paul Miller

Q Can anyone help identify this small cartridge? It has no markings on the case, overall length is 28.7mm, case length 20.5mm, rim diameter 9mm and projectile diameter is 5.6mm. Any information appreciated.

Ray Mendoza, via email

A Your photo depicts a .297/230 Morris Long which was developed in the 1880s and is generally referred to as a sub-calibre or auxiliary cartridge. There’s also a Morris Short version and although sporting rifles and pistols were made for these tiny centrefire rounds, they were actually developed for the military.



There was a requirement by the British Army and Admiralty for more marksmanship training for soldiers and sailors and the relatively densely populated countryside offered limited space for full-length small arms firing ranges, while a smaller cartridge could be safely fired on short ranges or even indoors.

This in turn led to the adoption of the ‘Tube, Aiming, Morris, Martini-Henry Rifle Mark I’ (to give it its military designation) or Morris Tube for short which is actually a barrel inserted inside the barrel of the service rifle of the day, the .577/450 Martini-Henry single-shot. The adaptor tube needed to be chambered for a small calibre centrefire cartridge of reduced range, hence development of the .297/230 Morris Long and Short cartridges.

Later Morris tubes were made for the .303 British service rifle and gave an effective way of providing shooting practice without the expense of regular ammunition, not to mention reduced noise and recoil. I’ve taken the liberty of replacing your photo with one showing the Morris Long (left) alongside the Morris Short and a standard .22 Long Rifle cartridge for comparison. The .297 refers to the approximate diameter at the base of the case in inches and 230 to the bullet diameter.

Rod Pascoe

All's well *that* ends well

In the first of a three-part special, **John Dunn** recalls his return to the Cobourgh Peninsula

When Scottish poet Robert Burns wrote “the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry” - or thereabouts - he nailed a reality to the floor. The sympathetic epigram ‘anything that can go wrong will go wrong’ is widely known as Murphy’s Law and in more recent times Forrest Gump reduced the concept to a concise, two-word equivalent sometimes aired on T-shirts. They all mean the same and over the past few years everyone has experienced their consequences.

We began planning our return to the Cobourgh Peninsula in 2019, postponed it in 2020 and again the following year as COVID ruled and for a while I thought it may not happen at all. Even so, I kept in touch with Rob Tritten from R&R Outfitters who was making noises about some new country to hunt. He reckoned big bantengs and buffaloes were distinct possibilities so we made some tentative arrangements for 2022 and waited.

On a cold winter morning in late August I was finally on my way. As I walked into Wagga Airport, Murphy snickered in the background as I learned at the Qantas check-in my booking had been changed and instead of flying direct to Darwin from Sydney I’d be dog-legging via Adelaide.

That it messed with my end-of-the-line charter flight arrangements was unfortunate as when I finally arrived in Darwin and walked into the Air Frontier office, I was two-and-a-half hours late. My charter flight had gone. On it was my hunting mate Graeme Fifield, his daughter Larissa and her son Noah. The plane needed time to fly out and return to Darwin before dark and they’d had to leave me behind.

There wasn’t another flight until 10 o’clock the following morning, so a member of the Air Frontier crew found me some overnight accommodation then dropped me off on the way home, a positive ending to what had otherwise been a very ordinary day. Everything was smothering under the

smoky pall of dry season fires when we left Darwin. Visibility was so poor we were only five minutes from landing before I could pick out the narrow slash of the Murganella airstrip stark against the drab bush. Thankfully, Gorgia Tritten was there to meet me with her two youngest children, Dylan and Zahara, so we transferred my gear to the troop carrier, watched the plane leave then headed for camp along a dusty road.

The new camp was set on a rise overlooking a narrow strip of beach edging the Arafura Sea, the centrepiece being a weather-worn, two-roomed galvanised hut known as Tiger’s Camp, named for its original Aboriginal occupant. The hut was a combined storeroom, pantry and



Tiger’s Camp, the centre of R&R Outfitters’ banteng hunting operation.



An ancient shell midden, just one of many lining the edge of the plain.

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All's well that ends well

living quarters for the Tritten family during hunting season, the wide eaves around it always offering shade somewhere during the day while a breezeway at the southern end doubled as a washing-up and barbecue area.

Other facilities included a shower and laundry tub, a long-drop toilet and airy, insect-proof tents to sleep in. A quiet generator ran 24/7 providing power for lights and refrigeration while water came from a bore-fed overhead tank that needed topping up every day or so. As rustic as it seemed to be it was a comfortable camp and when I left a little over a week later, I was sad to go.

Under a shade cloth awning beside a shipping container the Fifield clan was watching Rob and Caleb Tritten skin out the head and salt the cape of a beautiful banteng bull Larissa had shot. Although a veteran deer hunter, the bull was her first big game trophy and, not surprisingly, she was more than a little pleased with herself. There were hugs and handshakes all round, followed by some not too subtle mutual chivvying about my late arrival and hunting companions who'd started without me.

Graeme's banteng

We headed off about 4 o'clock, travelling through a mosaic of scorched and unburnt woodland towards flood plain country while out in the open, troops of brolgas wandered the edges of a saltwater creek that snaked back towards the timber. Flocks of corellas lifted and settled again as groups of Timor ponies raced away from the vehicle, their hooves stirring up clouds of fine ash and dust which hung in the air long after they'd galloped out of sight.

On the verges of the plain the time-worn mounds of ancient shell middens dotted the landscape, some of them old enough to have grown large trees, all of them testament to the presence of generations of Aboriginal people who'd fossicked and fed themselves over aeons of time in an environment obviously much richer than it appeared to be, even if only on a seasonal basis.

Caleb has an eye for game any hawk would envy and he was first to spot a banteng bull among the timber, a dark beast with horns which demanded a second look. The bull watched as we pulled up, then trotted away, clearly unimpressed. Further on was another bull, the truck rolled to a standstill and with little more than a cursory glance Rob told Graeme to grab his rifle - the job was on.

In single file they melted into the trees with Rob leading the line, Graeme in the middle and Caleb bringing up the rear with a Blazer straight-pull back-up rifle in .416 Rigby. Perhaps 15 minutes later Graeme



Larissa Fifield with Caleb and Rob Tritten and her banteng bull. The rifle is a Kimber .300 Win Mag.



Rob Tritten and Graeme Fifield with Graeme's impressive banteng bull. Notice the swarm of buffalo flies on the bull's shoulder.

collected the bull with his .416 Remington - a jet black animal with wonderful horns that would score well when measured at camp. We made our way back in the dark, only

missing the track a couple of times with wheel marks hard to see despite a layer of ash on the sun-baked soil.



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All's well that ends well

On the beach

Blue-winged kookaburras woke me before daylight as somewhere down the bay a chorus of wild dogs was making a maudlin racket. Thwarted mosquitoes hummed and bounced against the mesh screens of the tent. An early crow cawed. Pink sunlight painted the flat sea as low waves slopped on the sand and drew back, all of it low-key and soothing as befitted this place and the hour of the morning.

In need of exercise I went for a walk along the beach, keeping well back from the edge where a big crocodile had been cruising up and down the previous week. Two wild dogs had walked along the tide line, their marks overlaying those of a feral cat who'd obviously arrived before them. A line of three-toed tracks made by a heron meandering in and out the water, undoubtedly left by the bird striding ahead of me, its head regularly turning back to warily check my progress. In a channel a few metres offshore a spray of panicked bait fish scattered as a small shark cruised among them, its dorsal fin clear of the water. Further out, a shoal of larger fish tail-walked and flapped away as something big swirled on the surface then disappeared with an audible splash.

The debris of past storms and tides lay well above the tide line of the present, salt-encrusted driftwood, dried husks of coconut shells, ragged lines of sticks and feathers and sea grasses, drifts of shells, sponges of all shapes and sizes. The dried leathery

body of a starfish lay belly-up beside the white carapace and claws of a long dead crab amid a scattering of sea urchins, cuttlefish bones and the shrivelled feet of a sea bird sticking out the sand.

Not surprisingly there was also plenty of human refuse - lumps of polystyrene, fishing net floats and tangles of line, knots of polyester rope encrusted with small shells, a tooth-scarred plastic lure, a child's sandal, rubber thongs of various sizes, the insole from a woman's shoe, even a pink toothbrush with its bristles remarkably intact.

Plastic bottles and boxes with tops and lids of all shapes and sizes predominated, their abundance at odds with the minor successes of faraway, well-meaning urban recycling programs which do little more than scratch the surface of a global problem. As I walked back to camp it struck me that

what most Australians would consider a remote and pristine wilderness is anything but. Sadly, it never will be again.

• Next month: Bulls, buffaloes and hunting the hard way. ●



Feral cat tracks along the tide line.



A plastic wheel half buried in the sand. You wonder how rubbish like this finds its way into some of the most remote country in Australia.

Early morning Cobourg. Low waves slop on the shore and draw back.



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This is the third in a series on *The Hunter's Mancave* in which some of our regular contributors look back fondly on treasured mementoes

SPACE: THE FINAL FRONTIER

Continuing our series, Mark van den Boogaart recalls how 'The Studio' was created out of necessity

Change is inevitable, an unstoppable force that transforms what is now to what might be. Be it the short cycles of our seasons, epoch of transformation caused by the Ice Age or the rise and fall of empires, we bear witness to such events and record their passing so future generations may understand the forces at play. And it's for the benefit of those future generations we bear witness to the planetary change which helped drive the creation of my 'mancave'.

My wife's an artist, an inventive spirit who moves across creative mediums with enviable ease. Working with metal (including gold and silver), pottery, textiles, paints, clay and semi-precious stones, our house is a gallery formed over time. About three years ago her focus shifted to working with wood and restoring furniture and, like all change, it has both an up and downside. The up was buying presents: "Would you like a drill press for Christmas or how about a new scroll saw?" The down was space as little by little I realised I was becoming dispossessed, the victim of unstoppable change as I found myself driven from my ancestral lands - the garage.

It was a slow-moving wave which swept across our double garage and one I had a hand in creating. Over time my collection of hunting, shooting, fishing, camping, 4WD, camera and optic gear had grown under the assumption there would always be enough room but where once there

were open ranges, wire began appearing to divide and define the lands.

The old empire was nomadic and self-sufficient while the new one craved resources like benches, power points and dedicated lighting. For a while there was a little push and pull, small skirmishes involving orbital sanders, a camera tripod and other such items. Things were moved or misplaced, missions launched to find a

bottle of Hoppe's No.9, a tape measure or favourite paint brush, working bees were agreed to and efforts made but it was all just shuffling deckchairs on the Titanic.

A new paradigm was needed, a negotiated outcome until an idea was formulated. What about the back yard? There was an old garden shed, mostly disused and long turned into a comfortable home for spiders, reptiles and the occasional rodent. So could new



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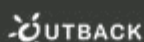
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Hunter's mancave

land be found and cultivated and who would occupy this space? The answer was obvious as with furniture pieces being delivered for renovation, the garage would be best suited to a woodworking haven while me and my stuff would retreat from civilisation to the wilds of a suburban back yard.

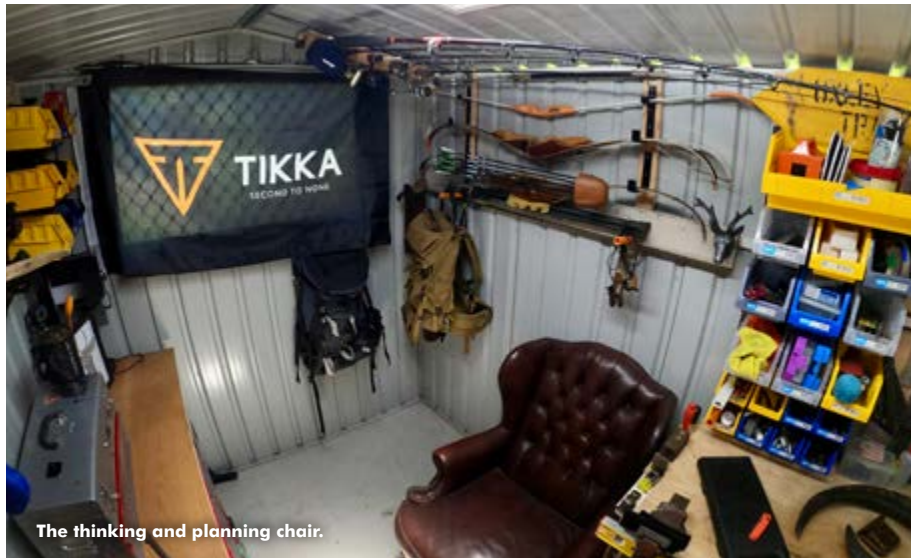
With the treaty inked, attention turned to the creation of lists, the consulting of Google

and raiding of bank accounts to make change happen starting with the shed. Armed with a cordless reciprocating saw, grinder and trailer, within 90 minutes it was a pile of scrap metal and surveying these 'new' lands I watched as the now-homeless insects and arachnids scurried towards the few remaining dark places available to them.

The shed was on a concrete slab not big enough for what I had in mind so we doubled the metreage, raised it 100mm and introduced drainage to provide a water barrier. It wasn't a particularly big space but I've always been good at arranging things, figuring out storage options and most of the stuff was modular, so it was going to work. Though I did have power this wild new land had no signal so I installed a Wi-Fi booster and was able to deliver my first on-site podcast and in doing so turned a garden shed into 'The Studio'.

With everything done it was time to complete my move. Unpacking and moving storage cabinets and considering where they might fit, the process took some effort until one day, armed with a can of rum, I held the official opening . . . and noticed some of the spiders had moved back in.

So to The Studio. A combination of workshop, mancave and creative space it's where I like to tinker, invent, modify, adjust, sometimes break and sometimes repair all things hunting, shooting, archery, fishing, camping, camera and optical gear. It's laid out in sections for my audio-video equipment and tripods, rifle range gear and a family's worth of recurve bows with my Bear Super Kodiak as the centrepiece.





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Hunter's mancave



Then it's the main workbench with more tools, secure storage for the sharp stuff and a cabinet for binoculars, spotting scopes and other hunting-related gear. Game mounts decorate the walls, all being DIY and testament to previous tinkering projects. Among them is a trophy or two including a 36" billy and another at 32", both of them public land goats taken in the heart of a Central New South Wales summer.

The 36-incher holds its place for two very different reasons, the first being I didn't know I'd reached the magic 36" mark until I took it home as we didn't have a tape in camp. The second is that while dragging it back to the truck I overdid things and ended up with mild heat stroke. At the time I considered leaving it behind but am very glad I didn't.

There are also three separate deer mounts, or more correctly antlers on the wall, the small fallow skull mount being a buck I took with my son as recorded in *Australian Junior Shooter* Issue 25 and, all things considered, that's probably my best trophy. The second is a set of cast antlers I picked up while hunting which remarkably were found in a location where there were no deer!



The final set of antlers belong to a red deer, a strong double-four and while they may look like cast antlers, their separation is the result of my learning through tinkering. Unfortunately due to a combination of poor trophy preservation, shot placement and letting the skull over-boil, I lost the chance of a full skull mount so had to cut off the antlers and think of another way to present them.

And among it all is a much smaller item, not a trophy but a memento. It's an old red dog collar which belonged to Cody, my first dog, gone years ago but still with me in spirit. On the workbench is my latest

acquisition, a set of buffalo horns taken during a trip to the Northern Territory last year and while they're taking a while to dry out, once they are ready I'll mount them on a piece of bush wood and hang them on the wall (somewhere).

Apart from trophy mounts and other items you'll find a couple of Swedish axes and a few fine English leather belts and pouches. I collect them and use them though if you ask why I collect them I couldn't give you a definitive answer other than to say I just like them. So that's The Studio, a hunter's outpost custom-built out of necessity in a quiet corner of our back yard. ●



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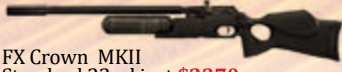
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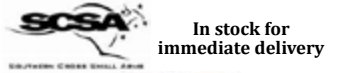


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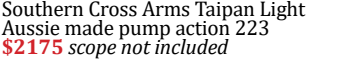
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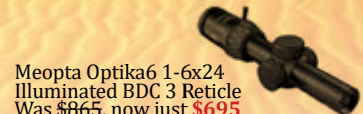


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I'll take it!



T3x Varmint Hunter had Chris Redlich opening his wallet

Adding to a growing list of contenders for Australia's best-selling rifle, Tikka have released their T3x Varmint Hunter selection, the one in .223 Remington being purpose-built for long-range vermin control. To the company's credit they continue to produce high-quality rifles with many an Aussie shooter, including myself, having at least one claiming tenancy within their gun safe. The T3x Varmint Hunter comes in two stock options - synthetic and walnut.

I understand the practicality of synthetic stocks but admit it's hard to deny the beauty of walnut timber. The synthetic model is available in stainless only with the walnut alternative in all blued or stainless barrel and action. If first appearances are a

good indication of quality then I was sold at 'hello!', the high-grade walnut stock having what I like to call a 'tiger stripe' grain structure which matches beautifully to the matte blued barrel and action.

Although retaining some recognisable signs of T3x genetics, the Varmint Hunter stock differs somewhat with its widened foregrip tapering to a bold target-style tip, the CNC fine-cut chequering lovely in appearance and providing a firm grip. Regardless of synthetic or timber stock, one thing Tikka always seem to get right is their pistol grip, a generous palm swell moulding to the hand while the chequering provides subtle but non-abrasive grip. The Varmint Hunter pistol grip is more vertical than on standard T3x models which are

designed for a better hold while shooting prone or from a rest.

Moving rearwards to the buttstock is Tikka's attempt to modernise the rifle's appearance by subtly reducing the full curved lines of a traditional raised cheek-piece. They've achieved this beautifully and the new ergonomic Monte Carlo version is not only functional but retains a strong connection to their heritage. Rounding out the butt is the inclusion of a generous rubber recoil pad.

Weighing almost 4kg (unscoped) I'm not sure the Varmint Hunter could be classed as a walkabout hunting rifle but for those who don't mind hiking to an afternoon's rabbit plinking session, the stock includes mounts for sling attachment. As per



Varmint Hunter in .223 Rem proves its worth on long-range targets.

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I'll take it!

T3x heavy duty claw extractor and plunge ejector ensure clear removal of spent cases.

standard, the underside of the buttstock features a single sling stud and on the fore-end are two for optional bipod positioning or sling and bipod combination.

Locating the action precisely to the stock is a steel recoil lug which mates to the receiver rebate and is securely fastened by two action screws. While the barrel is free floating, computer-controlled machining has enabled a first-class tight fit of all other components including the polymer triggerguard and magazine bottom. At the heart of the rifle is Tikka's unmistakable T3x blued receiver with full-length 17mm dovetail to suit Sako Optilok rings or similar dovetail mounts. Additionally, the top of

the receiver is drilled and tapped to accept mount screws suitable for a Picatinny rail or Weaver-style bases (Beretta supplied Burris two-piece bases and Steiner rings).

As with every T3x the silky-slick action is a rotating push feed design stainless steel bolt with dual locking lugs machined to provide a low-profile 70-degree bolt throw, the heavy-duty claw extractor and plunge ejector combined with the T3x widened ejection port promoting clear extraction of fired cases. A two-position safety is to the rear right of the receiver enabling easy manipulation by the master thumb, sliding rear for 'safe' and forward for 'fire' marked with a red dot on the receiver.



Dual sling studs for rest options and widened fore-end with fine chequering make for a steady grip.



A classic but modern feel to the raised cheekpiece. Note the beautiful grain structure of the walnut timber.

Bolt closure is clearly identified by a cocking piece indicator (red dot) exposed at the rear of the bolt when the trigger sears are engaged and ready for firing. The single-stage blade trigger is fully adjustable from an approximate 4lb 'max' to 2lb 'min' and anticipating a large amount of shooting for testing, I safely adjusted the trigger to a more comfortable 2lb in accordance with user manual guidelines. The barrel is the business end of any rifle and Tikka's, manufactured by Sako in Finland, are renowned for outstanding accuracy. The Varmint Hunter features a heavy profile barrel, specifically designed for increased firing stability in challenging conditions and has a marginal taper measuring 29mm at the receiver and 22mm at the crown (the muzzle crown is recessed to help improve accuracy).

Tikka blued barrels are made of high-grade Chromoly steel and the rifling is cut by cold hammer forging, the company claiming their method of production is superior to other procedures, delivering high-quality consistency. The option of muzzle threading to standard M18 (18mm) is available for those who wish to fit a muzzle brake. All Varmint Hunter barrels are 600mm in length (23.7") and the review rifle chambered for the .223 Rem cartridge has a fast-rifling twist rate of one turn in 8" suitable for stabilising high BC .224 bullets.

The one-piece magazine bottom and triggerguard are made from high strength synthetic polymer. The Varmint Hunter magazine holds six single-stacked rounds for the .223 Rem cartridge and is attached firmly and freed easily from the bottom recess by pressing the release catch.



Superb accuracy recorded at the 500-yard target thanks to Sue-Ann's shooting and the T3x Varmint Hunter.

Importantly for the varmint shooter requiring extra shots, additional magazines made by Tikka are also available on request.

Range and field testing

After stripping and reassembling the rifle to have a better understanding of its internals and externals, I couldn't wait to see how the complete package performed on paper. Using the supplied Burris two-piece mounts, I positioned the Steiner Predator 4 scope for correct eye relief and despite the Varmint Hunter now weighing a combined total of around 5kg (scoped and loaded), I wasn't phased considering it was designed for long-range varmint hunting and target shooting.

As expected the Steiner scope provided a clear picture and sighting-in at the standard 100m was quick and easy with my first confirmatory group landing well under .5 MOA. Using supplied 77-grain factory ammunition, the heavy barrel provided a rock-solid platform for all range shooting, giving me the confidence required to go hunting. Prior to our excursion, my wife Sue-Ann competed at a long range 'Hunter Class' shoot with the review rifle which exceeded all expectations when she nailed some high scores (including numerous V-bulls) at the 500 and 600-yard mound, reinforcing Tikka's high-quality manufacture.

Wet weather unfortunately foiled our plans for several hunting trips but with a slim window of opportunity opening, I took full advantage of the two nights we managed to go spotlighting. Although no foxes or feral cats presented, we were able to head-shoot numerous rogue hares at long range while they darted across the paddocks. Throughout the night's shooting I felt confident in the Varmint Hunter's capability in the .223 Rem cartridge and its ability for long-range feral pest destruction. And as if to back-up those opinions, my good friend Adam subsequently shot numerous wild pigs with his new Varmint



The rifle showed its destructive power during a night's spotlighting.

Hunter stainless synthetic in .243 Win, having bought the rifle after my recommendation and remarked on how glad he was he'd invested his hard-earned cash.

Conclusion

Overall I wasn't surprised to discover how well-designed the T3x Varmint Hunter is and I'm pleased Tikka haven't changed the winning formula Aussie hunters have come to appreciate. I was so impressed that on returning the review rifle I ended up ordering myself a new Varmint Hunter in 6.5 Creedmoor, a rifle I can't wait to use at the range and for long-distance varminting.

The Varmint Hunter family consists of eight highly accurate chamberings including .223 Rem (tested), .22-250 Rem, .243 Win, 6.5 Creedmoor, 6.5 PRC, .270 Win, .308 Win and .300 Win Mag. Left-hand models aren't available in all chamberings.

Retailing for \$2250 (blued/timber) and \$2590 (stainless/timber) at time of writing, that price is expected for a well-made European rifle with a proven reputation. More at berettaaustralia.com.au ●



The single-stack magazine holds six .223 cartridges.

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'Little' piece of history



Last month we looked at Melbourne's Latrobe Street and this time **Lionel Swift** focuses on three historic gunshops of Little Collins Street, each with a fascinating insight into the birth of firearms retailing in Australia

Evans & Balfour doing brisk business on a Saturday morning.

The three best known gunshops of old Lt Collins St were James Watson Rosier, Evans & Balfour and Alcock & Pierce. For interstate readers it's worth mentioning Melbourne's 'little' streets run east and west, each a block north of their much larger namesakes of Collins, Bourke and Lonsdale. And just to be different Flinders, the city's most southerly major street, also has one called Flinders Lane.

These streets were designed as service avenues at the rear of the large emporiums and hotels with their grand frontages in the main streets. Not surprisingly the 'little' streets gradually became home to smaller shops and specialist trades so I'll start with the first one opened (and closed) in this 'little' Melbourne street.

James Rosier - and the Kelly Gang connection

J.W. Rosier was born in Suffolk, England on December 22, 1834 the eldest child of James and Elizabeth Rosier. When christened on February 1, 1835 James the elder listed his occupation as a clock and watch maker. James Jr was followed by George (b.1837), Thomas (b.1839) and possibly Ann (b.1840) before the family moved to Bedfordshire in the early 1840s.

James Sr is listed in the 1841 census as a gunmaker with an apprentice working under him but then appears as a watchmaker in March 1842. Five years later he was listed in the directories as a gunsmith and on September 1, 1849 he placed an advertisement in the 'Beds. Times' stating he'd disposed of his business to Henry Adkin, also a gunmaker. The family then left for Australia aboard 'The Brothers' barque in 1849, arriving in Adelaide in February 1850 before continuing to Melbourne where they arrived on March 10.

James Watson Rosier established a gunsmithing business at 125 Little Collins St in 1857, having completed a gun-making apprenticeship in England, probably with his father. The business moved to 140 Brunswick St, Fitzroy around 1863 before returning to Melbourne at 32 Little Collins St East (1864-1866) then to 45 Little Collins St East (1867-1870), 66 Elizabeth St (1871-1888) before finally moving to 63 Bourke St West in late 1888 which subsequently was renumbered 432 Bourke St. The business remained at this address until sold at auction in 1916 to gunmaker Donald Mackintosh. It's of interest that James Rosier's gunsmith advert was still visible on the eastern side of a Collins St building and could be seen from a dining room in Windsor Hotel as recently as 2012.

In 1870 Rosier converted 250 of the 1851 Colt Navy revolvers used by the Victorian Police since 1864 to accept metallic cartridge ammunition under the 'Thuer' patent, these guns now commonly known as Thuer conversions. Though no Rosier markings are present, they're identifiable by both the conversion itself coupled with Victorian Police markings. Many of the known examples have had their Thuer-converted cylinders swapped back to the original percussion cylinder and the Victorian museum collection holds examples of both.

Rosier became gunsmith to the Victorian Rifle Association and in 1875 was also appointed 'Gunmaker to the Governor of Victoria'. He subsequently advertised 'Rosier' guns for sale which appeared to have been firearms retailed by him with his name engraved on them and numerous examples of these were listed in the 1916 auction catalogue of the business.

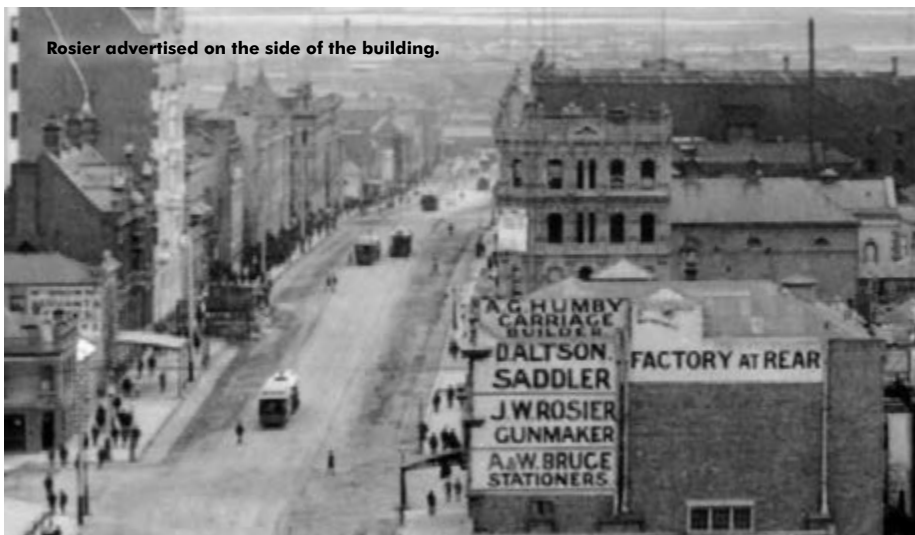


The man himself: James Rosier.

During the hunt for the Kelly Gang (1878-1880) Rosier supplied the Victorian Police with Webley revolvers as well as more unusual double-barrelled .50 calibre rifles (often mistaken for shotguns) and in June 1879 sold ammunition to Ned's sister Maggie Skillion and his cousin Tom Lloyd. The latter had bought ammunition in the morning but returned in the afternoon on the pretence of needing more for a hunting party heading to French Island. Rosier supplied some useless examples of the required ammunition but stated the remainder was not in stock and would have to be brought in the following day.

The pair left a £2 deposit with a promise to return the following day and while Rosier notified police who staked-out the shop, the couple never returned, having caught the night train to Benalla. Although the train was searched and Skillion and Lloyd detained on their arrival at Benalla no ammunition was found, that believed to have been passed to one of Lloyd's friends who'd accompanied the pair to Melbourne.

James Watson Rosier married Nancy Richards in 1856 and had 10 children, including the eldest James Watson Rosier Jr, who worked in the business in the 1890s before hearing loss forced him to work from home in Elsternwick where he'd a miniature rifle range built in the backyard to test repaired firearms. Due to increasing age and ill-health he sold the business by public auction in 1916 to fellow gun dealer Donald Mackintosh. Rosier died in South Yarra in 1920 and is buried in Boroondara Cemetery, not far from the family home in Kew.



Rosier advertised on the side of the building.

'Little' piece of history

Evans & Balfour - and a price anomaly

This was at 269 Lt Collins St, just round the corner from Swanson St on the south side. It was 70m diagonally opposite Alcock & Pierce and most gun owners from the 1930s to the 1970s didn't consider a trip to the city worthwhile without visiting both. Readers may be interested in some pages from a couple of old Evans & Balfour catalogues and of particular interest is the fact the price of Webley & Scott basic model SS doubles nearly doubled in the five years from 1968-1973 while the basic Greener of similar quality and price hardly rose at all.

Also recorded is the famed Greener 'Blue Rock' model which didn't then command the high price which many owners now expect some 50 years later, even allowing for general inflation. This brings to mind a saying attributed to another famous maker whose name I can't recall: "Greener fooled the world with his 'ultra-strong' crossbolt". It's interesting that so many high grade and quite strong English SS doubles don't have crossbolts although they're more common on European doubles. Of course English shotguns with and without crossbolts pass the same proof tests, suggesting that long-forgotten critic may have been on the right track!

Many owners today also try to 'fool the world' with the prices they ask for old Greener boxlocks, although of course the rarer and more exalted sidelocks are often worth the asking price. Several other interesting points are apparent on perusing these old catalogues:

- Les Turner, a director and co-founder of E&B, had his photo inside the back cover of each catalogue and offered expert advice on all things shooting, firearms

and ammunition in particular. Gunmakers represented by E&B are also listed naming suppliers from England, Europe, the US and, in those days, Australia.

- Repairs were also offered 'by their expert gunsmiths' and expert they were, operating a large workshop on the third floor of the Presgrove Building, just round the corner from the shop in Howey Place, off Lt Collins Street.

- This workshop was managed by a highly skilled English born and trained gunsmith named Dick Sharp. After some years he took over as owner (R.E. Sharp & Sons Gunsmiths) and apprenticed his son Kevin into the trade in 1947. Dick retired and the business continued to be operated by Kevin at Coldstream, Victoria before he too semi-retired to Bairnsdale where he carries on the business under the original name of R.E. Smith & Sons Gunsmiths.

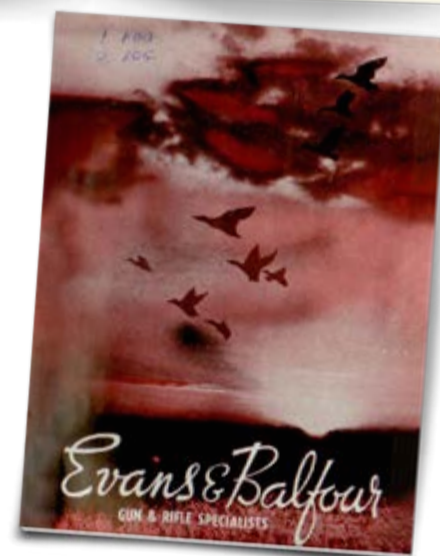
- A lesser-known aspect of Evans & Balfour is that Les Turner had a special showcased collection of high-grade guns on the first floor which wasn't normally open to the public, though selected potential customers were invited to view them privately. Admission to this sacred site was on the subjective basis of (a) having visited the ground floor showroom regularly enough to be recognised, (b) you appeared as if you could afford one of the higher-priced treasures and (c) whether Les liked the look of you!

I was therefore quite proud when I was eventually admitted to this hallowed display and bought a beautiful A.A. Brown and Sons boxlock ejector side-by-side shotgun. What I'm not so pleased about is selling it to buy a new Winchester Wildfowl Model 1300 pump-action which was 'acquired' by the government in 1996.

Tempting offers from 1968.



Much to enjoy in the 1973 catalogue.



Cover of the 1968 catalogue.

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'Little' piece of history

Alcock & Pierce - and an in-house tragedy

This old company just along the street from Evans & Balfour at 318 Lt Collins St is the only one of this trio still operating although not in retail, strictly importing and wholesaling. The firm was inaugurated in 1903 by Alfred William Alcock and James Arthur Pierce who'd worked together at McEwans Hardware Store. They were successful in several areas of retail in a variety of sports products and had distribution agencies to dealers throughout Australia as wholesalers, including Browning of Belgium and Darné of France. In fact Browning was one of the first agencies secured and was handled by the company for many years to the great benefit of both supplier and distributor.

Their range grew to include fishing gear, tennis equipment, household cutlery, lawn bowls and toys but their principal business from the outset was firearms, hunting and fishing equipment which led to them marketing their own line of shotgun ammunition made by some world leaders and packaged under the Alcock & Pierce name.

In 1916 a gunsmith was testing a firearm by firing it into a large block of wood on the floor. This practice had been followed for some time without testers realising both the block and floor beneath had been disintegrating, finally resulting in a projectile fatally wounding Alfred Alcock in the basement. The partnership was thus ended and a company was formed bearing the same name with a Mr Pat O'Shannessy as managing director.

Another change of ownership came in 1941 during WWII when firearm and sporting goods supply were affected with Albert Brewer, whose successful tennis racquet and lawn bowls business was diverted into the manufacture of Defence

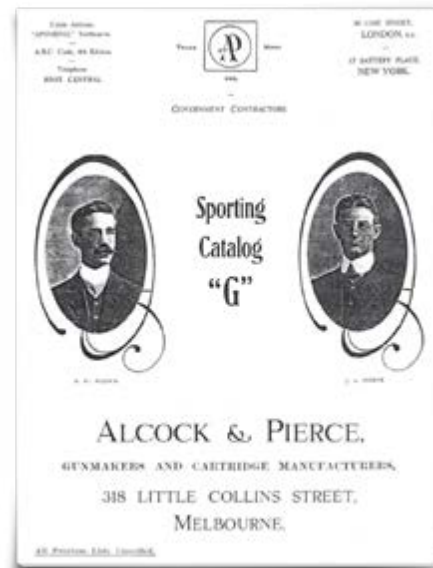


items. The business of racquet and bowls production was sold on his death in 1975, the fishing and firearms retailing business continuing with his son Robert as MD. In 1977 Robert instigated a body called The Firearms Traders Association of Victoria and was secretary, treasurer and publicist for 19 years. The organisation was viewed with respect by many others, including the Victorian Government, and Robert Brewer deserves a great deal of personal credit for this as well as the thanks of gun owners in general as well as dealers.

Alcock & Pierce also had a reputable gunsmithing service and one of their gunsmiths, Merv Naughton, left to start his own 'Fieldman' rifle manufacturing business. Another gunsmith who served an apprenticeship there, John Mialls, went on to launch a firearms business in Frankston which has been famous Australia-wide for many years. Another notable employee was

Ray Godkin, well known for assisting in pre-duck-opening nights which were held at a public venue each year to give information on duck numbers and water levels around Victoria (and NSW in those long-ago days). Ray also ran a 'duck-call' contest at these information nights and often won it as he was highly skilled in that art.

Alcock & Pierce under Robert Brewer had to move several times after losing the lease on that famous 318 Lt Collins St address, firstly to Sugden Place then McKillops St before uprooting again to the north end of Elizabeth St. The next move was back to the CBD part of Elizabeth St then finally to the eastern suburbs where it operates today under Robert Brewer's son Tim in a wholesale-only importing and distributing fashion while retaining the famous name of Alcock & Pierce. ●



Cover of the 1905 catalogue.
Pic courtesy Robert Brewer.

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Lead poisoning: Make sure you're shooting safely

Penny Hutchinson

The latest lead notifications to public health units in southeast Queensland have identified sporting shooters as being at far greater risk of lead exposure which has raised concerns for medical officers in the region who are seeing increasingly high blood levels in shooters. This phenomenon locally has been supported by alarming growing evidence of global research which found the blood-lead levels of recreational shooters may be more than 40 times higher than those of the general public.

Lead is a toxic substance which can affect people of any age and is especially harmful to children, pregnant women and their unborn babies. Lead builds up in the body so even small amounts can pose a health hazard over time and there is no 'safe' level, so care is needed when undertaking recreational activities requiring the use of lead. Consider your family, neighbours, pets and yourself by taking the recommended precautions. Lead is a heavy metal which can be airborne as dust. Dust and shavings land on clothes and hands and can be ingested when eating, drinking or smoking while contaminated clothes carry lead into the home and expose partners and children.

What is lead?

Lead (or Pb in the periodic table) is a naturally occurring heavy metal found in the Earth's crust and can be released into soil, air and water through soil erosion, volcanic eruptions, sea spray and bushfires. Humans have used it in a variety of ways for thousands of years with some past applications leading to serious environmental and health problems.

What are its sources?

Mining and metal manufacturing are the largest sources of lead emissions in Australia though there are many others including waste incinerators; battery recycling; production of lead fishing sinkers; cement, plaster and concrete manufacturing; ceramic products such as garden pots; iron and steel; petroleum and coal products; paper, glass and metal products; motor vehicles and their parts; wood products as well as yarn and fabric for making clothes and curtains.

How can I be exposed?

The most common route of lead exposure for indoor firing range users is inhaling airborne particles from the ignition of

primer material and shearing of particles from the bullet as it travels down the barrel. A primer is typically made up of lead styphnate and lead peroxide which ignites when struck by the firing pin to provide propulsion for the bullet. Dust and fumes created by the primer ignition, along with lead particles sheared from the bullet, are ejected at high pressure from the barrel with most of this material travelling at right angles to the direction of fire.

This results in the release of lead-containing fumes and particles close to the shooter's nose which can be breathed in, something very common when there's insufficient ventilation to blow the lead particles away as might occur outdoors. Another way to be exposed is by swallowing where lead particles settle on flat surfaces, clothes and hands and make their way into the mouth while eating and drinking.

Why target indoor shooters?

Research has found the blood-lead levels of recreational shooters may be more than 40 times higher than those of the general public and a review of the New York State Heavy Metals Registry, which reports lead testing results of New York residents, found

Indoor firing ranges pose a higher risk of lead exposure.



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Lead poisoning: Make sure you're shooting safely

more than half of all people with high levels reported their only exposure was from target shooting with no exposure at work.

What are the health effects?

Lead is a health hazard. It's stored in your bones and teeth and may damage parts of your body including the liver, kidneys and brain. Once in the body it circulates in the blood and the amount of lead in a person's blood gives an indication of how much has recently been breathed in or swallowed. A single exposure like eating a leaded paint flake the size of a five-cent piece can increase blood-lead levels for several weeks though some of this will remain in the body for life, while a gradual build up will increase health problems if exposure continues.

Unborn babies

Exposure can be harmful to the unborn baby as lead in the mother's blood passes through the placenta. Complications from high levels of exposure include premature birth, low birth weight and even miscarriage or stillbirth. Breastfeeding mothers can also pass lead to infants via their milk while the effects of lead exposure continue after birth and can result in impaired learning and mental ability.

Children

Lead exposure can permanently damage the brain with children under five particularly vulnerable because they frequently put their hands and toys to their mouth, they absorb and retain more lead from the gut and airways than adults and their developing brains are more sensitive to the effects of lead. Furthermore, up to 60 per cent of lead swallowed by children moves directly into circulating blood and thus from organ to organ.

Symptoms

A single exposure to high lead levels can lead to muscle pain, tiredness, abdominal pain, headaches, nausea and vomiting, fits and even coma while continued exposure to low levels of lead (such as indoor recreational shooting) may cause irritability and shortened attention span, lack of energy, loss of appetite, learning and behavioural problems, poor coordination, impaired growth, low blood count, high blood pressure, irregular heart rate and fertility problems. If, as an indoor shooter, you have any of these symptoms, visit your doctor and let them know your chosen sport.



Can I be tested?

You can find out how much lead is in your body by having a simple blood test - just ask your GP to refer you for a blood-lead level test.

Protective measures

The SSAA takes protective measures regarding lead poisoning at indoor shooting facilities including ensuring adequate ventilation, appropriate levels of awareness of the hazards associated with lead, good housekeeping and sufficient personal-hygiene facilities. Firing ranges should be adequately ventilated but contained to prevent the spreading of lead dust while all surfaces should be cleaned by wet dusting or mopping, not dry brushing or sweeping.

Walls and windows should be cleaned at least monthly using a high-phosphate solution (containing at least five per cent trisodium phosphate also known as TSP) or another lead-specific cleaning agent. Vacuum cleaners equipped with HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) filters will remove fine lead dust from the firing range with wet mopping being the next best alternative if such a vacuum cleaner is unavailable. Cloths and other cleaning equipment shouldn't be used anywhere else or other areas could be contaminated and ideally adequate hand-washing facilities, showers and changing rooms should be installed.

What you can do

Even small amounts of fine lead particles transferred from the range to the home can be a health hazard if swallowed or breathed in so it's important to avoid exposing yourself or your family to lead dust by taking the following basic precautions at the range.

Use unleaded ammunition when possible and keep young children, women of child-rearing age and pregnant women out of the shooting area. Don't eat, drink or smoke at the firing range and regularly wash your hands to remove lead dust. When using the range, wear protective clothing including disposable coveralls, shoes, disposable gloves and at least a P2 mask, shower when you get home and wash your shooting clothes.

At home, if making your own ammunition you should wear protective clothing, store lead bullets away from children and mark the labels as such, clean firearms by wet sponging, not dusting, and wash shooting clothes separately from regular washing, emptying lint filters after washing. This information is of a general nature and is not intended to alarm anyone. For more visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au and search 'lead exposure'.

• Dr Penny Hutchinson is a public health physician with Goodna Community Health Service and West Moreton Public Health Unit in Queensland. ●



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The *pen* is mightier than the rifle!

Rachael Oxborrow talks to John Dunn who reflects on more than three decades as an *Australian Shooter* columnist

For more than 34 years the Jumbunna column has been a faithful bookend for *Australian Shooter*. Over the course of some 360 articles author John Dunn has taken us on his adventures, shared his extensive firearms knowledge, hunting insights, thoughts and observations until, at the end of last year, he decided to call time on his hugely popular column.

Jumbunna is Aboriginal for “talk together” and for regular readers of John’s column, the stories often conveyed the feeling of sitting around the campfire with a friend sharing a yarn. The first Jumbunna appeared in the September 1988 edition of *Australian Shooters’ Journal*, as the magazine was known at the time and John, who’s lived in rural New South Wales for much of his life, began writing the column to share his daily observations of working in national parks.

“When I started out I’d work with an old typewriter and double type it with one carbon copy and an original,” he said. “I sometimes wonder how I kept it going for so long and it’s remarkable the column ran every month for more than 30 years.” Over

time some of those articles were compiled into two ‘best of’ books and to put those volumes together John scoured his records, used 3.5" floppy disk readers to trawl through his back catalogue and marvelled at the experiences he’s been able to share with readers for so long.

“At gun shows I’d have people come up to me and talk about the latest column, suggest ideas for future articles and I’ve always been amazed at how people connect to my writing,” John said. As he retired from his national parks role and eventually moved into town, the column morphed into documenting his hunting trips, observations and experiences from those adventures. His countless journeys both domestically and overseas have featured within the pages of this magazine and while he says he couldn’t pick a favourite column, there are some memorable ones which come to mind.

“There’s one from the Northern Territory I’ll always remember as I broke my toe,” he said. “Another is when a banteng came right up to us when we were hunting the Cobourg Peninsula and that was amazing, one of those encounters you’re



Write on: John’s column was a fixture for more than 34 years.

only going to experience once in a lifetime. I once wrote a column about a platypus on the river that wasn’t bothered by us hunting - those little guys fascinate me and it’s always nice to bump into them. I’ve been lucky to have enjoyed a lot of experiences in my life which are worth a story so it’s been a privilege to write about them and share them with other people.”

While this is the end of the Jumbunna column in *Australian Shooter*, we won’t be saying goodbye to John’s knowledgeable writing and witty observations as he’ll continue to write for SSAA publications, documenting his hunting adventures and penning the occasional product review.

• John Dunn’s books *The Jumbunna Collection*, *In the Footsteps of my Father* and *The Jumbunna Collection Volume II* are available to buy via email from foot-steps5350@gmail.com ●

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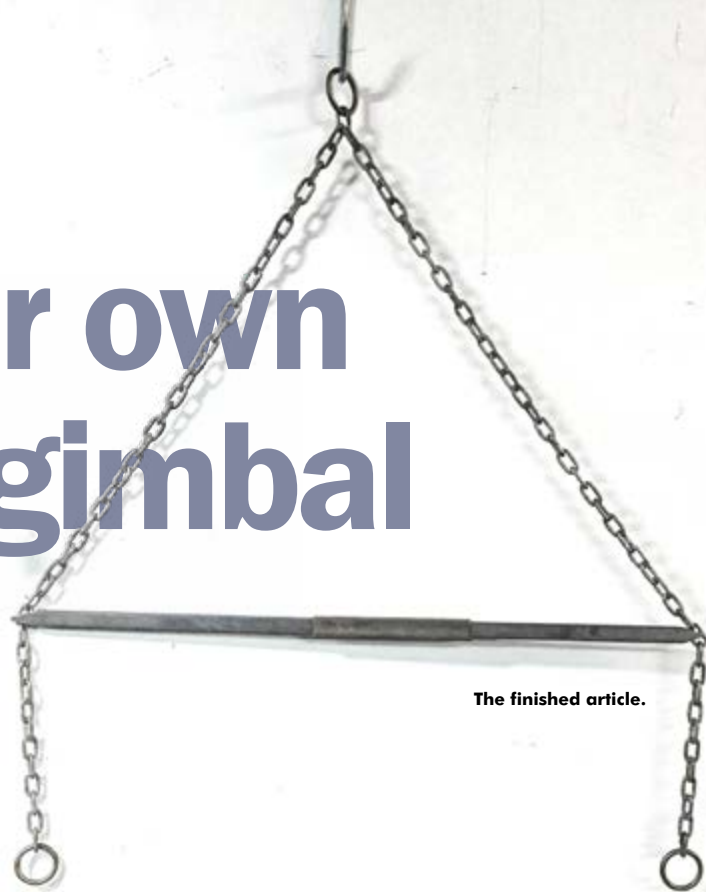
Joe Norris

At the height of the pandemic and being 'confined to barracks' I decided it was time to modify the transportable gimbal I made some time ago and, in the event anyone would like to try their hand at making one, I thought I'd pen this 'how-to' article. The original spreader was made from a piece of round bar I ground the ends of to fit through the chain links so it wouldn't move when setting it up. This was fine for small animals but when I tried to use it for a red stag my youngest daughter had shot, the weight was just too much and the rod bent into a U-shape.

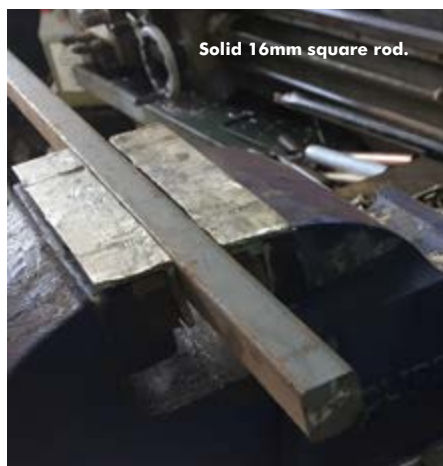
I wanted a portable set-up that wouldn't be a pain to have either behind or under the seat of my ute when not needed. I've seen several online but wanted something different so I decided to make one out of a chain with rings instead of hooks so I could hold the legs above the Achilles tendons, which would mean there was no need to try and skin around hooks or deposit dirt and hair on the meat. Another advantage of having the legs held by the chain and rings is there's no chance of the leg slipping off when one side is lighter than the other if the gimbal's used for butchering a sheep or pig and the animal is sawn down the back-bone to make chops.

The materials needed to make one like mine are 700mm of 16mm square solid bar, 160mm of 20mm box, 1700mm of welded link light chain, three rings slightly smaller in thickness than the hole in the chain links. Equipment needed is a grinder with 1mm cut-off wheel, drill with a bit slightly bigger than the thickness of the chain links, hammer and centre punch, vice and welder.

To make the spreader I just drilled a hole in the solid bar about 20mm back from each end then, with the cutting disc, put two cuts from the end of the bar to the hole so there's a slot the same size as the drill hole



The finished article.



Solid 16mm square rod.



Start with a hole slightly bigger than the chain you plan to use.



Mark the 20mm hollow section and punch indentations into the first 80mm segment to make it a tight fit over the solid square bar.



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when finished. Now cut the opposite sides off from behind the drill holes so the bar comes to a point that'll fit over the chain links. To make the spreader compact I cut the bar 390mm from one end.

Take the piece of 20mm box and using a centre punch make three indentations in the first 80mm only on each side. This is to make the box a 'hammer fit' over the solid bar. Take the shorter piece of the solid bar and hammer the box over it so the indentations form a tight grip on the bar. Only drive the box 80mm over the solid bar leaving the half of the box without indentations on it so the other section of solid bar can be fitted into it. This should mean both sections of solid bar are the same length now when laid side by side to make a compact package.

To make the hanging part of the gimbal take a 1700mm length of welded link chain, clamp the middle link in a vice and cut the weld of the link. Now spread the link open and fit a ring into the link before closing it back up. Then weld the link closed again which should leave you with two equal

lengths of chain hanging from the ring and if it doesn't you'll have to cut one side back until they're equal. Now you have it the same length, cut the last links on each side through the weld and fit a ring before welding the links back together.

To use the gimbal just put the spreader together and fit one side partway up the chain by slipping a link into the slot in the spreader and, counting the links below the spreader, fit the other side of the spreader the same number of links up the other side of the chain. Drop the chain through the ring in the end of the chain to form a loop then slip the leg of the animal through the loop and pull tight. Do the same on the other leg and take the weight. This will lock the chains to the leg and hold the animal securely until you've finished processing it.

For something to store it in I took an old pair of jeans, cut off a leg and sewed up one end to make a bag. The leg of the jeans is big enough to hold a rope too, but I wanted something small so didn't include a rope as there's usually one in my ute. ●





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The stuff of Legend

Winchester's XPR in .350 a winner, writes Con Kapralos

Every year it seems cartridge manufacturers, especially in the US, deliver another batch of calibres touted to shoot faster, flatter and with a greater knock-out punch or ballistic superiority over those already on the market. Seldom do we see a new calibre designed with a particular purpose in mind, where the faster and flatter prerequisites don't get a look in.

In the US there are several east coast states which only permit centrefire metallic cases of a straight-walled design greater than 1.8" in length for seasonal deer hunting. The rationale is these calibres are suited to shooting in relatively built-up areas and small acreages and don't pose a great risk as they're only effective out to 200m or so and fall off quickly thereafter.

The .450 Bushmaster for example is popular and fires a .45-calibre projectile which packs a punch over short distances. Winchester USA engineers saw the versatility in the .450 Bushmaster which uses projectiles in the 225 to 300-grain weight area with muzzle velocities around 1750-2500fps.

Yet they looked at designing a cartridge which would shoot a lighter projectile, be kinder in recoil but still use a straight-walled case to comply with the deer hunting requirements of the US states concerned. Enter the .350 Legend, built for deer hunting using a .35-calibre projectile with the parent case being a modified version of the ever-popular .223 Remington bottleneck. A major selling point was it had to be affordable.

.350 Legend overview

Many would naturally think .350 Legend brass could be formed from spent .223 Remington brass but this isn't the case. Winchester USA, designers of the .350 Legend, used the .223 Remington as the parent case which required several additional steps in its manufacture to produce a straight walled option 1.71" in length and a .378" case head with slight taper which facilitates extraction from the chamber once a round is fired.

The resultant case has no shoulder and with its taper is perfectly suited to .35-calibre projectiles. Comparing directly with a .223 Remington load is like chalk and cheese as the .350 Legend has significantly

less muzzle blast than the .223 but a tad more felt recoil. Winchester USA and Browning initially introduced a variety of loads for the .350 Legend with other US manufacturers Federal and Hornady coming to the party with their own loads for the Legend soon after.

Most factory offerings in .350 Legend embrace projectile weights in the 145 to 180-grain bracket, an exception being the 255-grain Super Suppressed load from Winchester. For the bulk of hunting applications, suitable projectiles in the 150 to 180-grain region would pass muster, with Winchester's 150-grain Deer Season XP and 180-grain Power-Point and similar offerings in the Browning BXR, Federal's



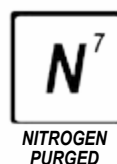
A detachable box magazine was designed to accommodate the straight-walled and stubby loads.

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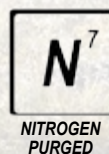
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The stuff of Legend

Winchester Australia has introduced the .350 Legend in its entry-level XPR bolt-action rifle.



Power-Shok/Fusion and Hornady Whitetail loads all excellent candidates. Hunting projectiles in this weight category are suited to quarry out to around 200m and for Australian hunters this equates to small-to-medium deer species along with goats, pigs and feral canines (so long as ranges are kept in mind).

The key to effective hunting with the .350 Legend is ensuring your given load has sufficient knock-down power for your target and the ranges involved. Medium deer species such as fallow would need 1000 ft-lb of striking energy as minimum. The 150gr loading falls short at 200m with around 900 ft-lb of residual energy but smaller and lighter-framed quarry such as goats, smaller pigs and wild dogs could be effectively tackled with the 150/180gr loads out to 200m with the residual energy present. For deer, 150-160m would be a better and more ethical distance with the .350 Legend.

XPR Synthetic

Winchester Australia supplied the standard model XPR Synthetic in .350 Legend calibre along with a matching optic in the excellent Meopta Optika 5 2-10x42 riflescope in Recknagel rings and bases. Also put forward were samples of Winchester ammunition for the calibre in the 145gr FMJ, 150gr Deer Season XP, 180gr Power-Point and Super Suppressed 255gr subsonic load.

The XPR rifle has been in production for quite a few years and is popular in the US, being offered in a large choice of variants and calibres, though in Australia the distributor only has two models in the Synthetic and Extreme Hunter. Features of the Winchester XPR Synthetic include the following:

- Push-feed action with a full-diameter three-lug bolt and 60-degree bolt for quick cycling of the action;
- Receiver made from steel bar-stock with pleasant round-bodied profile;

- Lightweight polymer stock with steel recoil lug inletted into the floor, mating up with a cross-slot machined into the underside of the front receiver ring;
- Winchester's MOA single-stage trigger, fully adjustable for weight and travel (review rifle trigger pull set at 2.2 kg);
- Teflon-coated bolt for silky smooth operation;
- Two-position safety located behind the bolt notch with bolt unlocking button;
- Winchester's Inflex Technology recoil pad to reduce felt recoil;
- Textured panels around pistol grip and fore-end to assist with positive grip no matter the weather;
- Sporter weight 22" (560mm) barrel made for the .350 Legend calibre along with newly designed detachable box magazine holding three rounds in single stack.



The Winchester XPR in .350 Legend shot extremely well with excellent groups from factory ammo.

The review rifle measures 1065mm and weighs 3.01kg (fitted with two-piece Weaver bases).

At the range

Being a new rifle it was thoroughly cleaned to remove any factory preservatives and the stock retaining screws checked for correct torque, as were the fitted Weaver bases. Once the supplied Recknagel rings and Meopta Optika riflescope were fitted, the rifle was bore-sighted at 25m before the target frame was moved out to 100m for accuracy testing. Five 3-shot groups were the order of the day with a quick barrel clean between ammo changes.

From the outset the .350 Legend was a pleasure to shoot, its mild recoil and muzzle blast making for a total shooting experience. Never once did it shoot poorly with all average groups around the Minute of Angle (MOA) mark and many individual groups

less than that. For a centrefire cartridge suited to shooting at relatively short ranges, the .350 Legend really surprised with its accuracy. The oddity in the Super Suppressed 255gr load worked well too, but its point-of-impact was around 30cm lower than the other loads with the lighter 145 to 180-grain projectiles.

The XPR Synthetic rifle cycled and ejected the .350 Legend cartridges and brass without issue and feeding from the 3-shot magazine was helped by a small chamfer cut into the entrance of the chamber to assist guiding the long, tapered rounds into the chamber itself. Hunters may like to note a Grizzly Winchester XPR .350 Legend nine-round magazine can be bought separately from dealerships which would be ideal in a culling scenario such as feral goat or pig control.

I decided a good test of the .350 Legend would be against some early summer fallow deer, which at that time of the year

are in peak condition for the table. With the rifle sighted-in using Winchester Deer Season XP 150-grain ammunition I'd a couple of areas in mind which the calibre would be well suited to, stalking through open woodland and light scrub with shots usually inside 150m. With synthetic stock and Meopta optic it carried well, the overall light weight making this a great hunting outfit though sadly no deer presented at ranges where the .350 Legend could cleanly take them.

In a hunting scenario the .350 Legend would mimic such proven calibres as the .30/30 Winchester and 7.62 Soviet with its ballistics and I certainly hope Australian hunters embrace it as it's an affordable and enjoyable short to medium-range calibre. The Winchester XPR Synthetic in .350 Legend retails for around \$995 and is available through the Winchester Australia dealer network. More at www.winchesteraustralia.com.au ●



Selection of Winchester factory ammunition sent for testing.

Winchester XPR Synthetic in .350 Legend - 100m

Ammunition	Best group (mm)	Worst group (mm)	Average group (mm)*
Winchester 145gr FMJ	20	26	23
Winchester Deer Season XP 150gr	18	28	23
Winchester Power-Point 180gr	26	38	32
Winchester Super Suppressed 255gr	19	34	28

* Average calculated from five 3-shot groups at 100m from a benchrest.

You've got it in you to *save a life*

Derek Nugent

Opponents of hunting, shooting and firearm-related activities in general will often cite 'public safety' concerns as the rationale for their stance. The anti-gun lobby takes every opportunity to question our ongoing ability to possess and use firearms, often on the basis there's no community benefit for private ownership of firearms to be permitted or, by inference, a need for organisations such as the SSAA to exist. Of

course this argument conveniently ignores the reality of the situation in both an economic and community context.

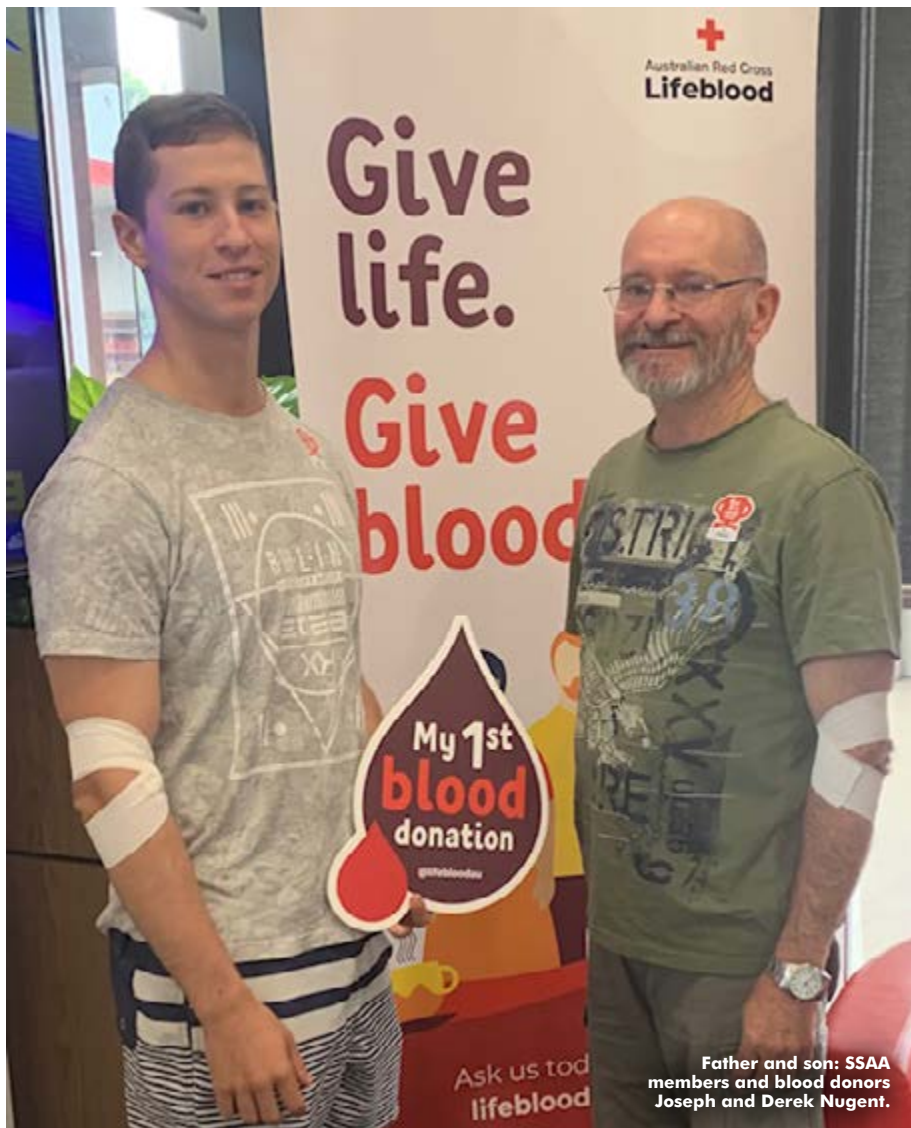
There are an estimated 868,000 licensed firearms owners across the country and the industry as a whole contributes more than \$2.4 billion annually to the nation's domestic economy and employs more than 20,000 Australians. Similarly the SSAA sponsors a host of beneficial community initiatives in the fields of education,

conservation and politics though it may come as a surprise to people, including members, that one of the least known yet most noble contributions made by many of our 212,000-plus members to the benefit of the entire community is through blood donations.

Saving a life

Each blood donation is able to save the lives of three people and it's a fact that Australia needs 1.7 million donations annually to meet demand, this equating to roughly three a minute with a new donor required every four minutes to maintain supply. The SSAA as an organisation has been officially supporting member blood donations since 2014 when a national donation team was first entered in the Red25 Blood Challenge, this commitment continuing to the present day with SSAA teams registered in each state through the Lifeblood Australia Group donation program.

This means members can literally roll up their sleeves and make a very tangible and positive contribution - in the name of SSAA - to the ongoing viability of blood services and the health outcomes of thousands of Australians. While there are eligibility criteria to be met to donate blood they're quite straightforward and essentially



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There are eight blood types: A, B, AB and O with an RH type (positive or negative) associated with each. While all blood types are eagerly sought for donation, some are rarer and more versatile, particularly the so-called universal types like O negative whole blood (7 per cent) and AB plasma (1-4 per cent) which can be given to anyone. The three possible types of donations are blood, plasma and platelets and once again they're in high demand as not everyone is able to donate all three, though each contributes to lifesaving treatments in an astonishing number of areas.

Blood donation

This is the most straightforward and quickest with virtually everyone capable of making a contribution. A whole blood donation can be made every 12 weeks, takes 15 minutes and extracts 470 millilitres (ml) or around 8 per cent of an adult's blood volume. Unfortunately it only has a shelf life of 42 days, hence the ongoing need for donations and new donors.

It's truly amazing how donated blood is used across a variety of medical scenarios and how many people actually benefit: 34 per cent is used to treat cancer and blood disease, 19 per cent goes to anaemia, 18 per cent to heart and organ surgeries, 13 per cent to stomach and kidney disease, 10 per cent to fractures and joint replacement, 4 per cent helps pregnant women, new mothers and young children while 2 per cent assists with managing road and trauma incidents.

Without doubt we'll all have known someone who falls into one of these categories and are reliant on the generosity of strangers for their ongoing survival, so with this in mind it's incumbent on as many of us as are able to make the commitment to support those members of our community in need of blood products by becoming a donor.

Plasma and platelet donation

These are more specialist as not everyone, for a variety of reasons, can donate them. Having said this, if you're physically able you can donate every two weeks and do so without prejudicing your 12-week whole blood donation cycle.

A plasma donation takes about 45 minutes and provides a basis for 18 different medical treatments including for chickenpox, measles, brain disorders, immune deficiencies, tetanus and tetanus infection, rhesus (RH) disease, rare blood disorders including thrombotic thrombocytopenia



Making a combined plasma and platelet donation.

purpura (TTP), liver and kidney disease, bone marrow transplants, haemophilia, deep vein thrombosis, heart surgery, haemorrhages, hepatitis and severe burns. Such an exhaustive list again clearly illustrates the number of people in our community who benefit from the Lifeblood donation program.

A platelet donation is restricted to males only and takes about 60 minutes though sadly it's only good for seven days. Platelets are made in the bone marrow and about 250 million of them exist in every millilitre of blood. Their purpose is to clot and stop bleeding therefore they're essential in managing blood loss during surgery, after major trauma and for anyone undergoing a medical treatment which lowers their platelet count (chemotherapy being one).

These facts further reinforce the need for people to step up and become a donor and doing so as a member of Team SSAA is your chance to make a valued and valuable contribution to the health of the wider Australian community.

Becoming a donor

Australia prides itself on the fact blood donations are made willingly on a volunteer basis as no money changes hands and not many countries can make such a community-minded claim. Consequently, becoming a donor is a simple process. Firstly I suggest visiting the Australian Red Cross Lifeblood webpage which is user-friendly and contains a depth of information on blood donation well beyond the scope of this article. It gives answers to every imaginable question and links to finding donation centres, booking an appointment and joining a blood donation team like SSAA.

On attending a donation centre you

complete a health/lifestyle survey to determine your eligibility to donate, your blood pressure and pulse will be measured and haemoglobin level tested. This mini health check is done each time you donate and your blood is also screened each time to ensure it's healthy and fit for purpose.

Depending on how busy the centre is and what type of donation you're making, allow between 45-120 minutes to complete the process, though given your efforts will save the lives of three people, it's one of the most meaningful uses of your time possible. That gift of life flows on to numerous nameless people who'll probably never be able to thank you personally but will be forever grateful for your generosity and community spirit, as will their loved ones.

Joining Team SSAA

The decision to become a blood donor is a personal one dependent on a myriad of factors including health, lifestyle and religious considerations, though as a general rule most of us are both able and eligible to donate, all that prevents us being the inclination to take that first step and attend a centre. I freely admit this was the case with me as while I always intended to donate blood, I never got around to it. But now in retirement I've made the commitment and am not only a regular donor of all three elements but a proud member of Team SSAA and, as a point of interest, in the Darling Downs (Queensland), Team SSAA sits 21st in the donation Top 100.

In this article I've endeavoured to highlight both the need for and far-reaching community benefits of being a blood donor, while advocating the ability to do so as an ambassador for the SSAA and all it represents. Our association is not just about firearms, shooting sports and the various issues pertaining to their ownership and use, it's representative of the interests of a large body of respectable, law-abiding, community-minded people who make a significant economic and social contribution to both their local districts and the nation as a whole.

While education, conservation and political initiatives represent the flagship programs of the SSAA, the quiet and unassuming participation of our members in the Lifeblood Australian Group Donation Program is indisputable evidence of a long-standing and ongoing commitment to the health and welfare of the Australian public. It shows a level of social responsibility and a pledge to the common good which is admirable, deserving of both recognition and respect and something we should all look to embrace. Please consider. ●

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Parliamentary Friends of Shooting group back in action

Rachael Oxborrow

The Parliamentary Friends of Shooting (PFOS) group was relaunched in Federal Parliament last month, bringing together different sides of politics, members of the shooting community and wider industry. The PFOS initiative began in 2015 and the group has been reborn several times following federal elections and has resulted in useful conversations, relationships and social occasions at the range.

New South Wales Labor Member for Hunter, Dan Repacholi and Victorian Nationals Senator Bridget McKenzie will be co-convening the group, with both reiterating the benefits of having a vehicle for our community to jointly advocate and increase the understanding of our sport among members of parliament, staff and the general public. "Now we're here, we're really going to have to put a shoulder to the wheel," Senator McKenzie said.

"For many years now the purpose of PFOS has been to demystify who we are as law-abiding firearm owners to ensure the

broader community understands who we are, what we do and that it's nothing to be afraid of. We also aim to make clear the broader economic and socio-economic contribution our community makes to this country."

The 2023 PFOS launch attendees included political staff members and a range of firearms industry and special interest groups including the Shooting Industry Foundation of Australia, Field and Game Australia, Australian Deer Association and Shooting Australia. Members of parliament in attendance included Western Australian Member for Moore, Ian Goodenough; WA Member for Brand, Madeleine King; Member for Eden-Monaro, Kristy McBain; Queensland Member for Kennedy, Bob Katter; Qld Senator Pauline Hanson; NSW Member for New England, Barnaby Joyce and Qld Member for Bonner, Ross Vasta.

Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA National) Chief Executive Officer Tim Bannister addressed the gathering at the launch and took the opportunity to highlight our ongoing calls for

more formal communication channels at federal level through a firearms advisory group. "It's good to see PFOS up and running," he said. "Firstly I'd like to thank Ian Goodenough, Ross Vasta and Bridget McKenzie for what you've done in the past. It has been a useful way of trying to get what we're about into conversation. We may all talk about shooting in different ways but the message is the same - we're licensed shooters and we're law-abiding."

"We had a very quiet time last year since the new government came in until it all exploded at the end of the year. Something former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd installed and the conservatives continued on with before COVID interrupted, was the Commonwealth Firearms Advisory Council. That group morphed into the Firearms Industry Reference Group over time and was really useful for this community. We were talking to Customs at the time and now Border Force and Australian Federal Police about the things we all have in common and that's public safety. It also allowed us the opportunity to make sure legislation worked in an effective way and didn't have unintended consequences."

"That worked really well for more than a decade but has stopped for the moment. I think it's something we as an industry need to get back on the drawing board. This will put us all in one room talking frankly with each other and so if something bad does happen, or if we together as a group see a way we can advance public safety while still making sure we can hunt, we can shoot and participate in sport at both elite and club level, then we can act."

"I'm asking Dan Repacholi to throw his weight around and knock on the door of the Attorney General and let's start a conversation about how we get anyone with a genuine interest and desire to see shooting prosper in Australia into that room so we can have a frank conversation."

To further push this point, SSAA National representatives also met with the Attorney General's Department to discuss ongoing consultation and formation of an advisory group. The conversation proved extremely useful and we look forward to progressing this in future. ●



SSAA CEO Tim Bannister addresses the meeting watched by Dan Repacholi and Senator Bridget McKenzie.

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Predator LRFs performed exceptionally well in wet weather while discovering a feeding buck.

Home on the range

Steiner LRF binos add new dimension, says Chris Redlich

In order to stay in touch with a modern-day hunter's needs is a requirement to provide a product which not only possesses the latest technology but is reliable and competitively priced. German firm Steiner have been producing quality optics for military and civilian use for decades and recently added new laser rangefinder (LRF) binoculars to their stable. Rangefinder binoculars aren't new to Steiner and 12 years ago I had the fortune of using a pair of their military binoculars overseas, ranging distances of mountain features out to 6km.

Unlike many other European brands Steiner's civilian binocular line-up looked to be deficient in comparative LRFs, then last year while browsing this magazine I was pleasantly surprised to see an ad for their new roof prism-design Predator LRFs. I was keen to find out more and as if struck by fate an invitation to review them arrived by email so I eagerly accepted the opportunity offered by Australian distributor Beretta.

As it turned out the review binoculars were hot property and once a pair became available I wasted no time in putting them through their paces. From the box they come supplied with a practical padded nylon carry case and comfort neck strap, lens cleaning cloth and user manual. Noticeable at first glance was the longer length of these new binos compared with other 10x42s I've reviewed recently. With a total length of

180mm (caps off) they're not the shortest around but what was immediately apparent was the streamlined lens barrels, free from the lumps and bumps found on other range-finding binoculars.

It was obvious the Steiner engineers had taken into consideration the compact allocation of electronic components providing a new ergonomic package. The aircraft-grade aluminium lens barrels include integral, heavy-duty loops for the neck strap or



shoulder harness mounting and all external surfaces are finished in a durable and grippy rubber coating in Steiner's signature non-reflective dark olive colour.

Weighing in at a solid 1kg isn't unusual for quality glass and consistent when compared to most other high-end European RF binoculars. The centre bridge is a semi-open hinge design offering interpupillary adjustment of 55-76 degrees, allowing enough movement to suit the eyes of many a hunter. The bridge hinge moves easily but is firm enough to stay put during regular insertion and removal from a harness and housed within the hinge is a large rubber coated fast-focus wheel, enabling rapid adjustment by either index finger in inclement weather.

For something that by all appearances looks quite sterile there's a lot going on in the centre bridge and located in front of the focus wheel is a watertight battery compartment. It houses a three-volt CR2 battery which provides at least 2500 range

THE EXTENSION OF THE HUNTER'S INSTINCT



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Home on the range

calculations before a battery status symbol in the display lets you know its remaining power. Interestingly, cold weather in particular and prolonged 'scan' mode will chew up more power than normal use. The ocular lenses each have a dioptre adjustment providing a clear customisation to the individual's eyes and both eyecups twist out to varying positions of eye relief from 10-15mm. The rubber eyecups include glare protectors (standard on Steiner binoculars) which help reduce penetrable sunlight between the binoculars and operator's eyes in bright conditions.

At the business end are the 42mm HD (high definition) objective lenses treated with Predator diamond coating and combined with the 10x magnification they provide a clear 112m field of view (FOV) at 1000m. Importantly, the lenses were fine to look through and although having marginal peripheral blurring were consistent with other high-end binoculars I've used. Protecting the objective are rubber lens caps, integrally attached to the binoculars' armour and while I'm generally not a fan of fiddly lens caps I grew used to them after a few outings.

Reviewing a pair of RF binoculars wouldn't be complete without a rundown on what some may describe as the boring part (breakdown of electronic components) but for the potential buyer who'd like to know more, read on. I don't claim to be an expert but my general knowledge on these electronics is translated directly from the supplied user manual.

The Predator LRF binoculars are basic on the outside but brimming with features, all functions easily accessed by pressing the menu select button with the alternate trigger finger on the left of the bridge. Housed within the right-hand lens is the display, six brightness levels enabling a visible view in all light (I chose Level 3 which suited all conditions experienced during testing).

The reticle consists of a centre circle flanked by broken cross-hairs at all four quarters with the verticals slightly smaller in length. To operate the rangefinder simply apply light pressure with the trigger finger to the power on/measure button marked with an arrow on the right of the bridge. A single press opens the display to standby and subsequent depressions while viewing the focused target allows for fast and easy rangefinding from 4m out to 1800m. The centre reticle is supported by diagonal flashing lines during the rangefinding process and disappears once the range is calculated. This arrangement, while



The business end of the LRF binos is Predator's HD diamond coated objective lenses providing crystal-clear viewing.

appearing to resemble an annoying flashing star, works well once you're used to it.

By holding down the range button while scanning, ranges are updated at a fast pace of around two calculations per second, this continuous scan feature particularly important for ranging moving objects, updating the hunter on any quarry until it stops for a clear shot. As with most rangefinding devices the Predator LRFs have an integrated inclinometer which calculates the angle of viewing, translating the line of sight (LOS) or angular measurement to horizontal. This is located directly below the reticle and horizontal distance (HD) for angle range compensation, below the LOS reading. Crucially the word 'End' is displayed when trying to range an object beyond the binoculars' capability.

Enhancing the features further is the inclusion of a game setting indicated by a deer's head which prioritises ranging a game animal instead of a tree or rock in close proximity to the target, a welcome feature particularly for long-range targets and from my experience during field testing wasn't just a gimmick.

Field test

Whenever I field test a product of particular technology, sometimes acquainting myself with a new piece of electronic optical equipment can be a challenge due to manufacturers' varying designs and features though I can say without any hesitation that familiarising with the new LRFs was a breeze.

Armed with knowledge from the user manual, those electronic features were immediately apparent from the moment I raised the binos to my eyes, clarity of the HD lens providing a crystal-clear image in all conditions and rangefinding capabilities



Looking through the bino lens in rain showing its rangefinding ability out to almost 1800m. Note the deer priority setting in the top left.

available at the touch of button. Using my non-master index finger to control the menu, I settled on the desired features including metre/yard, display brightness, angle compensation and animal (buck) priority setting, my trigger finger easily working the rangefinding button as I scanned numerous hills and vegetation in search of game.

I had the fortune of viewing a lone fallow deer grazing the hills for a late afternoon feed. The wet conditions were dismal but I easily ranged the deer at 600m and the quality Steiner lenses enabled clear identification in the low light, confirming a young buck with small antlers. He hung around for me to enjoy watching his undisturbed feeding time and long enough to take photos with my spotting scope adapter.

Conclusion

Some may prefer regular binoculars for hunting but once you've tried a pair of rangefinders it's hard to argue against that in-built convenience. LRF may mean laser rangefinder but for these Steiner Predators I suggest LRF also stands for 'Long Range Find'. These are the best long-distance rangefinders I've used so far, due to the ease at which they calculate distances freehand to almost 1800m in poor conditions.

I believe Steiner have raised the bar for hunting binocular design and their Predator 10x42 LRFs are the real deal for those after high-quality binos with the added convenience of a built-in laser rangefinder all combined in a sleek design. Backed by Steiner's 'heritage warranty' and competitively priced at \$2099 (at time of writing), the Predator LRF 10x42s are absolute value for money.

More at berettaaustralia.com.au. ●



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The new Sabatti Rover action is a completely new design, made out of a solid billet of high-strength 7075 aluminum alloy, precision machined to minimize manufacturing-induced tolerances, then hard anodized. The receiver comes with an integral Picatinny rail allowing the mount of riflescopes or other aiming devices.

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\$1,750 SRP

CALIBRES

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6,5x55 SE | 6.5 Creedmoor
7mm Remington Magnum
.30-06 Springfield | .308 Winchester

FEATURES

- Three lugs, 7075 aluminum alloy action
- Standard trigger
- Cold hammer forged barrel, standard rifling
- 3 shots removable polymer magazine
- Two positions safety, with bolt stop
- Polymer stock



ROVER ALASKAN WITH AICS MAGAZINE

\$2,190 SRP

CALIBRES

7mm Remington Magnum
.30-06 Springfield | .308 Winchester
.300 Winchester Magnum
.338 Winchester Magnum

FEATURES

- Three lugs, 7075 aluminum alloy action
- Standard trigger
- Cold hammer forged barrel, standard rifling
- Muzzle brake (Jet-Brake)
- 7 shots AICS compatible removable magazine
- Two positions safety, with bolt stop
- Adjustable sights
- Polymer stock with soft-touch finish





Staying power

Versatile .243 Winchester proves its worth for Thomas Tabor

The light recoil of the .243 Winchester makes it a great choice for ladies and younger shooters but possibly the most favourable aspect of this cartridge is its diversity. For hunters after a single calibre capable of being effective on anything from deer, roos and pigs all the way down to rabbits, foxes and small vermin, the .243 is hard to beat.

From the time it was introduced in 1955 shooters quickly embraced both the cartridge's light recoil as well as its hunting versatility. Eventually that same popularity led to a whole new era of .243/6mm cartridge choices - both wildcat versions as well as commercial calibres - but in the end the .243 has prevailed over all those decades and outlasted most of its challengers.

A little history

The late US cartridge wildcatter and gun writer Warren Page is largely credited with the advance of the .243 and at the time his desire was to cultivate a cartridge which could be used effectively for hunting deer as well as varmints, this eventually leading to the development of what we now know as the .243 Winchester. Page began by squeezing down the case of a 7.62mm NATO (which became known on the civilian market as the .308 Winchester) to accept the considerably smaller diameter .243/6mm bullet, the end result being a modern-looking, moderately sharp-shouldered and

fairly long-necked case. Ironically, as a kind of a back-handed slap at the once highly-touted .25 Souper cartridge, Page called his new creation the .240 Page Super Pooper.

Like most wildcatters Page must've dreamt of his new cartridge eventually reaching the pinnacle of success in the commercial market, which it did when Winchester adopted it in 1955. But while that major player chose to put the new cartridge into production and chamber their rifles for it, they decided not to call it the Page Pooper and instead it became known as the .243 Winchester.

The first rifles commercially available in the new calibre were Winchester's bolt-action Model 70 and lever-action Model 88. But as the popularity of the cartridge continued to grow so did the availability of choices both within the Winchester brand and from other rifle manufacturers. Even though Page's original design was based on the 7.62mm NATO/.308 Winchester case, today's reloading manuals show the current manufactured .243 Winchester brass to be 0.76mm longer than the .308 Winchester.

Nevertheless, shooters who reload their own ammunition can still produce brass for .243s by running .308 cases through their full-length resizing die to squeeze it down to .243 dimensions. But when this is done it has a tendency to increase the neck metal thickness which usually makes it necessary to turn that thickness down as if this

isn't done, higher chamber pressures could result.

Twist rate and bullet selection

The twist rate of a barrel is most often presented in the form of how many inches of the barrel it takes for the rifling to make one complete revolution. For example, a barrel with a 1-in-9 twist rate would indicate it takes 9" of that barrel length for the rifling to make a complete (360-degree) revolution. In order to determine the optimum rate of twist for a firearm, several factors are usually considered as calibre, length and shape of the intended bullet to be fired and velocities can all play a part in determining the best possible twist rate of a barrel. In general terms it's commonly felt that longer, heavier bullets in most calibres perform best in faster twist rate barrels while shorter, lighter weight bullets function more efficiently in barrels with slower twist rates.

I've owned several factory-made bolt-action rifles chambered in .243 which currently include a Remington 700 BDL with replacement aftermarket composite stock and a new unaltered Ruger American. Both barrels are said to have twist rates in the 1-in-9 to 1-in-10 range which in this calibre should be best suited for the heavier .243 bullets in the region of 95 to 105 grains, yet I found both rifles stabilise a much broader array of bullet weights than those two.



Leica Ultravid HD-Plus

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The Leica Ultravid HD-Plus models meet the highest demands of binocular users. The binoculars incorporate innovative coating processes, high-quality lenses and high-transmission glass (SCHOTT HT™- Glass) in the prisms. In addition, the perfect balance between transmission and contrast ensures rich colours, clear vision and the sharpest detail resolution.



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Staying power

While hunting deer-sized game my long-time favourite bullet is the 95-grain Nosler Partition but when chasing smaller game and varmints, I frequently switch to my own handloads with little 55-grain Nosler Solid Base bullets. While these fall on opposite ends of the usual .243 bullet spectrum, both group and perform very well yet differ in their impact points so a sighting adjustment must be made if switching.

Competitors

The same year Winchester brought the .243 to the market Remington countered with their own .243/6mm cartridge, initially calling it the .244 Remington, that version originally made by necking down a .257 Roberts case (itself developed from the case of the 7x57mm Mauser). Eventually the .244 was renamed the 6mm Remington and while the latter is still made today by many rifle manufacturers, it lost the popularity battle with the .243 Winchester early on and remains that way still.

Weatherby also threw their hat in the .243/6mm ring with the .240 Weatherby Magnum in 1968 but, like all that company’s cartridges, its popularity has remained quite limited over the years. And more recently cartridges like the 6mm Creedmoor, .24 Nosler and a few others have tried to muscle in on the .243 Winchester but have enjoyed little success.

My own experience

For handloading I found the best powders for almost all bullets for the .243 are those with a slower burn rate. As alluded to earlier, my favourite .243 load for hunting larger game consists of a handloaded 95-grain bullet, specifically a Nosler Partition which I send on its way at a measured 3177fps. That load produces 1200ft-lb of energy on impact at 100m and when sighted-in to hit around 3cm high at that range the bullet will only be down a little over 15cm at 300m.



Thomas found the moderately priced .243 Ruger American shot accurately.



One of Thomas’ favourite varmint handloads with a 55-grain Nosler Solid Base bullet is capable of good groups at 100 yards.



A couple of Thomas’ favoured handloaded .243 cartridges are the 95-grain Nosler Partition and 55-grain Solid Base.

And when I shift from pursuing big game to varmints, my handloads with 55-grain Nosler Solid Base Ballistic Tip bullets leave the barrel at an impressive 3900fps, this load producing devastating results on smaller game. Even if you don’t load your own cartridges, factory loads are available from a variety of manufacturers producing similar bullets.

The way I see it

It almost seems like new cartridges are being developed on a monthly basis but in my opinion some of the best are those which have stood the test of time with the .243 Winchester certainly one of them. Whether you’re going after pigs and deer-sized animals or varmints and small game I don’t believe you can go wrong with this cartridge.

I have a close friend who underwent serious surgery just before the start of the US elk hunting season a few years back and feeling reluctant to use his normal elk rifle due to its stout recoil, he opted instead for his .243. Normally I wouldn’t suggest the cartridge for game of this size but he’s an experienced hunter and knew well its limitations.

Not willing to give up an elk season he used that .243 to kill two cows, each with a single shot, and while certainly not recommended for this type of application, it does demonstrate the effectiveness of the cartridge when loaded with a high-quality hunting bullet coupled with precise placement. ●

ACCURACY CHART

.243 Winchester 3-Shot Groups at 100 yards

Hornady American whitetail factory ammo with 100-grain InterLock bullets

Best	Average	Worst
32mm	38mm	46mm

Handloaded 95gr Nosler Partition with 44 grains of IMR 4831 powder

Best	Average	Worst
5mm	27mm	48mm

Handloaded 55gr Nosler Solid Base BT with 44 grains of Varget powder

Best	Average	Worst
8mm	17mm	29mm

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Benchrest sharpshooters *glad to be back*

After a two-year pandemic-enforced hiatus, the Australia Day matches for light and heavy class benchrest rifles were held in late January at the SSAA Majura Range near Canberra, shooters from four states facing the starter on a warm and windy Saturday that would test the skill and patience of all.

Light rifle at 100 yards was first to be contested and you'd have to shoot below two-tenths of an inch to even look like winning the small group prize. At the end it was a .142 from Paul Sullivan which took the medal and while this was happening, one shooter was steadily putting together a tidy aggregate with Keith Smith a popular winner on .2066 for his five groups.

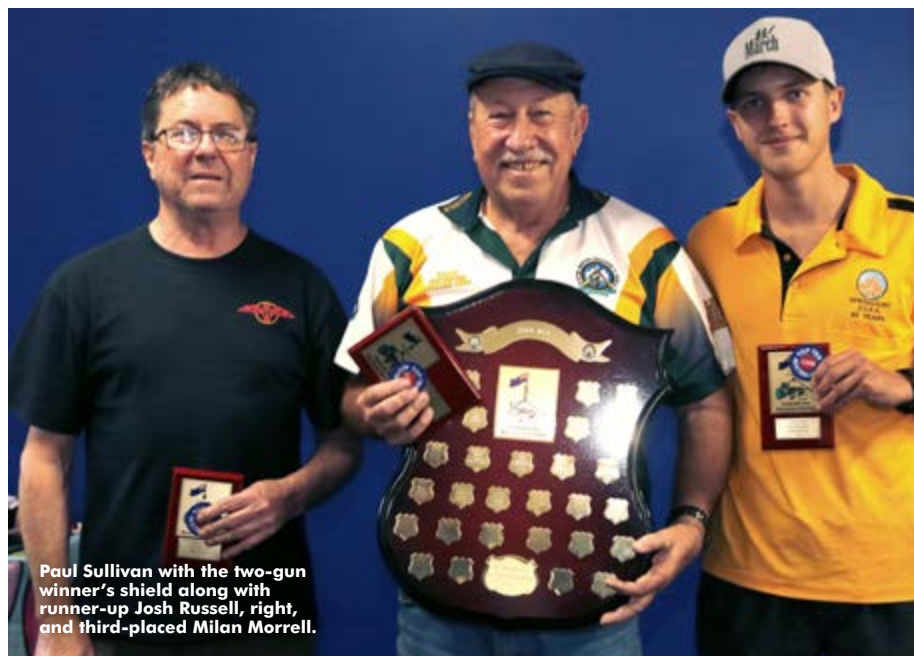
The 200 yard section was never going to be easy with lots of the wind and mirage Majura is renowned for. To keep five shots inside half an inch was difficult though some made it look easy, Milan Morrell posting the smallest group of .326 on his last card to comfortably take the aggregate title on .2556. Daylight was second! The grand aggregate produced a popular and talented winner in 17-year-old Josh Russell who went about things in a quiet and confident manner to record .2825 ahead of Morrell on .2875 and Sullivan with .2903.

Sunday was a different day indeed with cooler temperatures, very light conditions and results reflecting this. Point-one groups came thick and fast, the best of them being a neat .110 by Tom Thompson and the aggregate a tidy .2094 by Sullivan. The final yardage at 200 was closely contested with shooters acutely aware that in those light conditions any slip-ups would prove costly. The best group was a remarkable .202 by Sullivan on his 'C' target though by day's end we'd been treated to an extraordinary aggregate of .1867 by Michael Huebner.

Aided by his effort at the longer yardage, Huebner took the grand aggregate on .2157 from Sullivan on .2269 and Thomas Spang third on .2338. The Bob Daniels Memorial Trophy for the two-gun aggregate went to Sullivan on .2581 with Josh Russell second



Heavy rifle winner Michael Huebner flanked by runner-up Paul Sullivan, right, and third-placed Thomas Spang.



Paul Sullivan with the two-gun winner's shield along with runner-up Josh Russell, right, and third-placed Milan Morrell.

on .2701 and Morrell third on .2813 (full results on Benchrest Bulletin website).

Thanks are due to the Tobler family who put on the event and provided everything

from catering to running the firing line. Max Coady and Ian Thompson did the scoring and Carolyn Rae organised the target crew. A superb effort all round. ●



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All change!

Failing sight meant Barry Johnstone had to 'switch' eyes and shoulders

As Welsh poet Dylan Thomas told us: "Rage, rage against the dying of the light," evocative words which hold a significant meaning for sporting shooters. At the firing range or in the field when light starts to fade it's time to give it away and return another day. Yet when it's your eyesight that begins to fade it's a far more serious matter and my recent annual visit to the optician revealed the vision through my right (shooting) eye was deteriorating.

The good news is my left eye was fine so I started to experiment, left eye then right in turn and was blown away by how much clearer my vision thorough the scope was with my left eye. I was concerned but not alarmed as I'd turned 80 a few months earlier and during the past few years had disposed of all my calibres over .243 with the exception of a rifle in .357 Magnum.

My 'battery', as Karamojo Bell would've called it, now consisted of a .243 Ackley Imp Browning BBR, .222 Tikka M55, .357 Mag Rossi LA and a .22 Lithgow Model 12 which are also used by my son and grandson on bush trips but due to old legs I mostly shoot at the SSAA Belmont range these days. I could shoot the .243 from my left shoulder

as it had a straight plain stock but wasn't a comfortable fit, the .222 had a deluxe stock with cheekpiece and wasn't suitable, the .357 being a lever-action should be do-able with practice and the .22 was light enough but the bolt now being on the wrong side meant it was a bit fiddly.

The dilemma now was whether or not I should buy a left-handed gun and, if so, in what calibre. I already had all the reloading components from dies through to adequate supplies of powder and projectiles to suit my current calibres. Then someone asked: "Why do you need another rifle?" I told him I hoped to have a couple of bush trips left in me though admittedly I'd be stationary on a trail, by a dam or just sitting under a tree and needed a light sporter which would come to the left shoulder easily enough to overcome 60 years of right shoulder automatic response.

And I found one! A .222 Rimmed built on a Martini Cadet action, it was an original Sportco with a medium-heavy barrel and fitted with scope mounts. Condition for its age was pretty good though the bore showed some wear and I fitted a spare Kahles 4x scope with 7A reticle from around the same period (late 1960s or early '70s).

I'd no bore-sighter and being a Martini couldn't do my usual trick of bore-sighting on a TV aerial through the shed window, though luckily a shooting mate came to the rescue and did the job for me.

I loaded up some cases which came with the gun and using .222 dies with a .357 shell holder, the load which had given me excellent accuracy in the Tikka was a 55gr Sierra SP with 19.7 grains of 2207. For my newly-acquired Martini I loaded a 55-grain Sierra HPBT with 19.5 grains of 2207 then back at Belmont, using my left eye and shoulder it was spot on at 50m, extending out to 100m and holding dead-on at a crow target, I was stoked to see two holes slap-bang in the centre of the 8 ring.

I'm delighted with my ambidextrous Martini .222R which is compact, well balanced, handles and comes to the shoulder very smoothly with a slick action which extracts smoothly and a perfectly acceptable trigger. The .222 Rimmed for practical purposes gives little away in performance to the omnipresent .223 and as far as reloading goes, the .222 with its slightly longer neck may actually have some advantages. So, if you have to 'switch' eyes and shoulders, the Martini rifle is a worthy choice. ●



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The sinking also remains one of the most enthralling mysteries of the sea. Historians and shipwreck hunters alike scoured the Indian Ocean for close to

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Tiger snake in a curled up position.



Summer, snakes and stalking

Hunters beware those slippery visitors, warns Douglas Riach

Summer in the southern states and perhaps all year round in northern parts of Australia is snake season and it's at this time hunters need to be cautious but not paranoid about serpents. Yes, Australia is home to five of the world's 10 most venomous snakes but has a low snakebite incidence rate and a very minimal death rate, mainly due to medical treatment and the availability of antivenom.

The World Health Organisation estimates 125,000 people die from snakebites worldwide every year but Australia has an average of only one or two deaths per annum. From 2000 to May 2021 there have been 34 reported deaths in this country, with two further suspected but not confirmed fatalities and of those reported cases, one death was the result of a sea snake bite received when pulling in a fishing net. There were no deaths in 2004, 2005, 2017 and 2018.

Interestingly there have been no reported mortalities of a hunter, although a bush walker died in Western Australia in 2019 after being bitten by a snake and not located by emergency services for two days. Perhaps hunters are more cautious

as they know they share the bush with snakes though it may also be the boots and clothing worn when hunting. A number of the people bitten and who subsequently died didn't report being bitten and a snake bite was only confirmed later, so you could presume a hunter wearing high boots, tough long trousers and perhaps even protective leg gaiters could receive a snake strike and not be aware of it.

Is one state worse than others? During that reported 2000 to May 2021 period, snakebite deaths were recorded as Queensland 12, New South Wales 7, Victoria and Western Australia 6 each, Northern Territory 3, South Australia and Tasmania one each. In 2011 and 2012, Queensland was the only state to record a snakebite death and exceeded the national average with six casualties in the two years. As stated, in that 2000-2021 period none of the deaths were tagged as hunters with the activities recorded being fruit picking, pruning vines, jogging, attending hockey practice, farming and moving nets on a farm.

As well as the previously mentioned sea snake and bushwalker, there was also



Too close for comfort is a brown snake on open ground.



Hiding in the grass is a lurking brown snake.



Two tiger snakes in an irrigation ditch crossing a rice field.

one recorded case of a Queenslander who died after he caught a snake in his yard for the purpose of having it identified and a Queensland snake catcher who succumbed to a bite. The highest incidence of snakebites and deaths were recorded from gardening activities although in a number of cases, especially Queensland, the pursuit at the time is not logged and difficult to ascertain. Location of the snakebite is also

relevant although the site is not always reported.

The hand is the highest body part of reported bites followed by the toe and foot as in warmer areas the wearing of thongs, sandals or going barefoot may contribute to the incidence of bites in that area (this is unlikely to happen to hunters who should be wearing sturdy footwear). The number of snakebites to the hand can be contributed

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Summer, snakes and stalking

to several scenarios but the Queensland Government factsheet, like other state and territory snake advisory documents, says: "Never attempt to catch or kill a snake as most snakebites occur when people are trying to do this."

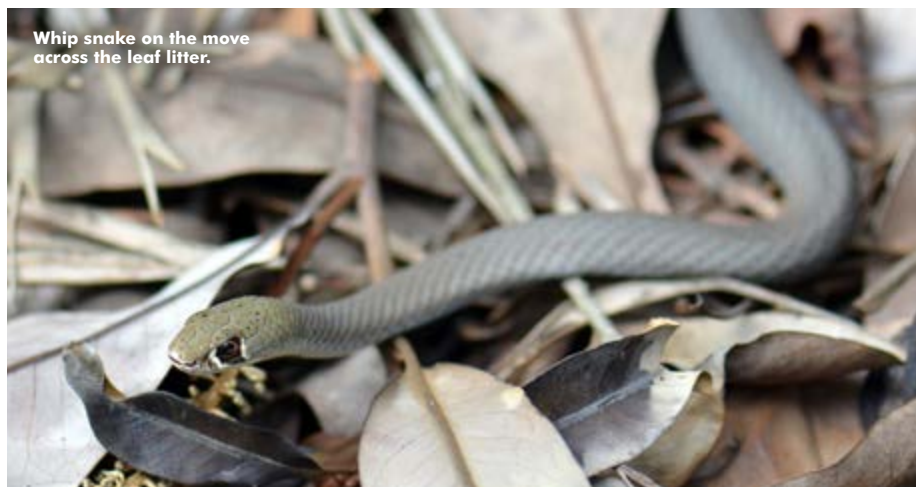
I presume most hunters have had a close encounter with a snake. I know I have with the sight of two tiger snakes at the edge of a NSW rice field being an unpleasant surprise, while most of my South Australian experiences have involved brown snakes and the occasional red-bellied black. I quietly backed away from the tiger snake episode to avoid a confrontation with a species I was unfamiliar with.

The brown snake is a fast-moving creature which appears not to fear humans. They're common in South Australia and I've seen them hold their ground and watch as I walked past, keeping out of striking distance of course. I know of two people in that state (not hunters at the time) who unknowingly went too close to brown snakes which struck with what's called a dry bite or blunt strike (they hit without using their fangs). I'm told it's a warning that you're too close though you should never take that risk and deliberately approach a brown snake. The 2000-2021 data shows that species has caused the most deaths by far followed by tiger snakes and taipans.

I've had several encounters with red-bellied black snakes, always around water and on one occasion while duck hunting with my mate in front of me, he stepped over one without noticing. It had its head up and watched him as he missed it with both feet while I stood perfectly still behind him. The serpent slowly uncoiled and moved off into the reeds which was a relief, as we were far too close for comfort.

The data shows deaths have occurred via venomous snakebites from creatures not normally considered dangerous to humans but either due to the age of the victim, immune response, allergy or other factors, this has happened. One such case was death from a whip snake, a mildly venomous variety not considered a risk to people due to the low toxicity of its venom and its small fangs. But in this case the person was handling the snake and was bitten on the fingertip, puncturing the skin, so my advice would be just don't handle any snake.

Going back to hunting scenarios, caution is required when moving around the bush in snake season - watch where you put your hands and never reach down a rabbit hole. I know hunters who don't like to take their eyes off the area being hunted but, if possible, check over your surroundings and



look where your feet are going to go as not all snakes are hiding in the grass and some are easily seen if you look for them.

I know deer hunters who avoid going out in snake season but if you want to hunt the summer months in snake country, consider additional precautions and wear high boots, appropriate long trousers and protective leg gaiters. Some are advertised as 'snake gaiters' while other brands appear just as thick and durable without the 'snake-proof' tag. It's your choice, remembering under the gaiters are long trousers and below that usually thick woollen socks giving good protection for the worst-case scenario.

I haven't mentioned snakebite first-aid kits as I've been discussing prevention not treatment and they'd likely need a separate article anyway, but it's something to consider putting in your backpack as insurance if that serious mishap occurs. Hunters haven't featured in the last 20 years of snakebite death data so with a bit of caution and the right footwear, clothing and leg gaiters there's no reason not to venture out any summer and go hunting. After all, it's statistically safer than riding a bike on the road. ●



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Versatile tripods impressed Con Kapralos

US firm BOG make some superlative shooting rests and hunting gear which include a range of monopod, bipod and tripod rests. I've been using one of their tripods for more than 10 years and have found the unit without comparison when it comes to form and function. BOG are always refining their product lines and one of the biggest sellers recently have been their DeathGrip Clamping Tripods and Infinite ArcaSwiss Tripod range.

NIOA is Australian importer and distributor for BOG and at a product range day had the DeathGrip Clamping Tripod with both aluminium and carbon-fibre legs and the Infinite ArcaSwiss carbon-fibre tripod on show. From the outset the sheer quality and ease of use on these products was evident and using them throughout the day only confirmed them to be excellent in all respects.

The DeathGrip with aluminium legs weighs 3.8kg and the carbon-fibre model tips the scales at around 3.2kg and apart from those differences in the materials, both units are identical in the way they operate. Starting with the legs, they have three-position angle locking positions at 20, 40 and 85 degrees with legs adjustable

for length using non-slip cam lever locking fasteners.

The tripod has an effective shooting height from 18cm right up to 150cm which translates to shooting positions from standing, kneeling to prone, retractable steel spikes in the rubber feet offering an additional level of grip if required with the legs foam padded along their upper segments (rubber retention straps hold them together for carrying). The clamping head is what defines the DeathGrip tripod, being able to clamp and hold a rifle securely. The saddle is rubber lined so won't mark the riflestock, a quick-adjusting lever clamping the saddle to the stock and tilt adjustment allowing up to 25 degrees of cant forwards and backwards as well as rotation to 360 degrees with tension adjustment.

The Infinite ArcaSwiss tripod takes things to the next level and is their premium model, designed as a multi-functional platform which uses a quick-change system on top of a ball-head mount. It features premium carbon-fibre legs with twist-locking adjustment, DeathGrip clamping head with non-marring rubber jaws, quick-release ArcaSwiss mounting system and prone to standing height



A spotting scope is easily accommodated.

adjustment in a 2.6kg package (with padded carry case). All of which makes for a serious hunting tripod which not only serves as a shooting platform but with the ArcaSwiss rail enables use with digital and video cameras and any other tripod accessory which accepts a 1/4-20 threaded post. For the stalking hunter where weight is a factor the Infinite ArcaSwiss carbon-fibre tripod is the only option.

It was a real pleasure to use these accessories which are extremely well thought-out in both design and function. The BOG DeathGrip range is available from NIOA dealers Australia-wide and you'll find more at nioa.com.au ●



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The new SSAA Razor Polo Shirt is a stylish and comfortable grey polo shirt with contrast panels and lime-green fluoro piping. Made from 100% BIZ COOL Polyester Sports Interlock material, the polo shirt has grid mesh underarm and side panels for breathability and a knitted collar with contrast placket.

The polo comes in sizes ranging from S to 5XL

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To celebrate the SSAA's 75th anniversary we have a special production run of 75-year anniversary pins and cloth badges.

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National

Handgun Metallic Silhouette National Postal Shoot

March 1-May 31, 2023

All SSAA HMS ranges

Program: Small Bore, Field Pistol, Big Bore. Contact: Russell Mowles: handgunsilhouette@disciplines.ssaa.org.au

Scoped 3P, Field Rifle, NRA and Air Rifle National Championships

April 5-10, 2023

Southern Districts Rifle Club, Bedforddale, WA

Program: April 5: Practice. April 6: NRA 3x40, 10m

Scoped Air Rifle - Precision. April 7: Field Rifle Centrefire, 10m Scoped Air Rifle - 3P April 8: Scoped 3P Rimfire. April 9: Field Rifle Rimfire, shooters' dinner and presentation in the evening. April 10: Scoped 3P Centrefire.

Facilities: Camping/caravan sites at range, limited powered sites, showers and toilets, licensed bar. Contact: secretary@sdrcl.com.au

SSAA Muzzleloading National Championships

April 6-10, 2023

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, Pinjar, WA

Program: April 6 Practice; 7 Pistol and Musket, 8-9 Rifle, 10 Rifle and Black Powder Cartridge Rifle. Facilities: Canteen open daily for lunch/snacks, limited camping and caravan sites available. Contact: Bob Boyd 0417 953 257 or Robertjboyd@bigpond.com.

SSAA Benchrest Centrefire National Championships

April 7-10, 2023

Dairyville Range, Coffs Harbour, NSW

Program: April 6: Practice, 7: Unlimited, 8: Light Benchrest, 9: Heavy Benchrest, 10: Sporter Benchrest. Nominations to ianbenchrest@gmail.com. Contact: Ian Thompson ianbenchrest@gmail.com

Rifle Metallic Silhouette National Championships

April 7-11, 2023

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA

Program - April 7: Practice and scrutineering; April 8: 80-shot Air Rifle Silhouette; April 9: 80-shot Rimfire Silhouette Rifle; April 10: 80-shot Centrefire Silhouette Rifle; April 11: 40-shot Rimfire Hunting Rifle Silhouette, 40-shot Centrefire Hunting Rifle Silhouette. Facilities: Camping, cooking and toilets on-site. Contact: Paul Dunn Paul@compac.com.au or 0407 428 175.

Lever Action Silhouette National Championships

April 13-16, 2023

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA

Program - April 13: Practice; April 14: Rifle Lever Action Silhouette (80 shots); April 15: Pistol Cartridge Lever Action Silhouette (80 shots); April 16: Rimfire Lever Action Silhouette (80 shots). Facilities: Camping with showers, toilets and barbecue, limited power, barbecue lunch supplied daily. Contact: Warren Goodfield 0407 440 431 laswa@iinet.net.au or David Brougham 0432 748 703 clas@iinet.net.au.

SSAA Benchrest Rimfire National Championships

April 13-16, 2023

Dairyville Range, Coffs Harbour, NSW

Program: April 12: Practice, 13: LRF Group, 14: HRF Group, 15: IRB Day One, 16: IRB Day Two. Nominations to ianbenchrest@gmail.com. Contact: Ian Thompson ianbenchrest@gmail.com.

Fly Shoot National Championships

May 5-8, 2023

Eagle Park Range, Victoria

Program: May 5: Practice. May 6: 500m Light Gun.

May 7: 500m Heavy Gun. May 8: 200m Rimfire. Facilities: Free camping at range with showers and limited power. Cafe open for breakfast and lunch. Contact: Nick Aagren: nick.aagren@gmail.com

Sporting Shotgun National Championships

May 13-14, 2023

SSAA Hay, NSW

Program: May 12: Practice. May 13-14: 200 targets (100 each day). Facilities: Camping at venue with showers, car parking. Canteen open for breakfast and lunch. Contact: Jan Jacka 0417 459 053

Shotgun 5-Stand National Championships

May 20-21, 2023

SSAA Albury, NSW

Program: May 19: Practice. May 20-21: 200 targets (100 each day), shoot-off for all places. Facilities: Limited camping available, canteen, parking at venue. Contact: Peter Thomson 0407 785 461.

SSAA National Junior Challenge

July 6-9, 2023

SSAA Canberra, ACT

Program: July 6: Pre-registration and practice; July 7: Rimfire Rifle Metallic Silhouette, 10m Scoped Air Rifle (subject to interest); July 8: Rimfire Field Rifle; July 9: 3P Rimfire Rifle. Contact: Jim Coghlan 0419 615 551 or email jimrox1955@bigpond.com

International

International Big Game Rifle Championship

August 25-27, 2023

Mickett Creek Shooting Complex, Darwin, NT

Program: August 25: Practice; 26-27: Competition days. See National website for full details. Facilities: Saturday and Sunday barbecue lunch provided, Sunday presentation following final event. No camping on range but several caravan/camp sites in the area. Contact: Joe Libro ntbiggamerifle@gmail.com

NSW

SSAA (NSW) Big Game Rifle State Championships

May 19-21, 2023

Windamere Regional Shooting Complex, NSW

Program: May 19 Set-up and practice; May 20: Rifle events 1-7; May 21: Rifle events 8-11, full program on National website. Facilities: Camping and caravans permitted at range Friday-Monday, toilets and hot showers. Contact: Ben Doherty 0409 831 258 (A/H) or bfjdoherty@bigpond.com

Qld

Queensland NRA Pistol Metallic Silhouette Postal Shoots

All (SSAA) Qld branches with approval to shoot Postal Metallic Silhouette Program: Shoot 1: February 1-May 31; Shoot 2: April 1-July 31; Shoot 3: May 1-August 31; Shoot 4: August 1-November 30. See National website for full event details. Contact: Hazel Bozic (07)4128 0467 or pms@ssaaqld.org.au

SSAA (Qld) Gallery Rifle State Championships

April 1-2, 2023

SSAA Clermont, Qld

Program: April 1 - 50m Precision, Multi-Target, Timed & Precision 1, 1500 Match. April 2 - 1020 Match in Classic and Open Class. Facilities: Camping with showers, canteen, breakfast and lunch both days and dinner on

Saturday (meals cost extra). Contact: Don Robinson 0428 986 070 or Lloyd Marteeene 0429 831 052.

SSAA (Qld) Combined Services Postal Shoot

January 1-April 10, 2023

All SSAA Queensland branches

Program: See National website for full event details. Contact: Stephen Heidrich csd@ssaaqld.org.au

SSAA (Qld) Long Range Precision State Championships

May 26-29, 2023

SSAA Luna, Millmerran, Qld

Program: May 25: Range open for zero-checking; May 26: .22LR 100m on mini-core target, .22LR 200m on mini-core target; May 27: Centrefire 700m on core target, Centrefire 800m on Core target; May 28: Centrefire 900m on Core target, Centrefire 1000m on Core target. Facilities: Cabins and camping at Captains Mountain Range, bunkhouse \$15 a night, single cabin \$40 a night, double \$30 per person, campsite \$12 a night. Contact: Richard White (07) 4652 4270.

Vic

SSAA (Vic) Junior Rimfire Silhouette State Championships

May 21, 2023

Eagle Park Range, Vic

Program: 9am practice, competition starts 10.10 for 80 shots Rimfire Silhouette. Contact: Mark Butler 0409 135 740.

SSAA (Vic) Scoped Silhouette State Championships

May 27-28, 2023

Eagle Park Range, Vic

Program: Saturday 80 shots Centrefire; Sunday 80 shots Rimfire. Contact: Mark Butler 0409 135 740.

SSAA (Vic) Single Action Black Powder State Championships

July 15-16, 2023

Eagle Park Range, Vic

Program: July 15: Long Range, four Single Action main stages, dusk shoot. July 16: Six Single Action main stages, presentation. Facilities: Camping with showers and toilets, limited power, lunch both days, dinner Saturday. Contact: Tony Diablo 0419 187 980 or diablo6@bigpond.com

SSAA (Vic) Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

September 23-24, 2023

Eagle Park Range, Vic

Program: Saturday 80 rifle calibre; Sunday 80 shots pistol calibre then 80 shots smallbore rifle. Contact: Mark Butler 0409 135 740.

SSAA (Vic) Field Rifle, 3P, Scoped Air Rifle and NRA State Championships

October 22, 2023

Eagle Park Range, Vic

Program: Centrefire competition followed by Rimfire. Contact: Mark Butler 0409 135 740.

WA

SSAA (WA) IHMS State Championships

April 21-23, 2023

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA Program: See

National website for full details. Facilities: Canteen and barbecue daily, onsite toilets and showers. Contact: Joe Brajkovich 0414 474 573 or mammothprojects@hotmail.com.

SSAA (WA) Centrefire Benchrest State Championships

May 27-June 5, 2023

Jarrahdale Sporting Shooters, WA

Program: May 27: 300yd Heavy Bench; May 28: Unlimited; June 3: Sporter; June 4: Heavy Bench; June 5: Light Bench. Discipline delegates meeting on June 4. Facilities: No canteen, plenty of camping room with showers, toilets, barbecue facilities, limited power. Contact: Trevor 0417 085 528 benchrestwa@inet.net.au or Dave 0400 205 892 benchrest@jarrahdalshooters.org.au.

SSAA (WA) Skeet Shotgun State Championships

May 28, 2023

Jarrahdale Sporting Shooters, WA

Program: 100 targets. Facilities: Free tea and coffee, cold drinks and snacks on sale. Contact: Nigel Youens 0466 341 379 or John Graham 0409 084 973.

SSAA (WA) Lever Action State Championships

June 2-4, 2023

SSAA Geraldton Branch, WA

Program: June 2: Practice; June 3: 9.30am start; June 4: 9.30am start. Facilities: Camping at range with power and water, canteen facilities, breakfast and lunch can be bought. Contact: Stephen Ellis 0418 388 991 or leveraction@ssaawa.org.au or Dane Taylor 0407 083 408 or geraldton@ssaawa.org.au

SSAA (WA) Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

July 6-10, 2023

Hedland Sporting Shooters, WA

Program: July 6: Practice. 7: Rifle Lever Action. 8: Pistol Cartridge. 9: Small Bore. WA State team selection will be on top 10 positions. Facilities: Canteen food sales, camping, showers, toilets, barbecue area, limited

power, Saturday night meal supplied. Contact: David Brougham 0432 748 703 or clas@inet.net.au.

SSAA (WA) Sporting Clays State Championships

July 30, 2023

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA

Program: 100 Sporting Clays targets. Facilities: Hot food, cool drinks available to buy, free tea, coffee and biscuits. Contact: Neil Cobb 0404 040 357 or neilcobb@bigpond.com.

SSAA (WA) Shotgun Tower State Championships

September 17, 2023

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA

Program: 15 Target DB, 15 Target SB, 15 Target Points score and 15 Pairs (total 75 targets). Facilities: Hot food, cool drinks available to buy, free tea, coffee and biscuits. Contact: Neil Cobb 0404 040 357 or neilcobb@bigpond.com.

SSAA National Event Cancellation/Postponement Policy

SSAA National championship events may be subject to border controls and other COVID-19 impacts. In addition to general border closures, many states and territories may prohibit persons from known COVID hotspots. An event may be postponed or cancelled at any time by SSAA National, SSAA State Office or club directive. It is recommended competitors consider any potential COVID-19 impacts on travel, accommodation plans and insurances etc. SSAA National will not be liable for reimbursement to competitors for any costs associated with a postponed or cancelled SSAA National championship event for any reason, including COVID-19. Competitors planning to attend an event should consider options for free cancellation or refund of travel and accommodation costs where available.

Clarification

On Page 62 of last month's edition we gave the price of the Caldwell Stable Table Lite Shooting Bench as \$149. Unfortunately this was in US dollars. The price in Australia is around \$400.

SSAA Member Alert

Please be aware that state and territory police firearms registries regularly cross-check firearm licences and your member status. To support your genuine reason and keep your firearms licence and to make sure that SSAA can support you, make sure you renew your SSAA membership.

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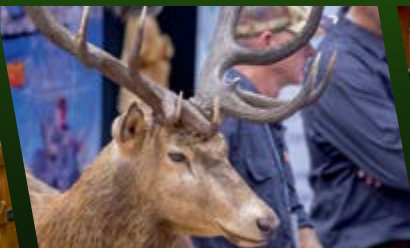
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This application is made in full recognition of the Associations' requirement for responsible and ethical behaviour. I undertake to do all in my power to preserve the good image of the sport and the Associations. I understand that members breaking the Code of Conduct and/or Social Media Policies may be subject to suspension or expulsion. Both can be found at ssaa.org.au/code

SIGNATURE:.....

DATE:.....

Refund Policy: Subject to Australian law, membership fees are not refundable, nor can they be transferred.

Members join a SSAA state or territory branch. The information you provide on this form will be disclosed to the state or territory branch of the SSAA to which your membership application relates. A copy of SSAA Inc's privacy policy can be found at ssaa.org.au/privacy. You can obtain access to your personal information by writing to: SSAA, PO Box 2520, Unley SA 5061.

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Complete this section ONLY if you wish to use your membership of the SSAA to support your Genuine Reason for having a firearms licence. Register your SSAA activities by marking one or more of the following boxes:

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The call of the wild . . . and why do we listen?

Scrolling through my Facebook feed I came across a meme posted by a friend from Texas, an avid hunter and fisher with whom I've plenty to talk about. It focused on a reaction to the sound of flying geese. Over three frames the first showed the geese, the second someone with eyes to the sky and the third was the same person, this time accompanied by the question: 'What are you listening to?' Their reply: 'Nothing!'

My response was more a wry, knowing smile than a gut-busting laugh as I stop and listen to 'nothing' all the time, mostly birds but occasionally other creatures or even movement of wind through tress. I assume most people 'hear' it though 'listening' to it would be a much smaller group. I don't know if I purposely elevate the sound in my consciousness or my subconscious mind takes over, but the sound of wild things cuts through all the other sounds of our busy, modern lives.

I'm sure it's one of our older responses, certainly the sounds themselves are. The mammalian sounds which prick up our ears have been with us since the end of the Ice Age and for birds, maybe 65 million years which means they've been honking, chirping, singing and even screeching for about 60 million years before we even arrived on the scene. But why do these sounds resonate so strongly? I think because I'm hearing something which stands apart from us. Despite what animal rights kooks may try to tell us, birds aren't discussing their favourite non-dairy substitute, fish aren't arguing about who's hauling the net and most certainly wild things aren't chatting with us.



In writing *On a Monument to a Pigeon*, Aldo Leopold penned what many regard as the most poignant reflection ever about extinction. In doing so he encapsulated the concept of the true separation between humans and the wild kingdom when he wrote "We, who have lost our pigeons, mourn the loss. Had the funeral been ours, the pigeons would hardly have mourned us". Likewise animal behaviour is not an anthropomorphised version of our own and while we inhabit the same space, wild things are unconcerned with our comings and goings other than to remain vigilant of our predacious nature - and profit from us where they can.

The story of the City Mouse and Country Mouse isn't about mice. The recent mice plagues weren't the fault of local yokel country mice going on a bender while their more sophisticated city cousins stuck to their café lattes and refrained from such shenanigans. It was the inevitable response of a wild population to an overabundance of food, water and opportune breeding conditions. Those same conditions in the CBD would create a similar plague.

As a frequent visitor to the Brisbane Valley I'm lucky enough to have heard the roar of red deer and have also seen what are usually otherwise highly attuned wild game become goofy, lust-driven fools. While I know a little bit about red deer, I know for certain I'm listening to a very old song and watching a very old dance. I also realise neither are meant for me or my kind which is maybe why, upon hearing it, I sometimes find it far more fulfilling to watch, listen and wait for a better stag.

If you know what this all means then keep listening and, if you can, share it with others. While we may never be truly able to interpret the language of wild things like a fanciful top-hatted doctor who can talk to the animals, we can be guides. We can elevate the importance of the sound, point to its origin, speculate on its usage and surmise its meaning. We can also share that more innate response, the one which makes us stop and listen with such intensity to 'nothing'.



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